



4<sup>th</sup> Annual

# Pan Canadian Voice for Women's Housing 2020 Symposium



PAN-CANADIAN VOICE  
FOR WOMEN'S HOUSING  
A SYMPOSIUM



PARLONS  
FEMMES ET LOGEMENT  
UN SYMPOSIUM PANCANADIEN

Oct 5<sup>th</sup> - Nov 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020

# Pan Canadian Voice for Women's Housing 2020 Symposium

Due to the ongoing Covid -19 pandemic, the event was held with the attendees attending the different sessions virtually.

Discussion Paper drafted from flip chart notes, Edited by Janice Abbott, Formatted by Fei Wang, Atira Women's Resource Society

## 2020 Advisory Circle Members

Annetta Armstrong	Indigenous Women's Healing Centre
Janice Abbott	Atira Women's Resource Society
Laura Budd	Moose Jaw Pride Committee
Cindy Chaisson	Yukon Women's Transition Home Society
Syreeta Moore	Atira Women's Resource Society
Janine Olifie	Community Advocate
Danya O'Malley	PEI Family Violence Prevention Services
Jewelless Smith	Council of Canadians with Disabilities
Dolly Williams	Preston & Area Housing Fund
Nicole Young	Hope Haven Transition House

## Facilitators

Janice Abbott, Natasha Carvalho, Danya O'Mally, Jewelless Smith

## Symposium Coordinator

Arita Atwal, Eden Hoey

## 2020 Symposium Funders

The 2020 PCVWH Symposium was funded by CMHC



## 2020 Symposium Participants (Organizations)

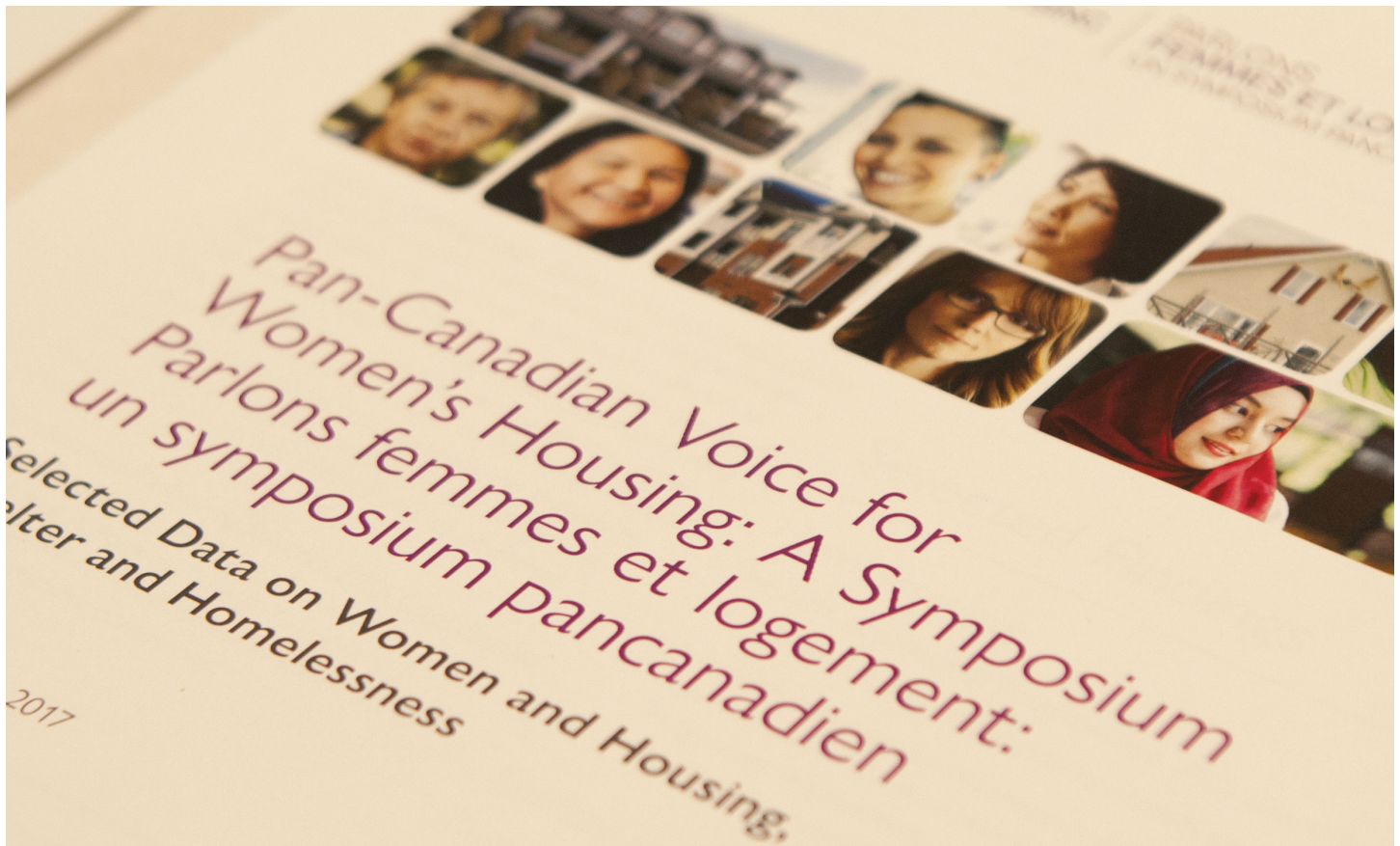
Janice Abbott	Atira Women's Resource Society
Stephanie Allen	Hogan's Alley Society, Vancouver
Dana Riccio Arabe	Wahbung Abinoonjiiag Inc
Mebrat Beyene	WISH Drop-In Centre Society
Margot Brunner	Voice of Albertans and Disabilities
Laura Budd	Moose Jaw Pride Committee
Cindy Chaisson	Yukon Women's Transition Home Society
Ann Decter	Canadian Women's Foundation
Lori Deets	Moose Jaw Transition House/Moose Jaw Family Services
Nathalie Fortin	WP Program - National
Maura Gowans	Aboriginal Mother Centre/Community Advocate (LE)
Arlene Hache	Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness
Tammy Hansen	North End Women's Centre
Karine-Myrgianie Jean-Francois	Dawn Canada
Angela Kalyta	NWAC
Kelly Lawless	Community Advocate (LE)
Angela MacDougall	BWSS
Katherine McParland	Advocate
Bruk Melles	Atira Women's Resource Society
Syreeta Moore	Atira Women's Resource Society/Community Advocate (LE)
Michele Nadeau	YWCA Moncton
Janine Olfie	Yellowknife Women's Society & Community Advocate (LE)
Danya O'Mally	PEI Family Violence Prevention Organization
Maui Para	YWCA THP
Chevi Rabbit	Community Advocate
Miia Suokonautio	YWCA Halifax
Gail Thornhill	Stella's Circle
Johanna Venturini	AFIPE (Associação Filhos do Pai Eterno)
Dolly Williams	Preston & Area Housing Fund
Kate Wilson	YWCA Yellowknife
Ellen Woodsworth	Women Transforming Cities, Vancouver
Nicole Young	Hope Haven Transition House
Leesa	WAGE National Team

