

Shelters for victims of abuse with ties to Indigenous communities or organizations in Canada, 2020/2021

by Ashley Maxwell

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Shelters for victims of abuse with ties to Indigenous communities or organizations in Canada, 2020/2021: Highlights

- In 2020/2021, there were 93 shelters that had ties to Indigenous (First Nations, Métis or Inuit) communities or organizations (also referred to as Indigenous shelters) operating across Canada that were primarily mandated to serve victims of abuse. More than half (54%) of all Indigenous shelters were located in rural areas and nearly four in ten (39%) were located on reserves. The large majority (80%) of Indigenous shelters were located in First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities.
- A small proportion (8%) of Indigenous shelters reported that they provide long-term accommodation of three months or more to their clients. The large majority (92%) of Indigenous shelters were short-term facilities that have a general mandate of providing accommodation for less than three months. In comparison, one-quarter (25%) of non-Indigenous shelters offered long-term accommodation and the remaining 75% provided short-term housing.
- The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the support and services that shelters were able to provide to victims of abuse. About one-third of Indigenous (32%) and non-Indigenous shelters (34%) reported being impacted by the pandemic to a great extent. The period when the initial lockdowns and restrictions were implemented across the country was the most challenging time for shelters.
- Just under half of shelters reported that their facility was greatly impacted by accommodation capacity during the COVID-19 pandemic (46% of Indigenous shelters and 47% of non-Indigenous shelters). This was the greatest pandemic-related challenge faced by shelters, as social distancing requirements decreased the number of residents that could be accommodated for example. In addition, about four in ten (41%) Indigenous shelters reported being greatly impacted by difficulties providing professional services or programs during the pandemic.
- Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters reported some staffing-related challenges throughout the pandemic. For example, over one-quarter of Indigenous shelters reported that they faced challenges related to staff availability due to family or caregiving responsibilities (28%) and self-isolation requirements (26%).
- Half of Indigenous (50%) and non-Indigenous (49%) shelters reported increases in the number of crisis calls that they received since the start of the pandemic, and some reported increasing their use of other methods of communication to provide support or services to individuals outside of their facilities (48% and 72%, respectively).
- There were 7,478 admissions to Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse in 2020/2021, 29% less than were admitted in 2017/2018 when data were last collected. Non-Indigenous shelters also reported a similar decline in admissions over this period (-31%).
- On April 14, 2021, the survey snapshot date, there were 532 people residing in Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse: nearly two-thirds (65%) were adult women and about one-third (34%) were children who accompanied their parent.
- The large majority (80%) of the women who were staying in Indigenous shelters for reasons of abuse on the snapshot date were escaping intimate partner violence, similar to what was reported among women residing in non-Indigenous shelters (84%). Most commonly, women in Indigenous shelters reported that their abuser was a current common-law partner (51%) or a current spouse (11%). About seven in ten women in both Indigenous (71%) and non-Indigenous shelters (70%) were living with their abuser prior to seeking shelter.
- First Nations, Métis and Inuit women and children represented a large proportion of the residents in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse, relative to their representation in the overall Canadian population. On the survey snapshot date, 60% of women and 65% of accompanying children in Indigenous shelters were identified as Indigenous persons. Non-Indigenous shelters reported that under one-fifth of the women (17%) and accompanying children (18%) in their shelters on that date were Indigenous. In comparison, in Canada, 5% of women (age 18 and older) and 8% of children identify as Indigenous persons.
- More than one-third (36%) of the women residing in an Indigenous shelter for victims of abuse were previously clients of that shelter in the preceding year, either receiving services as a resident (30%) or on an outreach basis (6%). Higher proportions of repeat clients were reported among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous rural shelters, compared with those located in urban areas.
- The majority (74%) of the women who left an Indigenous shelter for victims of abuse on the survey snapshot date returned to a home where their abuser was residing. A much smaller proportion of women departing non-Indigenous shelters reported the same (14%).
- On the survey snapshot date, 41% of the beds in short-term Indigenous shelters were occupied and 12% of all short-term Indigenous shelters were considered full, much lower proportions than what was reported in 2017/2018. Non-Indigenous shelters also reported a lower occupancy rate in 2020/2021 (57%).

- Indigenous shelters reported turning away 45 people from their facilities on the snapshot date, the large majority (82%) of whom were women.
- Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse reported that a lack of permanent housing and a lack of affordable long-term housing were the most common challenges facing shelters and their residents in 2020/2021.

Shelters for victims of abuse with ties to Indigenous communities or organizations in Canada, 2020/2021

by Ashley Maxwell, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics

During periods of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, having adequate and available supports and services such as shelters for victims of abuse is crucial, since research has shown that these types of periods can often exacerbate and escalate social inequalities for marginalized population groups (Gauthier et al. 2021; Qian and Fuller 2020; Su et al. 2022). These groups include people who are experiencing homelessness, those who are living in poverty, as well as racialized groups, members of the LGBTQ2+ population and Indigenous persons (Arriagada et al. 2020; Bushnik et al. 2022; Gibb et al. 2020; Kantamneni 2020).

There is often overlap and intersectionality between marginalized population groups—and many can experience multiple social inequities and disadvantages at the same time (Maki 2020). For instance, compared with the rest of the Canadian population, First Nations people, Métis and Inuit (Indigenous persons) tend to be overrepresented and at an increased risk of experiencing homelessness, financial instability and poverty, and they tend to have lower levels of income and education (House of Commons 2021; Patrick 2014; Statistics Canada 2018; Statistics Canada 2017; Statistics Canada 2015; Statistics Canada 2013; Uppal 2022). This increased marginalization can be linked to the ongoing impacts of colonization and colonial practices such as the Sixties Scoop and the residential school system, which punished and prevented Indigenous populations from partaking in cultural practices and using their languages and religions, while forcibly separating children from their families and communities (Aguar and Halseth 2015; Bombay et al. 2009; Heidinger 2021; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). The long-lasting impacts of colonial policies contribute to the perpetuation of intergenerational trauma, social inequality and social, economic and political disadvantage for First Nations people, Métis and Inuit. In addition, they also place Indigenous people, particularly young women and girls, at a greater risk of experiencing victimization, as well as some of the most extreme forms of victimization such as intimate partner violence and homicide (Allen 2020; Boyce 2016; Brennan 2011; Burczycka 2016; Moreau et. al 2020; Perreault and Simpson 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic, with its various periods of lockdown and associated restrictions, changed the way that almost every Canadian went about their daily life. Such restrictions, limited some of the activities that a person could do and also further exacerbated already difficult social circumstances and living conditions faced by many Indigenous persons. For instance, many Indigenous people faced difficulties following public health guidelines and measures throughout the pandemic, as many lack access to adequate and suitable housing (Anderson 2017; Statistics Canada 2020b; United Nations 2019). In particular, crowded housing conditions did not allow many Indigenous people to isolate if they were sick (House of Commons 2021). Many also faced difficulties accessing clean water for handwashing, as well as difficulties accessing healthcare services. Reports suggest that the overall higher level of geographic isolation and remoteness of some of the communities where they live also made Indigenous people particularly vulnerable throughout the pandemic (House of Commons 2021). For instance, there were supply chain issues in many Northern/remote Indigenous communities which made it difficult for people to obtain personal protective equipment in order to protect themselves against the COVID-19 virus (House of Commons 2021).

Canadians also spent more time in their homes over the course of the pandemic, due to the various public health measures that were put in place throughout the country. These conditions created added stress for many families and may have exacerbated already difficult living situations and put people at an increased risk of violence (Brooks et al. 2020; Evans et al. 2020; Humphreys et al. 2020; Ragavan et al. 2020). There were worries that some individuals would be at a greater risk of domestic or family violence during the pandemic because of the various restrictions which made them more isolated at home with their abusers and unable to escape (United Nations 2020). This was documented in research from the early stages of the pandemic, which found that one in ten (10%) Canadian women were very or extremely concerned about the possibility of violence in the home (Statistics Canada 2020a). This was particularly concerning for Indigenous populations, who were already more vulnerable to this form of violence and at a greater likelihood of experiencing victimization (Allen 2020; Boyce 2016; Brennan 2011; Burczycka 2016; Moreau et. al 2020; Perreault and Simpson 2016).

Using data from the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse (SRFVA), this *Juristat* article primarily focuses on presenting information on shelters for victims of abuse that had ties to First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities or organizations in Canada during 2020/2021 (see Text box 1). The SRFVA collects information on all shelters in Canada that are primarily mandated to serve victims of abuse (see Survey description).¹

This article examines the characteristics of Indigenous shelters in Canada, such as the number of annual admissions and the types of services provided to the clients they serve. Additional information will also be presented about the individuals who are accessing these shelters for reasons of abuse. The SRFVA reports this information based on two distinct time periods. Data relating to the characteristics of shelters are based on a 12-month reference period that preceded the collection of the survey data (2020/2021).² In addition, information related to individual residents is based on the snapshot date of April 14, 2021.³ Throughout the article, comparisons will be made between Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters.

In addition, during the most recent cycle of the survey, a new section was added which contains several COVID-related questions. This was done in an attempt to measure the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdown measures had on shelters across Canada. While these questions do not touch on how victims may have been impacted by the pandemic directly, such as whether the pandemic influenced a person's decision to seek shelter because of abuse, they provide a great deal of information related to changes in the level of support and services which shelters were able to provide during the course of the pandemic and how shelters adapted during this unprecedented period. In addition, all of this information can help inform policy makers who are presently making decisions regarding resources and supports available for victims of abuse in Canada.

