



Voices for Housing Justice

Centering Women, Gender-Diverse, and
Two-Spirit People in the Fight for Safe,
Adequate, and Affordable Housing

MAY 2025

OUTCOMES REPORT

Introduction & Purpose

In October 2024, the [National Right to Housing Network](#) (NRHN), in partnership with the [Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa](#), held a community gathering in Ottawa to center the voices of women, gender-diverse, and Two-Spirit people in the fight for housing justice. This gathering created space for rights-holders, advocates, and lived experts to share their knowledge with one another, strengthen advocacy strategies, and identify the systemic barriers preventing people from securing safe, adequate, and affordable housing across Canada.

The gathering also served as a key moment in preparing rights-holders to engage with the [Neha review panel](#), which looks at the right to safe, adequate, and affordable housing for women, Two Spirit, Trans, and gender-diverse people, and the Canadian government's duty to uphold this right.

To guide these discussions, we structured the conversations around three key questions:

1. **Vision:** What would it mean to eradicate homelessness for women, gender-diverse, and Two-Spirit people in Canada?
2. **Knowledge:** What is happening in your community that reflects or challenges the right to housing?
3. **Action:** What policy solutions would change things for you?

As the housing crisis continues to deepen across Canada without sufficient government action, the insights and demands shared at this gathering highlighted the urgent need for a rights-based approach to housing policy. Participants emphasized that housing precarity is deeply tied to gender-based violence, income insecurity, discriminatory policies, and the criminalization of survival strategies. As such, this gathering focused on advancing

concrete solutions that center the leadership of those most affected and pushing for policy and programmatic changes that reflect the lived realities of the participants.

This discussion continued at the 2024 National Conference on Ending Homelessness (CAEH24), where NRHN hosted a dedicated Right to Housing stream to ensure that the right to housing, systemic policy failures, and community-led advocacy remained central to the housing policy conversations discussed there. The insights from the Ottawa community gathering helped shape the dialogue and allowed us to strengthen discussions around policy gaps, advocacy strategies, and pathways to mobilization.

This report brings forward the key learnings from both the Ottawa community gathering and CAEH24 discussions and outlines the identified challenges and opportunities for future advocacy, as well as actionable recommendations to push for the systemic changes needed to realize the right to housing for all in Canada.

Key Challenges Identified

The experiences shared at the Ottawa gathering and CAEH24 highlighted the persistent and structural barriers that prevent women, gender-diverse, and Two-Spirit people from accessing safe, adequate, and affordable housing. Participants described how existing housing policies fail to meet their needs, leaving many in precarious situations with few viable options.

The systemic barriers identified in these gatherings, which continue to push women, gender-diverse, and Two-Spirit people into precarious housing situations, include:

Lack of Affordable and Appropriate Housing

- Severe shortages of truly affordable and appropriate housing options, leaving many without stable or suitable living conditions.

- Long wait times for women and gender-diverse individuals fleeing violence, often leaving them in unsafe situations while waiting for shelter or permanent housing options.
- Existing social housing units remain inaccessible due to income restrictions and prioritization policies that do not reflect real need. For instance, many low-income individuals and families do not meet the eligibility criteria, while others face long bureaucratic delays in accessing available units. These policies often fail to consider the urgent and complex realities of those most in need, leaving them trapped in unstable or unsafe housing situations.
- Mass evictions, renovictions, and gentrification displacing vulnerable communities, forcing people out of their homes without adequate protections or viable alternatives.

Barriers to Accessing Shelter & Housing Services

- Lack of shelter spaces designed for gender-diverse individuals, resulting in exclusion, unsafe environments, and barriers to accessing critical support services. Many shelters remain unsafe or unwelcoming for Two-Spirit, Trans, and non-binary individuals due to discriminatory policies or lack of staff training.
- Restrictive eligibility criteria for social housing and emergency supports exclude many in need, often prioritizing those who fit narrow definitions of vulnerability while leaving others in dangerous situations without options.
- Emergency shelters and transitional housing often fail to provide safe, inclusive, and dignified conditions. Issues such as overcrowding, lack of privacy, and inaccessible spaces prevent people from feeling secure or supported, leading some to avoid shelters altogether.

Inadequate Support Systems

- Limited access to culturally appropriate and gender-responsive mental health and substance use supports, leaving many without care that aligns with their needs.
- Criminalization of sex work and substance/drug use exacerbates housing insecurity, pushing individuals further into precarious situations.
- Migrants, especially those with precarious or undocumented status, face systemic barriers to accessing housing services, including discrimination, exclusion from shelters, social housing, and financial assistance. Many are left with no legal protections or adequate pathways to stable, long-term housing.

Inadequate/Lack of Tenant Protections

- Weak rent control measures and lack of enforcement of existing tenant protections which results in widespread unaffordable rent hikes and displacement. Without strong regulations, landlords continue exploitative practices that often push low-income tenants out of their homes.
- Discriminatory landlord practices against marginalized renters, including racialized people, youth, sex workers, and those on social assistance, making it difficult to secure safe and stable housing. Many renters face unjust screening criteria, refusals to rent, or exploitative rental conditions.
- No meaningful accountability mechanisms exist in Ontario when housing rights are violated, leaving tenants with little recourse when facing eviction, unsafe conditions, or exploitative practices.

Key Recommendations

Based on the challenges identified above, participants outlined specific policy and programmatic changes that are critical in addressing these systemic housing injustices:

1. Ensure rent increases align with income realities by capping increases relative to minimum wage and income growth, preventing the growing gap between earnings and housing costs.
2. Expand rural housing resources to ensure services and housing options are not concentrated in urban centers, addressing regional disparities in access to housing supports.
3. Increase funding and capacity for gender-responsive shelters and emergency housing, ensuring inclusive and safe spaces for 2SLGBTQ+, Black and racialized communities.
4. Create more third spaces—accessible, safe public spaces beyond homes and workplaces—where people can gather, access resources, and find community support.
5. Close funding gaps for non-profits and frontline services, ensuring stable operational funding that allow organizations to meet the actual needs of their communities rather than relying on short-term or emergency funding.
6. Ensure housing policies align with community needs, preventing operational policies that create more barriers rather than solutions.
7. Decriminalize sex work and drug use to remove barriers to housing and ensure people are met with support rather than punishment.

8. Support harm reduction programs and strategies and provide sober spaces, ensuring a range of supportive environments for people navigating substance use and recovery.
9. Allow pets in shelters and housing programs, recognizing that many people experiencing homelessness have companion animals and should not be forced to choose between shelter and their pets.
10. Expand tenant education initiatives, ensuring renters understand their rights and have access to resources when facing housing insecurity.
11. Establish legal protections for sex workers, ensuring access to stable housing without discrimination or exclusion.
12. Recognize rental-geared-to-income (RGI) policies to ensure deeply affordable housing options for low-income renters.
13. Increase relationship-based supports for youth, such as mentorship programs and consistent, supportive figures to help young people navigate housing insecurity.
14. Standardize rent prices and prevent mass evictions by ensuring corporate landlords cannot displace entire communities for profit-driven redevelopment.
15. Dedicate sustainable funding for second-stage and transitional housing, ensuring people leaving shelters, rehabilitation programs, or domestic violence situations have long-term housing options.
17. Strengthen protections against re-evictions and ensure a right to return at the same rent, preventing displacement and forced relocations due to landlord-driven renovations.

18. Create a universal definition of affordable housing that ensures those most in need—particularly those in deep poverty—are prioritized in housing policy and funding.