## 2020 Symposium Participants (Other Attendees)

Ariella Aburto	Embers Moore	Chelsey
Michelle Arsenault	Ann Ndagire	Felix
Percy Bechard	Haley Prescod	Heather
Cheryll Case	Manisha R	Jennifer
Hawa Dumbuya-Sesay	Amanda Ramkishun	Jody
Dominique Fogarty	Ambalika Roy	Msuarez
Denika Garrick	Susan Thorpe	Sgual
Soha Kneen	Tracey W	Tara
Robyn M	Tara Ward	Vanessa
Sam Mason	Abigail	
Maura Meng	AN	
J. Miller	Beth	

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# Summary of the Sessions of the 2020 Symposium

The 2020 Symposium was unique from the ones held before, as it brought together, virtually, a diverse group of more than 60 women. Due to the events of Covid-19, the possibility of a virtual symposium was put into action after considering the challenges that the virtual format would present. The Advisory Circle conducted the Symposium over nine (9) sessions spread out over four (4) weeks, enabling women to attend sessions around their working hours. Each of these sessions lasted for two (2) hours, each yielding a “Call to Action” which was then presented to CMHC and government representatives at the final plenary session.

The Symposium commenced on Day One with the Opening Ceremony by Janice Abbott followed by blessings from Western and Eastern located Elders. Through the course of the next couple of weeks, discussions between women from a diverse demographic were conducted around the theme of adversities faced by women in the housing and infrastructure sector.

All Sessions began in a similar fashion after which the Co-host divided the attendees into groups of five or eight. The Session topics would then be discussed

over monitored time concluding with each of the groups formulating solutions and calls to action. These solutions and calls to action would then be presented to the other groups narrowing down the key take-back features to be posed to government. Additionally, through the period of the Symposium, counselling was available to all attendees and attendees were provided adequate information on leaving groups assigned to them should they feel uncomfortable at any given time.



Each of the Sessions featured key barriers faced by women with respect to discrimination in relation to meeting women’s and children’s housing needs. The sessions conducted were divided into ‘Official Sessions’ and ‘Additional Sessions’. Official Sessions provided attendees with a platform to discuss broader topics of concern for women whereas the ‘Additional Sessions’ focused on intersectional barriers to housing, including racism, ableism, gender discrimination, immigration status and language.