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Characteristics of Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse

Most Indigenous shelters provide short-term accommodation

In 2020/2021, there were 93 shelters with ties to Indigenous communities or organizations operating across Canada that were primarily mandated to serve victims of abuse.⁴ About four in ten (39%, or 36 shelters) of these shelters were located on a reserve. The large majority (80%, or 74 shelters) of Indigenous facilities reported that they were located in a First Nations, Métis or Inuit community.^{5 6} Indigenous shelters represented 17% of all shelters operating across the country in 2020/2021 and they also provided 17% of the funded beds. In comparison, there were 432 non-Indigenous shelters in Canada in 2020/2021.⁷

Text box 1

Defining Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse

There are five questions in the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse (SRFVA) that allow respondent shelters to identify whether they are associated with Indigenous communities or organizations in Canada. The questions are as follows:

1. Is your shelter an Indigenous organization?⁸
2. Is your shelter located in a First Nations, Métis or Inuit community?
3. Is your shelter located on a reserve?
4. Is your shelter owned by a First Nations government (band council)?
5. Is your shelter operated by a First Nations government (band council)?

Responses to these questions were used as a way to identify Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters for this article. Throughout the article, a shelter is defined as Indigenous if it responded yes to any of these questions, while a non-Indigenous shelter responded no to all of the questions.⁹ In addition, some shelters that did not report this information in 2020/2021 were identified as Indigenous or non-Indigenous by linking to the 2017/2018 SRFVA dataset and pulling the information that was provided for the five Indigenous questions during that cycle of the survey.¹⁰ Those shelters that did not provide answers to any of the Indigenous questions in 2020/2021 and that could not be linked historically were excluded from the analysis altogether. In total, there were 32 shelters (and 273 residents) that were excluded from the analysis.

Based on this categorization, there may be instances where a respondent shelter is classified as Indigenous, but it is not located in an Indigenous community, such as those located in urban areas. According to the 2020/2021 SRFVA, 80% of Indigenous shelters were located in a First Nations, Métis or Inuit community.

It is also important to note that not all individuals who are accessing shelters that have ties to Indigenous communities or organizations are Indigenous people.^{11 12} Similarly, many Indigenous victims seek shelter for abuse in non-Indigenous facilities. On the survey snapshot date in 2021, nearly one-fifth (17%) of the women in non-Indigenous shelters were First Nations people, Métis or Inuit.¹³

The large majority (92%, or 86 shelters) of Indigenous shelters were short-term facilities, meaning that they have a general policy of providing accommodation for less than three months and they typically provide individual beds to residents, as opposed to separate apartments or units. The remaining seven (8%) Indigenous shelters were long-term facilities with a general policy of providing accommodation for three months or more through residential units (e.g., apartments or houses). In comparison, one-quarter (25%, or 110 shelters) of non-Indigenous shelters offered long-term accommodation to residents and the remaining 75% (322 shelters) provided short-term housing.

According to research from Women's Shelters Canada, there is an overall lack of long-term shelters in Canada, particularly in many First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities (Maki 2020; Maki 2019), where there are often ongoing housing issues, and the existing housing tends to be unaffordable, inaccessible, unavailable and of poor quality (House of Commons 2019; Senate 2015). These communities, which often face some of the highest rates of victimization in the country (Allen 2020; Allen and Perreault 2015; Perreault 2019; Rotenberg 2019), are often geographically isolated and are frequently in remote areas (House of Commons 2019), which makes having adequate supports for victims of abuse critical. However, it is difficult to establish long-term shelters in many of these areas because of ongoing housing shortages, the additional costs associated with building any kind of housing in the North where many Inuit communities are located, as well as the fact that there tend to be fewer opportunities to partner with housing organizations as well as barriers to local fundraising (Maki 2020).

Similar to the previous cycle of the SRFVA which was conducted in 2017/2018, over half (54%) of the shelters that had ties to Indigenous communities or organizations in Canada in 2020/2021 were located in rural areas, where nearly half (48%) of the Indigenous population lives (Statistics Canada 2017).¹⁴ In particular, just over half (52%) of rural Indigenous shelters were located on reserves. In comparison, about three in ten (28%) non-Indigenous shelters were located in rural areas.

In addition, Indigenous shelters were spread across the country in 2020/2021, with every province or territory having at least one shelter with ties to these communities or organizations. Two of the most populated provinces—Ontario and British Columbia—had the largest number of Indigenous shelters (20 and 23 shelters, respectively), while the territories had 11 Indigenous shelters.¹⁵ According to the 2016 Census of Population, even though First Nations people, Métis and Inuit live across the country in both rural and urban areas, most Indigenous populations are concentrated in the western provinces, Ontario and in the territories (Statistics Canada 2017). Therefore, it is not surprising that these areas would have the largest proportion of shelters with ties to these organizations or communities.

More than half of shelters mandated to serve women and children only, large majority serve victims of various types of abuse

Shelters for victims of abuse typically have a general mandate or policy that governs their operations and the people that they assist. According to the SRFVA, over half (57%) of Indigenous shelters and over two-thirds (69%) of non-Indigenous shelters were mandated to serve women and children only in 2020/2021.^{16 17} In addition, 16% of Indigenous shelters and 10% of non-Indigenous shelters reported that they were mandated to serve women only.¹⁸

Yet, despite their mandates, some shelters indicated that they had residents at their facilities other than those specified in their policies. In 2020/2021, 28% of Indigenous shelters and 19% of non-Indigenous shelters admitted people to their facilities other than those outlined in their mandates. For example, 14% of Indigenous shelters admitted accompanying children to their facilities even though their mandates did not specify that they provide services to children.¹⁹ This proportion was higher than what was reported among non-Indigenous shelters who also admitted accompanying children outside their mandates (7%).

Shelters are also typically mandated to serve victims who have experienced particular kinds of abuse or violence. In 2020/2021, nearly all (99%) Indigenous shelters and the vast majority (90%) of non-Indigenous shelters were mandated to serve victims of various types of abuse.²⁰ All (100%) Indigenous shelters indicated that they were mandated to serve victims of spousal violence, followed closely by other family relationship abuse (93%) and other intimate relationship abuse (91%).²¹ Smaller proportions of Indigenous shelters reported having a mandate to serve victims of senior abuse (78%) and abuse by an acquaintance or friend (68%).

Shelters provide a variety of different services to victims

Shelters for victims of abuse provide a variety of services and programs to clients and offer more than just safe shelter to those who are experiencing abuse or violence. These services can vary depending on the size and location of the shelter, as well as whether the shelter provides short or long-term accommodation to victims. According to the SRFVA, in 2020/2021, the large majority of Indigenous shelters reported offering general services to victims such as advocacy (90%), crisis phone line support (88%) and housing referrals (88%) (Table 1).²² Similar proportions of non-Indigenous shelters also reported offering these types of services.

In contrast, smaller proportions of Indigenous shelters than non-Indigenous shelters reported offering professional services such as mental health services (60% versus 69%), as well as individual counselling for adults (77% versus 88%).

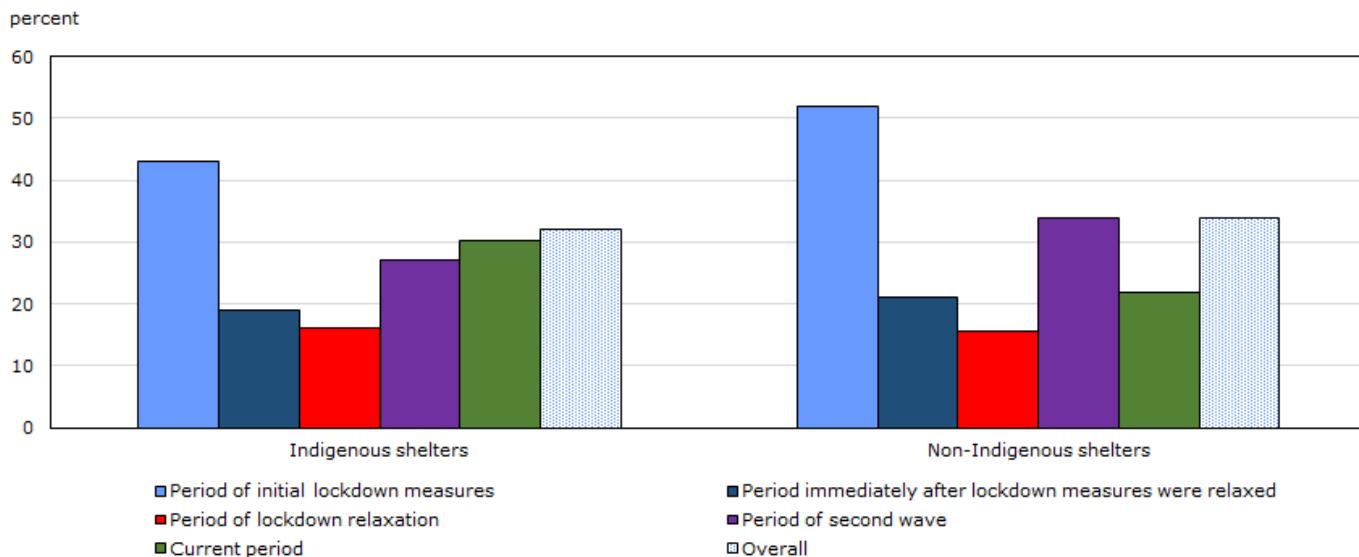
Victims of abuse seeking shelter often come from many different population groups and social locations such as racialized identity, socioeconomic status and ability (Maki 2020), so it is important that shelters are accommodating of these various circumstances by offering a variety of different supports and services. For instance, a person experiencing abuse may have a low income and may also be on the verge of poverty or homelessness if they choose to leave their abuser and seek shelter (Little 2015; Mosher et. al 2004). Therefore, offering services for the other areas of their life which may also be impacted by their decision to leave an abusive situation—such as training to secure a better paying job or assistance finding adequate housing—is just as important as offering temporary shelter and a safe place to live, and may provide them with more of a reason not to return to their abuser.