### **Official Sessions**

The theme of the official sessions were designed around giving women a platform to discuss their experiences with respect to affordable housing. Existing systemic barriers with respect to rent supplements, child protection/reunification and child welfare program discrepancies were discussed. Problems related to funding of basic needs for First Nations, Métis and Inuit women, women with disabilities and women hailing from rural areas were discussed and calls to actions were posed. The calls to action called for the government to understand the impact Covid-19 has had on women and provide solutions in the form of better policies, accountability for promises made, affordable housing, a guaranteed annual income and transparency in the system.

### **Additional Sessions**

The Additional Sessions were mainly themed around the concerns and experiences of women who face additional barriers, beyond sexism and misogyny, to accessing safe, affordable, adequate housing including First Nations, Métis and Inuit women, Black women, women of color, immigrant and refugee women, women with disabilities, Lesbian and bisexual women, trans women, two-spirit and trans feminine individuals and Francophone women. The attendees spoke of the stigma attached to skin color (race), gender, ability and language and how accessing affordable housing is even harder and almost always accompanied by experiences of overt and covert discrimination. Discussions on cultural insensitivity took place at length calling for more progressive laws and protections for women who experience multiple and intersecting barriers to housing. A key factor discussed was the loss of income due to COVID-19 and how the same had a direct impact on women’s housing needs.

# Analysis of the 2019 Six Calls to Action & Recommendations

## 1

### Housing and Women with Lived Expertise

#### CALL TO ACTION

- Call on CMHC to develop the National Housing Strategy (NHS) in consultation with those most affected; and in consultation with the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Strategy to End Violence Against Women

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strategies so developed need to be rolled out. There needs to exist a level of transparency while issuing such strategies, wherein recommendations provided by affected communities have been heard and accommodated;
- Funding should be specifically applied to create an accepting culture in housing programs along with enough flexibility to create various housing models to suit the different adversities faced. Women should be in apposition to choose rather than settle which is the current norm.

## 2

### First Nations, Métis and Inuit Housing

#### CALL TO ACTION

- Call on the federal government to ensure that all housing responds to First Nations, Métis and Inuit women;
- We call for housing that is culturally sensitive with appropriate regulations and accommodations and that is administered by First Nations, Métis and Inuit women - to this end, the housing must be inclusive of healing and treatment centers;
- We also call on the government of Canada to take immediate steps to reverse the policy that excludes Inuit from accessing federal shelter funding; and
- We call on the federal government to recognize the needs of women and children in urban centers and out of Indigenous communities (off reserve).

# 3

## Infrastructure Funding for Housing

### CALL TO ACTION

- Call on CMHC to reinstate the Shelter Enhancement Program immediately, allowing for both shelter and other kinds of housing for women, and equal to 25% of the total NHS funding envelope; and
- We also call on CMHC to make this funding available to on and off reserve projects.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- A major concern with design and accessibility criteria will need to be developed and addressed to accommodate disabled women;
- More disclosure and transparency are required to understand how the government is utilizing funds before it reaches the communities. The ability to seek information on the projects being worked on and if resources are being allocated responsibly. This calls for more transparency on the provincial level
- There is an absolute requirement of establishing a direct relationship with the federal government. Access to housing is so unequal throughout the country and while there is a national strategy in place, the same will need to be integrated with provincial government contracts.
- Information on available funding from the government needs to be effectively communicated to organizations that can utilize it. Additionally, the process and applications to such grants and funding needs to be simplified to make it accessible to all communities.
- Existing infrastructure needs to be maintained with additionally now making it more accessible;
- The concept of affordable housing for women or families with several children will need to be developed to accommodate larger families.

# 4

## A Voice for Women's Housing

### CALL TO ACTION

- Calls on the federal government and CMHC to consult with and provide ongoing funding to the Pan-Canadian Voice for Women's Housing

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- We recommend it may be beneficial to have a female person represent CMHC in working with the vision of the symposium next.

# 5

## Operational Funding for Women’s and Women-Serving Organizations

### CALL TO ACTION

- Call for funding for women’s and women-serving organizations, which is comparable to the level of funding for services and programs provided directly by government and broader public sector agencies; and
- We also call on the federal government to ensure that community-based front-line workers and organizational and program staff are competitively compensated.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- More flexibility in funding to cover immediate needs wherever and whenever they should arise considering the current structure is too rigid in terms of funding expenses.