Impact of COVID-19 on shelters for victims of abuse

Around one in three shelters report a great extent of impact overall from the COVID-19 pandemic

During the most recent cycle of the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse (SRFVA), shelters were asked about the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on their operations as well as their ability to provide support to victims seeking shelter. According to the survey, about one-third of Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters reported that overall, the pandemic impacted their ability to provide services to victims to a great extent (32% and 34%, respectively) (Table 2; Chart 1).^{23 24 25} The proportion of Indigenous shelters reporting that they were greatly impacted by the pandemic was also higher if the shelters were located on reserves, compared with shelters located off reserves (38% versus 28%).²⁶

Chart 1
Shelters for victims of abuse reporting a great extent of impact due to the COVID-19 pandemic, by pandemic period and type of shelter, Canada, 2020/2021



Note: Calculations exclude between 32% and 33% of Indigenous shelters and between 20% and 21% of non-Indigenous shelters that did not provide a response to the questions. The other response categories were "To a moderate extent", "To a minor extent", "Not at all" and "Not applicable". Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council).

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

Yet overall, Indigenous shelters were generally less likely than non-Indigenous shelters to indicate that they were impacted by a particular pandemic period to a great extent. For instance, 43% of Indigenous shelters and 52% of non-Indigenous shelters reported that they were impacted by the period of initial lockdown measures to a great extent.²⁷ This was the pandemic period that was the most impactful for both types of shelters. Another great period of impact was the period of the second wave—about one-quarter (27%) of Indigenous shelters and about one-third (34%) of non-Indigenous shelters reported that this time period impacted their facility to a great extent.²⁸

Indigenous shelters situated on reserves were more likely to report that they were greatly impacted by a particular pandemic period, compared with shelters that were off reserves. For example, half (50%) of the Indigenous shelters located on reserves reported that they were greatly impacted by the period of the pandemic when the initial lockdown measures were implemented, while 38% of shelters that were situated off reserves reported the same. This difference in impact may be because data also show that there were a large number of COVID-19 cases in on-reserve Indigenous communities throughout the pandemic (Government of Canada 2022). In addition, some of the characteristics of Indigenous communities on reserves may have also made them more vulnerable because of the COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns, and therefore it was more difficult for shelters in these communities to continue to provide the same level of support to victims. For instance, compared with those living off reserves, those living on reserves tend to have less access to health care services, less access to clean drinking water, there is more food insecurity in communities, and there tends to be more overcrowding in housing (House of Commons 2021).

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters reported that they experienced the least amount of impact during the times throughout the COVID-19 pandemic when the lockdowns were relaxed and certain restrictions were lifted.

Accommodation capacity greatest pandemic-related challenge for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the ability of many shelters to provide the same level, quality and type of services to victims that they offered prior to the pandemic. According to the SRFVA, the greatest challenge that shelters encountered throughout the pandemic was related to accommodation capacity. Nearly half of all Indigenous (46%) and non-Indigenous (47%) shelters reported that the pandemic had a great impact on their accommodation capacity, due to an inability to operate at full capacity because of physical distancing measures for example (Table 3). This is likely because many shelters had to reduce their capacity in order to abide by public health and provincial or territorial rules and regulations which were intended to limit the spread of the virus (Women's Shelters Canada 2020).

A much larger proportion of Indigenous shelters than non-Indigenous shelters were greatly impacted by two particular pandemic-related challenges. About four in ten (41%) Indigenous shelters and about three in ten (29%) non-Indigenous shelters reported that the next greatest challenge that impacted their ability to provide services to victims during the pandemic was difficulties providing professional services or programs. In addition, nearly one in three (32%) Indigenous shelters reported difficulties communicating with victims outside of their facilities who were not residents, while about one in five (19%) non-Indigenous shelters reported the same. For most other challenges, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters indicated a similar level of impact, as did shelters both on and off reserves. All of these challenges may have also impacted the ability of victims to seek and obtain support for the abuse that they were experiencing during this difficult time period.

Indigenous shelters more impacted than non-Indigenous shelters by most staffing-related COVID challenges

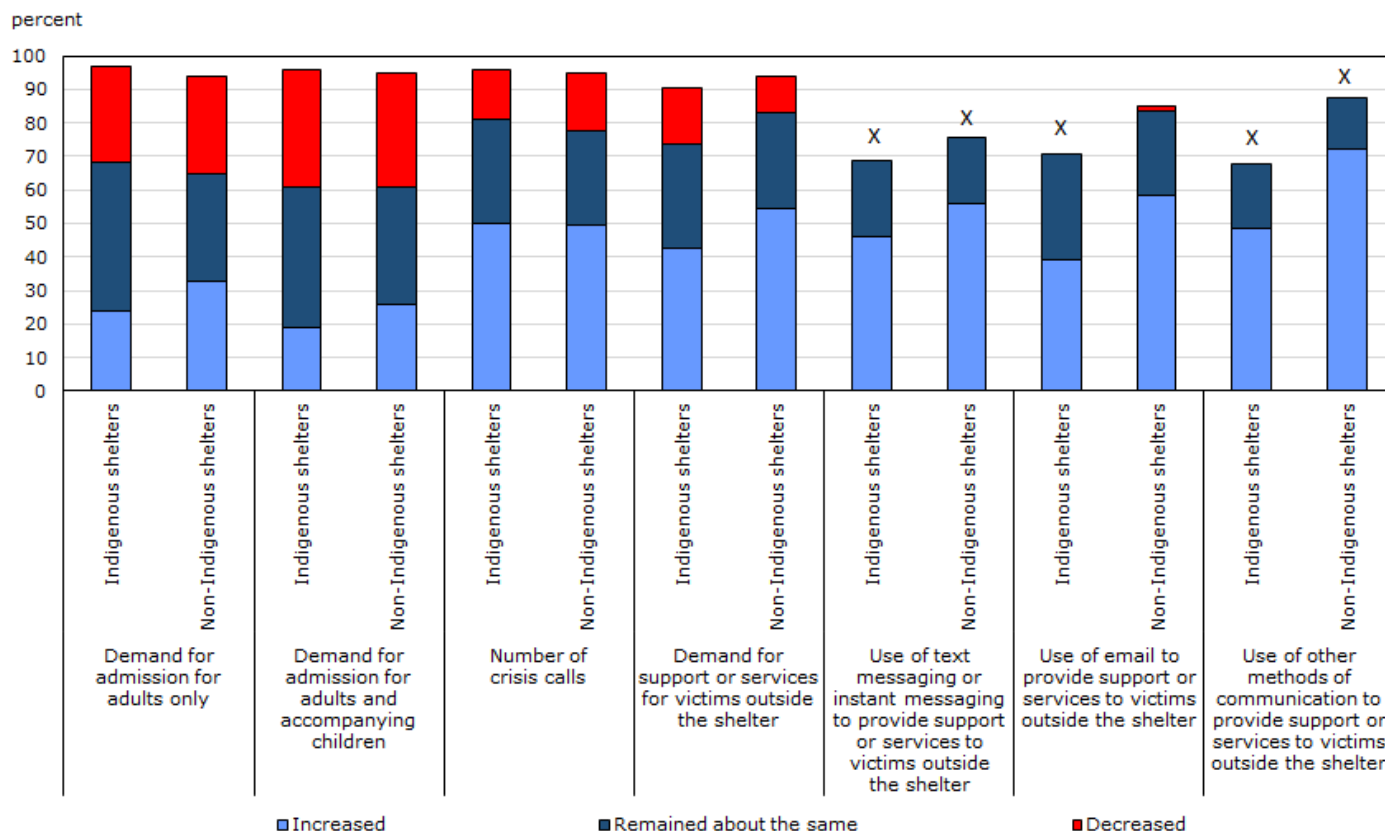
In addition to challenges related to operations, the COVID-19 pandemic also created staffing issues for some shelters, which in turn impacted their ability to assist victims of abuse. For most COVID-related staffing challenges, a higher proportion of shelters that had ties to Indigenous communities or organizations reported that they were greatly impacted, compared with non-Indigenous shelters. Nearly three in ten (28%) Indigenous shelters reported that they were greatly impacted by staff availability challenges due to family or caregiving responsibilities, while about one in seven (15%) non-Indigenous shelters reported the same (Table 3). In addition, 26% of Indigenous shelters reported that they were greatly impacted by staff availability due to self-isolation requirements, compared with 11% of non-Indigenous shelters.

Non-Indigenous shelters reported that their greatest staffing-related challenge in 2020/2021 was hiring or training new staff—over one-third (36%) of non-Indigenous shelters indicated that they were greatly impacted by this. In comparison, 23% of Indigenous shelters reported the same.

Crisis calls, and demand and use of external supports increase

Shelters reported a number of different areas that were impacted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic which relate to additional supports and services that they provide to victims of abuse. Half (50%) of all Indigenous and non-Indigenous (49%) shelters reported an increase in the number of crisis calls that they received during the pandemic, while about three in ten (31% and 28%, respectively) shelters reported that they remained about the same (Chart 2).²⁹ More specifically, a larger proportion of off-reserve Indigenous shelters reported increases in the number of crisis calls, compared with on-reserve shelters (58% of shelters versus 38% of shelters).

Chart 2
Impact of COVID-19 on demand for services among shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter, Canada, 2020/2021



X suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the Statistics Act

Note: Includes the response category "Not applicable". Calculations exclude between 33% and 34% of Indigenous shelters and 21% of non-Indigenous shelters that did not provide a response to the questions. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council).

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

Some shelters also indicated that they increased the use of external supports in order to assist victims outside of their facilities. About half (48%) of all Indigenous shelters reported an increase in the use of various methods of communication to support victims outside their facilities, such as video conferencing or letters, as well as an increase in the use of text messaging or instant messaging (46% of shelters). Many non-Indigenous shelters also reported an increase in the use of these two types of external supports (72% of shelters and 56% of shelters), as well as the use of email to provide outside support (58% of shelters).

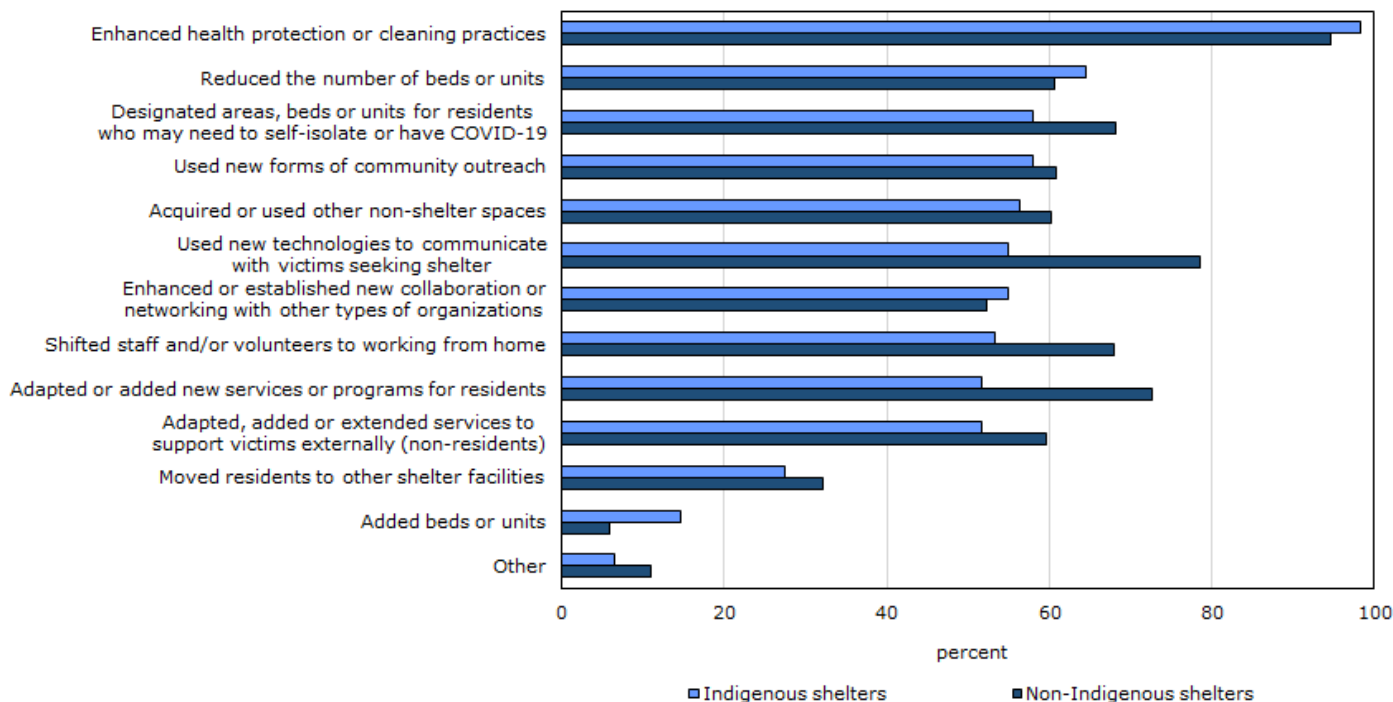
Notably, there were differences in the proportion of Indigenous shelters reporting increases in demand for support for services for victims outside of their facilities. Half (50%) of Indigenous shelters located off reserves reported increases in demand for these types of support, while three in ten (30%) on-reserve shelters reported the same.

Yet, despite some of these increases, many shelters did not report associated increases in demand for admissions to their facilities in 2020/2021. About three in ten Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters (29%, each) reported decreases in demand for adult admissions during the pandemic, while about one-third (35% and 34%, respectively) reported decreases in demand for admissions of families (adults and accompanying children).^{30 31} These findings are also consistent with the overall decline in admissions reported by shelters in this cycle of the SRFVA (2020/2021), compared with the previous cycle (2017/2018, see below).

Shelters implemented many new measures during the pandemic to mitigate its impact

Shelters implemented a number of measures throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in order to reduce the spread of the virus, while continuing to serve victims seeking shelter because of abuse. Some of these new measures included making physical changes to shelter spaces such as reducing the number of beds or units in their facilities (65% of Indigenous shelters and 61% of non-Indigenous shelters) and having designated areas, beds or units for residents who may need to self-isolate or have COVID-19 (58% of Indigenous shelters and 68% of non-Indigenous shelters) (Chart 3). A number of shelters also reported that they acquired or used non-shelter spaces (56% of Indigenous shelters and 60% of non-Indigenous shelters).

Chart 3
Measures implemented by shelters for victims of abuse to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, by type of shelter, Canada, 2020/2021



Note: The sum of the response categories can exceed 100% as respondents could mark all measures that apply. Calculations exclude 33% of Indigenous shelters and 22% of non-Indigenous shelters that did not provide a response to the questions. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council).

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

In addition, many shelters adapted new services in order to better serve residents as well as victims externally, and some shelters utilized different forms of technology to assist victims. For example, 58% of Indigenous shelters and 61% of non-Indigenous shelters reported using new forms of community outreach, while a considerably smaller proportion of Indigenous shelters than non-Indigenous shelters reported using new technologies to communicate with victims seeking shelter (55% and 79%, respectively).

Most commonly, nearly all shelters (98% of Indigenous shelters and 95% of non-Indigenous shelters) implemented enhanced health protection or cleaning practices throughout the pandemic.

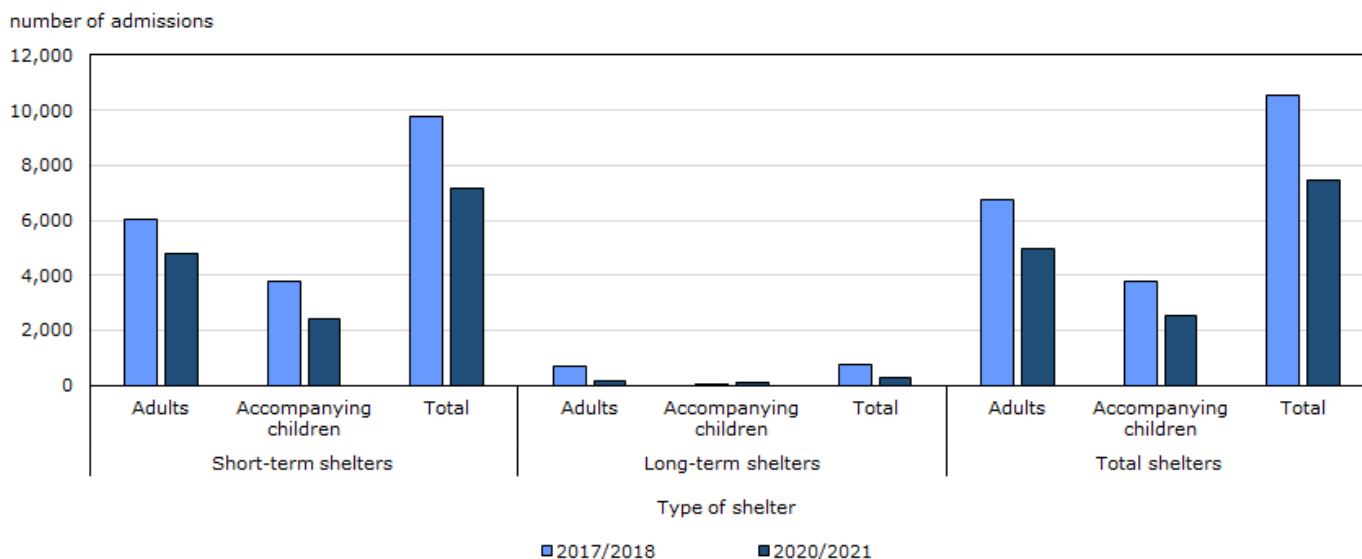
Admissions to shelters

Admissions to Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters decrease in 2020/2021

In 2020/2021, shelters for victims of abuse that had ties to Indigenous communities or organizations admitted 7,478 individuals, about two-thirds (65%) of whom were adult females (Table 4).^{32 33} Specifically, there were 4,871 adult females, 59 adult males and 16 adults of another gender who were admitted to Indigenous shelters over a one-year period. Additionally, there were also 2,532 children who accompanied the adults to these Indigenous shelters. In comparison, there were over 36,000 admissions to non-Indigenous shelters during the same time period, 60% of whom were adult females.

Compared with the previous cycle of the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse (SRFVA) in 2017/2018, there were 29% fewer admissions to Indigenous shelters and 31% fewer admissions to non-Indigenous shelters in 2020/2021. More specifically, Indigenous shelters admitted 27% fewer adult females in 2020/2021 compared with 2017/2018, and 33% fewer children (there were 6,709 adult females and 3,804 children admitted to Indigenous shelters in 2017/2018 (Maxwell 2020)) (Chart 4). However, there were over five times more adult male admissions in 2020/2021 compared with the previous cycle (11 admissions in 2017/2018 (Maxwell 2020) and 59 admissions in 2020/2021). Similar to findings for all shelters in Canada (Ibrahim 2022), this may be partly attributable to the increase in the number of Indigenous shelters mandated to serve males (nine in 2020/2021, compared with four in 2017/2018 (Maxwell 2020)). In addition, the overall decline in admissions in 2020/2021 may also be attributable, at least partly, to the reduction in the number of beds or units because of the COVID-19 pandemic that was reported by 65% of Indigenous shelters and 61% of non-Indigenous shelters.

Chart 4
Admissions to Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter, Canada, 2017/2018 and 2020/2021



Note: An admission refers to the official acceptance of a resident into the shelter with the allocation of a bed, child’s bed, crib, bedroom or bedroom unit, or apartment. The total number of admissions is based on all admissions for a 12-month reference period and includes those who may have been admitted more than once. Each shelter visit is counted as a separate admission. For example, the same person being admitted to a shelter three times in a year would count as three admissions. Accompanying children include adult children (typically aged 18 or older) accompanying a parent or caregiver, such as adult children with disabilities and those who are caretakers of a parent experiencing abuse. Shelters are defined by their mandated expected length of stay, regardless of practice. Short-term shelters include shelters whose expected length of stay is less than three months, and typically provide individual beds to residents, as opposed to separate apartments or units. Long-term shelters include shelters whose expected length of stay is three months or longer, and typically provide residential units (e.g. apartments) to residents. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council).