# 6

## Women and a Guaranteed Annual Income

### CALL TO ACTION

- Call on CMHC to advocate for a Guaranteed Annual Income program that is reflective of regional realities. The program should be built using an intersectional gender lens with the participation of a diverse cross-section of women. It must be responsive to women’s self-identified needs such as ensuring family preservation, sustainable, rent geared-to-income housing, strong transitional support, and be in addition to child benefits.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Re-emphasizing the guaranteed annual income given the success of CERB during the Covid-19 pandemic, but would require more flexibility as compared to CERB.



# New Calls to Action



## CALL TO ACTION

Specifically calling on CMHC to support communities who are marginalized (for example, Black, First Nations, Métis and Inuit women, women who are disabled, transwomen, refugee and immigrant women, Francophone women ) to create and offer housing that will enable them to supports themselves (by and for us).



## CALL TO ACTION

All organizations that receive funding from CMHC must demonstrate they have robust and active anti-racism and anti-oppression policies and practices in place.



# Updates & Commitments by CMHC to the Pan-Canadian Voice for Women's Housing

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## UPDATE ON THE 2019 SYMPOSIUM CALLS TO ACTION

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**1**

### CALL TO ACTION

- Put in place an appropriately compensated council with lived expertise for CMHC to call on for advice and input.

### CMHC RESPONSE

- CMHC acknowledged and has since received over 400 applications for this initiative and are positive the council is becoming a reality in the near future.



## 2

### CALL TO ACTION

- Challenge government to ensure First Nations, Métis and Inuit women have safe homes; provide adequate funding in the North and for urban (off-reserve) housing;

### CMHC RESPONSE

- CMHC has agreed to remain an active partner in co-developing distinct housing for First Nations, Métis and Inuit women, stating they will further develop an indigenous housing strategy in partnership with First Nations, Métis and Inuit women with the plan to hand over the operation of housing to First Nations, Métis and Inuit women once completed. CMHC ensured it is educating its staff on the importance of reconciliation and reparations and has recently launched an expression of interest for an indigenous advisory counsel to guide the Symposium's work.

## 3

### CALL TO ACTION

- CMHC must reinstate the Shelter Enhancement Program and make the program available to women's organizations on and off reserve.
- CMHC must address the lack of transparency in provincial and territorial government spending and hold the government accountable for the same.

## 4

### CALL TO ACTION

- CMHC must take steps to make the National Housing Co-investment Fund (NHCF) application simpler

### CMHC RESPONSE

- CMHC has launched a \$1B rapid housing initiative with an intent to build more than 3,000 homes with the help of the provinces, territories and municipalities. The fund can be used to build housing or buy buildings. Applications that would serve urban First Nations, Métis and Inuit people are being prioritized. Flexibility to allow for exemptions to the 12-month timeframe between being granted the funding and completion of the project has been accounted for. Additionally, in May, CHMC was able to fund 12 new women's shelters for a period of five years.

## 5

### CALL TO ACTION

- Recognizing that advocating for a Guaranteed Annual Income is not CMHC's main area of influence, the call of for accountability, a compensated panel of those with LE who can work with the group to develop a framework, metrics and accountability measures to report back annually and reduce silos

### CMHC RESPONSE

- CMHC launched the Canada housing benefit wherein \$4B in rent supplement support will go directly to households across Canada.

## 6

### CALL TO ACTION

- Long-term, multi-year funding is required for women-serving organizations to work collaboratively and help CMHC achieve its targets related to women's housing, as support services and well-compensated social workers are essential to ensure vulnerable women remain housed.

### CMHC RESPONSE

- CMHC agreed to deliver programs to fund buildings, and has required provincial, territorial and other community partners to provide the wrap-around services women need.

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## 2020 COMMITMENTS FROM CMHC

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Evan Siddall, President and CEO of CMHC, made the following commitments to the Pan-Canadian Voice for Women's Housing:

1. CMHC is committed to continue its funding for the Symposium;
2. Continuing commitment to the Symposium that the concerns raised will be considered and have significant influence on policy and funding decisions;
3. Quality attempts shall be made to recognize the need to develop deeper connections with all marginalized communities given the level of discrimination faced;
4. Using funds effectively to develop projects with community organizations in rural areas, especially the north;
5. Continued accountability to the symposium
6. Commitment to discuss with internal teams and report on policies and funding more transparently;
7. Share progress on progress on eight commitments undertaken by CMHC on anti-racism.

# Next Steps

## for Pan-Canadian Voice for Women's Housing



Given the COVID- 19 pandemic, we are unsure if the next Pan-Canadian Voice for Women's Housing Symposium will be held virtually or in-person. CMHC is committed to funding the next Symposium. The members of the Advisory Circle, in addition to planning for the fifth annual Symposium, will explore ideas around keeping PCVWH participants informed, including the possibility of developing a newsletter or setting up a PCVWH intranet.

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