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

Declines in the overall number of admissions to Indigenous shelters were reported in most regions across the country in 2020/2021, with the exception of the territories, where an increase (+8%) in admissions was reported. Declines in admissions were also found across all non-Indigenous shelters in 2020/2021.

Given the small number of long-term Indigenous shelters in Canada, it is not surprising that the vast majority (96%) of admissions to Indigenous shelters in 2020/2021 were to short-term facilities (Table 5). Similarly, non-Indigenous shelters admitted 92% of their residents to facilities providing short-term accommodation. Overall, Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters reported fewer admissions to both short and long-term facilities in 2020/2021, compared with 2017/2018.

Profile of shelters and their residents

Most residents in shelters for victims of abuse are women and accompanying children

There were 532 residents staying in shelters for victims of abuse that had ties to Indigenous communities or organizations on the survey snapshot date of April 14, 2021 (Table 6).³⁴ Nearly all (98%) of these residents were adult females and accompanying children. More specifically, there were 344 adult females (65%) and 180 accompanying children (34%) residing in these shelters on the snapshot date.

Non-Indigenous shelters also reported a similar proportion (99%) of adult females and accompanying children residing in their shelters on the snapshot date. Overall, there were 4,661 individuals residing in non-Indigenous shelters on April 14, 2021, 53% of whom were adult females.

The proportion of residents that were women and children was similar for both short and long-term shelters. In addition, women and children also made up the vast majority of the residents of Indigenous shelters in rural and urban areas, as well as those that were located on and off reserves.

As outlined previously, shelters have a general mandate or policy that governs their operations and the people that they serve. In 2020/2021, 99% of Indigenous shelters were mandated to assist victims of multiple kinds of abuse. However, on the survey snapshot date, not all of the residents who were staying at these facilities were there for reasons of abuse. According to the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse (SRFVA), 85% of the residents in Indigenous shelters were there

for reasons of abuse. In comparison, 93% of the residents in non-Indigenous shelters were staying there for reasons of abuse. The remaining residents were there for other reasons such as homelessness, crisis intervention, or emergency shelter. For Indigenous shelters in particular, there may be a higher proportion of residents in facilities for reasons other than abuse because there are fewer shelters in general in some Indigenous communities, so shelters often need to serve victims seeking shelter for a variety of different reasons. In addition, victims of abuse can often be experiencing other types of social inequality—such as poverty—requiring them to seek shelter for multiple reasons. For instance, a recent report by Women's Shelters Canada outlined that abused women can often also be experiencing homelessness, which requires shelters to be accommodating and supportive of both issues and population groups (Maki 2020).

Six in ten women in Indigenous shelters identify as First Nations people, Métis or Inuit

The experiences of First Nations people, Métis and Inuit in Canada are shaped by their histories and the ongoing impacts of colonization. Indigenous people often experience socio-economic disparities and historical and intergenerational trauma, which is rooted in colonial policies such as the residential school system and the Sixties Scoop. These policies have all contributed to experiences of child abuse, as well as greater exposure to violence in general (Heidinger 2021; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015).

Research has shown that Indigenous people are more likely to experience almost all forms of violent victimization in Canada, compared with non-Indigenous persons (Boyce 2016; Cotter and Savage 2019; Heidinger 2021). Indigenous women and girls in particular, often experience some of the highest rates of victimization in the country (Allen 2020; Boyce 2016; Perreault and Simpson 2016). More specifically, they are disproportionately more likely to experience intimate partner violence, as well as the most severe cases of this type of violence (Heidinger 2021). In extreme situations, this form of violence has led to homicide. According to recent police-reported crime statistics, Indigenous female victims of homicide in 2019 were most often killed by an intimate partner, spouse or family member (Moreau et. al 2020).

First Nations people, Métis and Inuit represented a large proportion of the residents in shelters for victims of abuse on the survey snapshot date, compared with their representation in the overall Canadian population. According to the SRFVA, 60% of the women in Indigenous shelters and 17% of the women in non-Indigenous shelters were First Nations people, Métis or Inuit.³⁵ Overall, Indigenous persons represent 5% of the total Canadian adult population.³⁶ Similarly, Indigenous children represented 65% of the accompanying children in Indigenous shelters and 18% of the accompanying children in non-Indigenous shelters. In comparison, 8% of children in the Canadian population identify as Indigenous persons.³⁷

In addition, there was a greater proportion of Indigenous persons residing in rural shelters on the snapshot date, compared with urban shelters. Over eight in ten (82%) of the women in rural Indigenous shelters were identified as First Nations people, Métis or Inuit, compared with just under half (48%) of the women in urban Indigenous shelters. There was also a higher proportion of Indigenous persons in rural non-Indigenous shelters than urban non-Indigenous shelters (25% versus 15%).

Also, there was a greater proportion of Indigenous residents staying in shelters that were located on reserves, compared with shelters located off reserves. About eight in ten of the women (80%) and children (78%) in shelters located on reserves on the survey snapshot date were First Nations people, Métis or Inuit, compared with just over half of the women (55%) and children (57%) residing in shelters situated off reserves.

Compared with non-Indigenous shelters, a much greater proportion of Indigenous shelters reported offering culturally sensitive services for Indigenous persons, in order to accommodate the specific needs of Indigenous victims, while taking into account their unique histories and the historical impacts of colonization. These services include, for example, traditional healing methods, the provision of services by spiritual Elders and the integration of Indigenous cultural norms and beliefs. Nearly all (97%) Indigenous shelters reported offering these types of services in 2020/2021, while just over half (56%) of non-Indigenous shelters reported the same (Table 1).

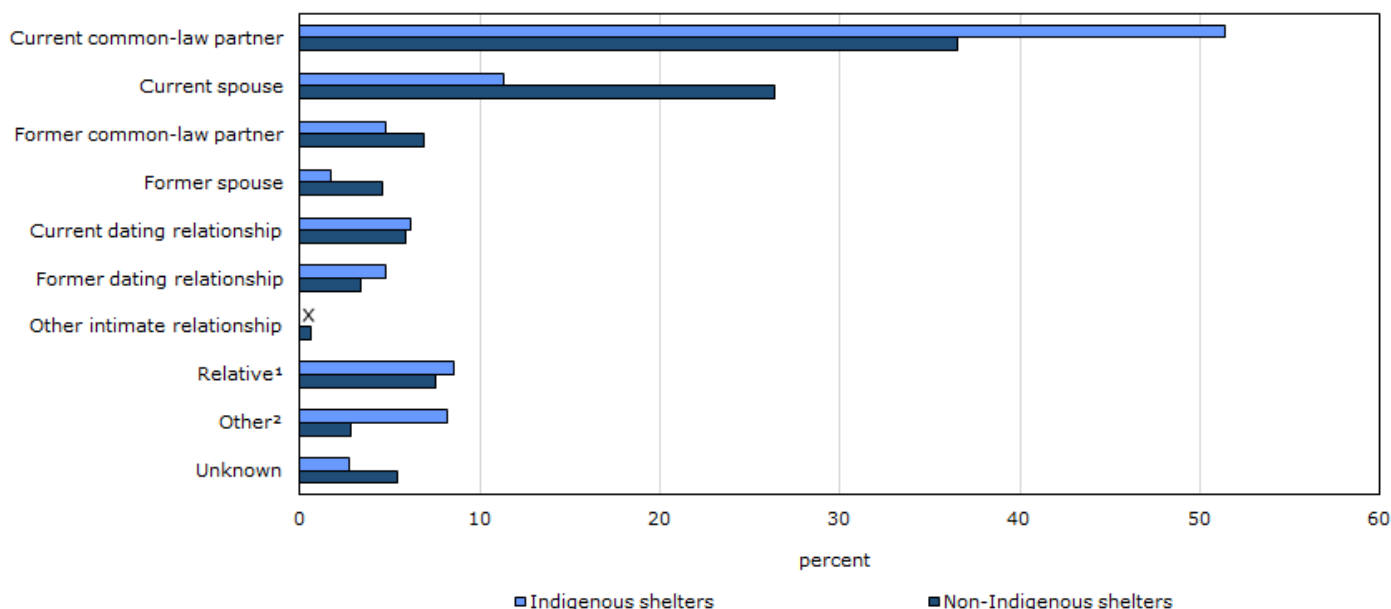
Most women seek shelter because of intimate partner violence

The Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (SSPPS) provides information on Canadians' experiences in public, at work, online and in their intimate partner relationships. According to the 2018 cycle of the survey, 44% of women who had ever been in an intimate partner relationship reported experiencing some kind of violence in their lifetime—including psychological, physical, or sexual violence.³⁸ Women were also more likely to report that they experienced multiple abusive behaviours in their lifetime (Cotter 2021b). The SSPPS also found that Indigenous women were more likely than non-Indigenous women to report being victims of intimate partner violence (IPV), both in their lifetime and in the preceding 12 months (Heidinger 2021). Other data sources have also found that women disproportionately experience some of the most severe forms of IPV, both in their lifetime (Breiding et al. 2014), and in the preceding 12 months (Burczycka 2016), such as being choked, assaulted or threatened with a weapon, or being sexually assaulted.

On the SRFVA snapshot date, the large majority of the women who were seeking shelter at an Indigenous or non-Indigenous facility for reasons of abuse were doing so because they were experiencing IPV (80% and 84%, respectively) (Chart 5).³⁹ More specifically, 51% of women residents were seeking shelter at an Indigenous facility because of abuse involving a common-law partner, while 11% were experiencing abuse by a current spouse. In addition, 5% of women in Indigenous shelters were escaping violence from a former common-law partner and 2% from a former spouse.

Chart 5
Relationship of abuser to adult females in shelters primarily for reasons of abuse, by type of shelter, Canada, April 14, 2021

Relationship of abuser to adult females



X suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*

1. Includes parents, children, siblings and extended family.

2. Includes caregiver, friend/acquaintance, authority figure and other unspecified relationships.

Note: In 2020/2021, the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse was updated to collect resident information based on gender instead of sex. Adult female residents include transgender adults identifying as female. The April 14, 2021 reference period reflects the survey snapshot day, a predetermined business day meant to represent a typical day of operations for shelters across Canada. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council). The sum of the percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding. Reasons of abuse can include, for example, having experienced physical, sexual, financial, emotional or psychological abuse, or harassment, among others.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

According to the SRFVA, 71% of the women who were seeking shelter at an Indigenous facility for reasons of abuse were living with their abuser prior to seeking shelter, while 27% were not.⁴⁰ Similar proportions were reported among women residing in non-Indigenous shelters (70% and 26%, respectively). These findings were also supported in other research which has found that victims of intimate partner violence often live in a shared residence with their abuser (Burczykca 2019).

In addition, some women seeking shelter at Indigenous and non-Indigenous facilities were doing so because of abuse that they were experiencing in a current or former dating relationship (11% and 9%, respectively).⁴¹

Most women residing in Indigenous shelters had experienced emotional or psychological abuse

The SSPPS found that psychological abuse, which includes forms of abuse that target an individual’s emotional, mental or financial well-being, or impedes their personal freedom or sense of safety, was the most common form of intimate violence experienced by women victims in general (Cotter 2021b), as well as Indigenous women victims (Heidinger 2021). Similar findings were found among women residents in shelters for victims of abuse in 2020/2021. According to the SRFVA, on the survey snapshot date, most of the women residents who were seeking shelter at an Indigenous facility had experienced emotional or psychological abuse (75%) (Table 7).⁴² This was followed closely by physical abuse, which was experienced by 70% of the women residents. About three in ten women in Indigenous shelters experienced financial abuse (34%) or harassment (30%). For most types of abuse, Indigenous shelters reported that a smaller proportion of their women residents experienced a particular type, compared with women in non-Indigenous shelters. For example, just over one-third (34%) of the women in Indigenous shelters experienced financial abuse, compared with more than half (57%) of the women in non-Indigenous shelters.

Even though police-reported data show that human trafficking incidents make up a small proportion of all police-reported crime in Canada and that these incidents are often under-reported, they disproportionately impact young women and girls more than any other group of people (Conroy and Sutton 2022). Indigenous women in particular are at an increased risk of experiencing human trafficking and sexual exploitation (House of Commons 2018; Public Safety Canada 2020; Public Safety Canada 2019; Sethi 2007), which was recently highlighted by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIWG) (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019). According to the NIMMIWG, Indigenous women and girls are at an increased risk of human trafficking due to a colonial legacy of economic deprivation, racism, discrimination and abuse. Colonial policies such as the residential school system and the Sixties Scoop and the resulting traumas, have only increased the vulnerability of Indigenous women and girls to human trafficking (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019).

Data from the SRFVA show that a higher proportion of Indigenous facilities reported that their women residents were seeking shelter because of human trafficking-related abuse (7%), compared with non-Indigenous shelters (4% of women residents). This higher proportion of women experiencing human trafficking-related abuse is also consistent with what was reported during the 2017/2018 cycle of the survey (Maxwell 2020).

Fewer women parents admitted with their children in Indigenous shelters than non-Indigenous shelters

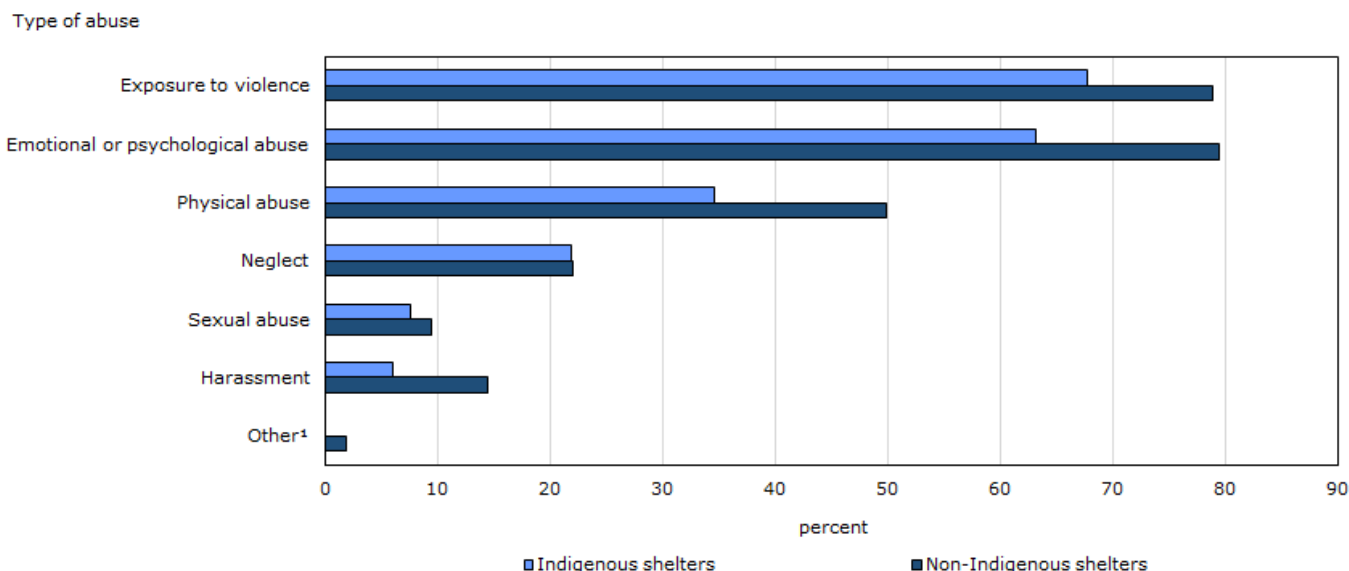
On the survey snapshot date, the majority of the women residing in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters had parental responsibilities (76% and 69%, respectively).⁴³ Of those residents in Indigenous shelters who had parental responsibilities, 68% were admitted with their children, while 32% were admitted without their children.⁴⁴ In comparison, 77% of the women in non-Indigenous shelters who had parental responsibilities were admitted with their children.

Most often, women in Indigenous shelters protecting children from exposure to violence

Many women who seek shelter with their children are protecting them from witnessing or experiencing violence or abuse in the home. According to self-reported victimization data from 2019, about one in five (22%) people in Canada reported having experienced physical abuse by an adult before the age of 15, or having witnessed violence in the home committed by a parent or guardian (21%). Also, 6% of Canadians reported being sexually abused as children (Cotter 2021a). Experiences of self-reported victimization were higher among Indigenous people than non-Indigenous people. For example, just over one-third (34%) of Indigenous people witnessed violence by a parent against another person during their childhood, compared with one in five (20%) non-Indigenous people (Perreault 2022). In addition, recent police-reported data found that one-third (32%) of children and youth victims of violence were victimized by a family member, most commonly a parent (Conroy 2021a).

Facilities responding to the SRFVA were asked to provide information about their residents regarding the type of abuse that they were protecting their children from by seeking shelter. According to the survey, on the snapshot date, Indigenous shelters reported that 68% of the women residents in their facilities who had parental responsibilities were protecting their children from exposure to violence (Chart 6).^{45 46} In comparison, non-Indigenous shelters reported that the women in their shelters were most commonly protecting their children from emotional or psychological abuse or from exposure to violence (79% of the women residents, each). About six in ten (63%) of the women residents in Indigenous shelters were protecting their children from emotional or psychological abuse, while 35% were protecting them from physical abuse.

Chart 6
Types of abuse adult females were protecting their children from by going to a shelter for victims of abuse, by type of shelter, Canada, April 14, 2021



1. Includes forced religion, economic abuse, among others.
Note: In 2020/2021, the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse was updated to collect resident information based on gender instead of sex. Adult female residents include transgender adults identifying as female. The April 14, 2021 reference period reflects the survey snapshot day, a predetermined business day meant to represent a typical day of operations for shelters across Canada. Calculations are based on the number of residents with parental responsibilities (whether admitted with their children or not). Calculations exclude 37% of Indigenous shelters and 31% of non-Indigenous shelters that did not provide a response to the questions. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council). Protection of children includes protecting those under the age of 18 as well as adult children under the care of their parent(s), such as those with disabilities. Percentages can exceed 100% as respondents could mark all responses that apply.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

Similar to non-Indigenous shelters, more than half of the women in Indigenous shelters are aged 18 to 34

Younger age has often been associated with a higher risk of victimization in general (Conroy and Cotter 2017; Cotter and Savage 2019; Perreault 2015), especially among Indigenous women and girls (Boyce 2016). It has also been associated with a higher likelihood of experiencing particular kinds of violence, such as intimate partner violence (Burczycka 2019; Cotter 2021b). Results from the 2018 SSPPS found that young women aged 15 to 24 were proportionately more likely to be victims of intimate partner violence, compared with women aged 25 and older (Cotter 2021b; Savage 2021b).

According to the SRFVA, just over half of the women residents in Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters on the snapshot date were between the ages of 18 and 34 (51%, respectively).⁴⁷ More specifically, 14% of the women in Indigenous shelters were between the ages of 18 and 24, 19% were aged 25 to 29 and 18% were aged 30 to 34. Nearly three in ten (29%) women in Indigenous shelters were aged 35 to 44. These findings are slightly different than what was reported during the 2017/2018 cycle of the survey. In 2017/2018, 56% of women residents in Indigenous shelters were between the ages of 18 and 34, and 18% were between the ages of 35 and 44.

Consistent with the 2017/2018 results (Maxwell 2020), children residing in shelters that had ties to Indigenous communities or organizations were younger than children in non-Indigenous shelters. On the survey snapshot date, 84% of the children in Indigenous shelters were under the age of 12. In comparison, 80% of the children in non-Indigenous shelters were in the same age range. These proportions were similar for both female and male children.

Over one-third of the women in Indigenous shelters reported their abuse to the police

According to the 2019 General Social Survey (GSS) on Canadians’ Safety (Victimization), about one quarter (24%) of all violent incidents came to the attention of the police that year. Overall, women and young victims were less likely to report to police (Cotter 2021a), and they were even less likely to report these situations if it was an incident of spousal violence (Conroy 2021b).⁴⁸ While most victims of violence in general cite reasons such as the incident was too minor or not important enough to report to police, or they did not want the hassle of dealing with the police (Cotter 2021a), some women reported different reasons than men for not reporting. For example, women were more likely to say that they did not report to police because of a belief that the offender would not be adequately punished, that they did not think the incident could be reported to police, shame or embarrassment, they felt that they would not be believed, or that they felt that reporting would bring shame and dishonour to their family (Cotter 2021a).

Reporting to the police can also sometimes be linked to confidence in the police and the criminal justice system more generally. For Indigenous persons in particular, this confidence can be related to the historical practices of colonization such as systemic racism and police violence and profiling, as well as an overall mistrust of the government and official institutions (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019). According to the 2020 GSS on Social Identity, compared with the non-Indigenous population, Indigenous people were less likely to report confidence in the police, the criminal justice system and the courts. They were also more likely to have negative perceptions of the police and police performance (Cotter 2022).

A slightly higher proportion of women in Indigenous shelters reported the abusive situation that led them to seek shelter to the police in 2020/2021, than women in non-Indigenous shelters.⁴⁹ According to the SRFVA, 35% of women in Indigenous shelters who were there for reasons of abuse reported their abuse to the police, compared with 30% of women in non-Indigenous shelters.⁵⁰ Notably, this may be a function of smaller communities and remote areas—where many Indigenous shelters are located— which other research has shown tend to have higher rates of violence that comes to the attention of police (Burczycka 2022). The exact reasons for this is unknown, but violence may be more likely to come to the attention of police in these areas because it is more difficult to hide and other community members may be aware of it. For 6% of women in Indigenous shelters and 22% of women in non-Indigenous shelters, the facility did not know whether the abuse had been reported to the police.

However, Indigenous shelters reported that a slightly lower proportion of women in their facilities had charges laid against the individual suspected of abuse, compared with women in non-Indigenous shelters (12% versus 15%).⁵¹ Indigenous shelters also reported that a slightly lower proportion of women in their facilities had an order keeping their abuser away (12%), such as a peace bond or a restraining order, compared with those in non-Indigenous shelters (15%).^{52 53}

These findings may be related to an overall lower level of confidence in the police among Indigenous peoples, as well as a more critical perception of police performance (Cotter 2022). In addition, research has found that it is more common for victims from Indigenous communities to request that no further action be taken when they are involved in violent incidents, compared with those in non-Indigenous communities (Allen 2020). This may be because complainants prefer to deal with matters by themselves or within the community, rather than through the criminal justice system (Jerome 2019). It may also be tied to distrust in law enforcement in general which is rooted in the intergenerational impacts of colonial policies and practices (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019). The relative remoteness of some of these Indigenous communities may also play a role, since victims may not want to proceed criminally if it means they need to leave their communities to attend court. Furthermore, there may also be a greater burden on victims and their families in Indigenous communities, both economically and personally, if the perpetrator is charged and has to leave the community for court or incarceration. This burden may also be higher where the accused is a family member and if they are the main provider for their families (Allen 2020).

More than one in ten women in Indigenous shelters have a disability

Research in Canada has shown that overall, persons with disabilities have a higher likelihood of being victims of violence than persons without disabilities (Burczycka 2018; Conroy and Cotter 2017; Cotter 2018; Perreault 2015). Women with a disability are more likely to be a victim of violent crime than women without a disability. Women with a disability are also more likely to experience spousal violence by a current or former intimate partner than women without a disability (Cotter 2018). In addition, Indigenous peoples generally have a higher prevalence of disability than the non-Indigenous population (Burlock 2017; Hahmann et al. 2019), as do women than men (Morris et. al 2018). Self-reported data from the SSPPS has shown that Indigenous women with disabilities are more likely to have experienced lifetime violent victimization (Heidinger 2022) as well as intimate partner violence (Heidinger 2021; Savage 2021a), compared with Indigenous women without disabilities as well as their non-Indigenous counterparts.

According to the SRFVA, over one in ten (12%) women in Indigenous shelters on the snapshot date had a disability, similar proportions to what was reported among women in non-Indigenous shelters (13%).⁵⁴ However, the prevalence of disabilities among women in shelters was much lower than the proportion of individuals in the overall Canadian population who have a disability: 22% of Canadians aged 15 and older have at least one disability (Morris et. al 2018). While the exact reasons for this is unknown, it is important to recognize that there are a variety of different risk factors associated with victimization and that some of them may be more prevalent among women in shelters for reasons of abuse.⁵⁵

On the survey snapshot date, a similar proportion of children in Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters had a disability (9% and 7%, respectively). In addition, similar proportions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters reported being wheelchair-accessible in 2020/2021: about three-quarters of both types of facilities (75% and 74%, respectively) (Table 1).⁵⁶

Higher proportion of repeat clients in Indigenous shelters than in non-Indigenous shelters

The decision to leave an abusive relationship is one which can be very difficult for some victims. As a result, the process of leaving an abusive situation can be rather complex and many individuals may repeatedly need to access and use victim services that exist in their communities, prior to fully escaping the abuse that they are experiencing (Burczycka 2016). For example, leaving a violent home can mean for some that they may be choosing to enter another difficult living situation—such as homelessness and poverty—due to their socio-economic reliance on their abuser (Maki 2020). Therefore, victims can often utilize victim services repeatedly before they are able to fully leave their abusive situation.

The majority of shelters that reported to the SRFVA in 2020/2021 indicated that their facility allowed repeat clients (97% of Indigenous shelters and 95% of non-Indigenous shelters).⁵⁷ Of those Indigenous shelters who indicated that they allowed repeat clients, and among adult women residents at these shelters, 36% had been served by the same facility previously. More specifically, 30% of adult women residents previously received services as a resident, while 6% received services on an outreach basis only.⁵⁸ Overall, a slightly smaller proportion of adult women residents in non-Indigenous shelters were repeat clients (32%). In addition, 48% of the women in Indigenous shelters had not been former clients and it was unknown whether 16% of the residents had or had not previously received services. Of note, there were minimal differences in the proportion of women residents who were repeat clients in shelters located on reserves, compared with those located off reserves.

While it may be harder for some individuals in rural areas to access victim services such as shelters for victims of abuse because they are located in areas far from their homes (House of Commons 2019), overall, women residing in rural shelters were more likely to have been repeat clients than women in urban shelters. These findings were similar for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous facilities. About half (52%) of the women in rural Indigenous shelters were repeat clientele: 39% former residents and 13% received services on an outreach basis. Comparatively, 28% of the women in urban Indigenous shelters were repeat clients. The higher prevalence of repeat clients in rural shelters may be because there are often fewer shelters in these areas to serve individuals spread over large geographic areas, so victims may use the same shelter repeatedly because it is the only option available to them.

About one in five Indigenous shelters reported turning people away on the snapshot date, the majority were women from shelters in rural areas

As previously noted, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted the ability of many shelters to operate at full capacity and to accept all victims seeking shelter because of abuse. According to the SRFVA, 19% of Indigenous shelters and 30% of non-Indigenous shelters reported turning people away on the snapshot date. There were 45 people turned away from Indigenous shelters and 404 people turned away from non-Indigenous shelters on April 14, 2021. For Indigenous shelters in particular, there were 48% fewer people turned away in 2020/2021 than on the 2017/2018 snapshot date. The majority of the people turned away from both types of shelters on April 14, 2021 were women (82% and 80%, respectively), similar to what was reported during the previous cycle of the SRFVA. Most of the women were turned away from Indigenous shelters located in rural areas (76%), while the large majority of the women were turned away from non-Indigenous shelters in urban areas (87%).

Indigenous shelters reported that women were commonly turned away from their facilities for safety issues, such as the person was on a non-admit or caution list (33%).⁵⁹ Nearly four in ten (38%) women were turned away from an Indigenous shelter for various other reasons, for example because there was a COVID-19 outbreak in the facility, victims chose to think about their options before becoming residents in the shelter, or a required phone assessment for admittance was not completed prior to seeking shelter. The most common reason a woman was turned away from a non-Indigenous shelter was because the shelter was full (76%).⁶⁰ Of note, Indigenous shelters did not report the reason why 43% of the women were turned away from their facilities, and non-Indigenous shelters did not report why 21% of the women were turned away from their facilities.

About three-quarters of the women who depart short-term Indigenous shelters return to a home where their abuser resides, compared with one in seven of those who leave short-term non-Indigenous shelters

On the survey snapshot date, there were 31 people who departed Indigenous shelters and 71 people who departed non-Indigenous shelters.⁶¹ Around three-quarters of these departures were women (74% and 73%, respectively). All of the departures from Indigenous shelters were from short-term facilities. Specifically, 12 (39%) of the departures were from shelters located on reserves. Similarly, all but four of the departures from non-Indigenous shelters were also from short-term facilities, and just under one-third (31%) of the departures were from shelters located in rural areas.

Compared with women who left short-term non-Indigenous shelters on the survey snapshot date, much higher proportions of women who departed short-term Indigenous shelters returned home and their abuser was living in the home (14% versus 74%).⁶² Another 14% (each) of women who left short-term non-Indigenous shelters returned home and their abuser was not in the home or they departed to live with friends or family members.

The fact that women departing both types of short-term shelters often return to live with their abuser may be related to the personal relationship that many women seeking shelter have with their abuser, such as an intimate partner relationship.

Some women may also be financially dependent on their abuser and have nowhere else to go (House of Commons 2019). In addition, shelters are often only a temporary means of escaping abuse, and they do not offer a long-term, permanent way for victims to leave their abusive situations. This can be problematic if suitable housing alternatives are not available to abuse victims once they leave a shelter (House of Commons 2019), and if long-term shelters are not available. Furthermore, for those who reside in small, close-knit communities—such as Indigenous communities—there may be even fewer housing alternatives available to victims due to low housing supply and a lack of affordable housing. Victims may also live in a shared home with their extended family and their partner or spouse. All of these factors may contribute to victims returning to the abusive situation that they were trying to escape in the first place, by returning to a shared residence with their abuser.

Greater proportion of women in Indigenous shelters than non-Indigenous shelters have a history of homelessness

The most recent cycle of the SRFVA included new questions related to homelessness, in attempt to gain some insight into the interconnections of homelessness and victimization. Although respondent shelters did not report that any of the women who left their shelters on the snapshot date were departing into homelessness, another question on the survey asked shelters to indicate whether any of their residents previously experienced homelessness.

According to the survey, over half (54%) of the women in Indigenous shelters on the snapshot date had a prior history of homelessness—meaning they had been homeless at some point in their life prior to seeking shelter in the facility.⁶³ In comparison, much smaller proportions of women in non-Indigenous shelters reported the same (37%).⁶⁴ Also, 44% of children residing in Indigenous shelters and 28% of children in non-Indigenous shelters had a prior history of homelessness. The higher prevalence of homelessness among both women and children in Indigenous shelters than those residing in non-Indigenous shelters may be related to the fact that previous research has found that overall, Indigenous persons are more likely to report past experiences of homelessness than the non-Indigenous population (Uppal 2022). This has also been documented in other research which has found that higher rates of homelessness among Indigenous populations is often tied to the intergenerational effects of colonization and the residential school system, and is associated with systemic barriers to employment and education, as well as racial discrimination in areas such as the workplace and the housing market (Belanger et al. 2012; Leach 2010).

Similar proportions of women residents in both rural and urban Indigenous shelters, as well as those located on and off reserves had a prior history of homelessness.

Women in shelters most commonly self-refer

Women residing in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters were most commonly self-referred to the facility in 2020/2021. About four in ten women in short-term shelters reported that they were self-referred (42% of women in short-term Indigenous shelters and 37% of women in short-term non-Indigenous shelters). For women in short-term Indigenous shelters, the next most common referral source was an Indigenous organization (15%), while short-term non-Indigenous shelters reported that 15% of women in their facilities were referred by a phone help line.

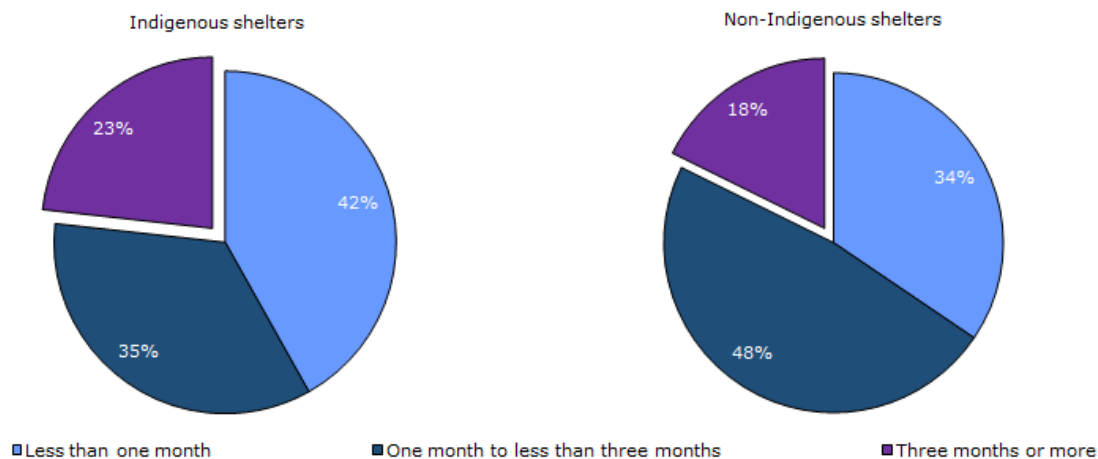
Long-term shelters most frequently reported that their women residents were referred by another shelter for victims of abuse (33% of women in long-term Indigenous shelters and 40% of women in long-term non-Indigenous shelters), or they were self-referred to the facility (33% of women in long-term Indigenous shelters and 26% of women in long-term non-Indigenous shelters).

Short-term Indigenous shelters report longer average lengths of stay than short-term non-Indigenous facilities

Overall, there is a general shortage of long-term shelters for victims of abuse in Canada, particularly in certain areas of the country—such as in Indigenous communities—and in particular provinces or territories (Maki 2020; Maki 2019). This shortage of long-term shelters can result in added stress on existing short-term shelters that often need to accommodate victims of abuse seeking long-term accommodation. As a result, some victims end up staying in short-term shelters for longer than the mandated expected length of stay, which is usually less than three months. Short-term shelters are intended to be a temporary place where victims can reside until they find alternate housing arrangements, or they can find a suitable long-term shelter.

In 2020/2021, the majority of short-term shelters in Canada reported that the average length of stay at their facilities was within the mandated three month period, results which are comparable to what was reported in 2017/2018 (Maxwell 2020). About three-quarters (77%) of short-term Indigenous shelters and over eight in ten (82%) short-term non-Indigenous shelters reported average lengths of stay of less than three months (Chart 7). However, overall, Indigenous shelters reported longer average lengths of stay: 23% of short-term Indigenous shelters reported average lengths of stay of three months or more, compared with 18% of non-Indigenous shelters.

Chart 7
Average length of stay in short-term shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter, Canada, 2020/2021



Note: Shelters are defined by their mandated expected length of stay, regardless of practice. Short-term shelters include shelters whose expected length of stay is less than three months. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council).

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

A higher proportion of shelters located in urban areas reported longer average lengths of stay than shelters located in rural areas. Over one-quarter of short-term urban Indigenous shelters (27%) reported average lengths of stay of three months or more, compared with 20% of rural Indigenous shelters. Similarly, 21% of short-term urban non-Indigenous shelters reported the same, compared with about one in ten (11%) short-term rural non-Indigenous shelters. These differences in average lengths of stay between rural and urban shelters may be related to the current housing crisis in Canada and the lack of affordable housing in urban areas to purchase or to rent (Homeless Hub 2018; House of Commons 2019; Kirkby and Mettler 2016).

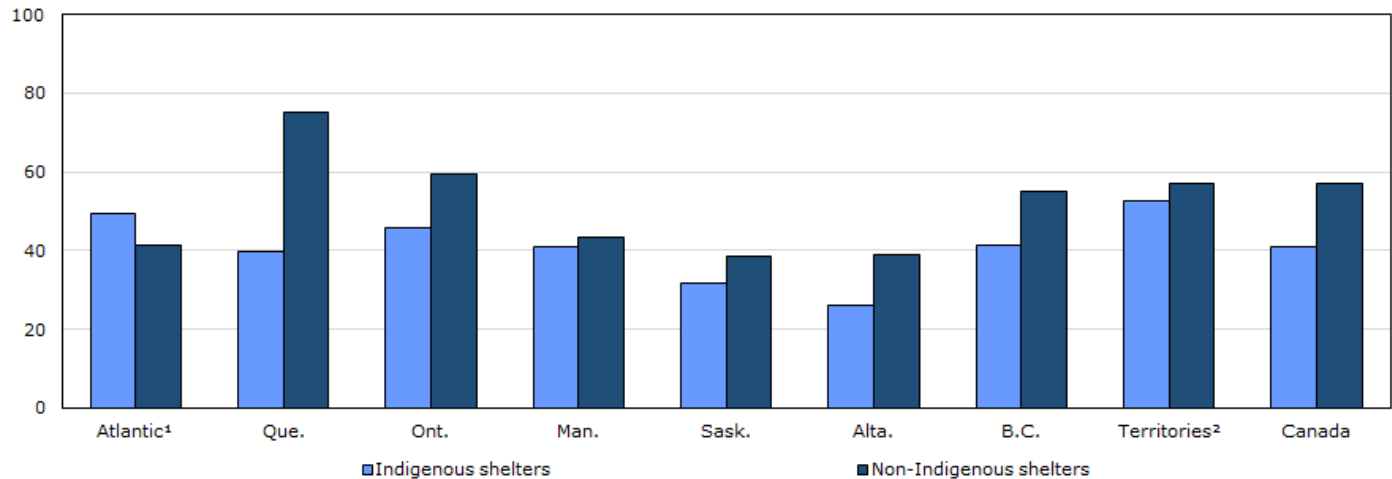
In addition, average lengths of stay differed among Indigenous shelters, depending if shelters were located on or off reserves. In 2020/2021, 31% of short-term shelters located on reserves reported average lengths of stay of three months or more, while 18% of short-term off-reserve shelters reported the same.

Smaller proportion of short-term Indigenous shelters than short-term non-Indigenous shelters occupied or considered full on the snapshot date

In 2020/2021, there were 1,123 funded beds in the 86 short-term shelters for victims of abuse that had ties to Indigenous communities or organizations in Canada (Table 8).⁶⁵ In addition, there were 65 units across seven long-term Indigenous shelters. On the snapshot date of April 14, 2021, about four in ten (41%) of the beds in short-term Indigenous shelters were occupied and 12% (or 10 shelters) of short-term Indigenous shelters were considered full (i.e., 90% occupancy or greater) (Chart 8).⁶⁶ In comparison, over half (57%) of the beds in the 322 short-term non-Indigenous shelters were occupied and 17% (or 55 shelters) of short-term non-Indigenous shelters were considered full.

Chart 8**Occupancy rate for short-term shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter and region, April 14, 2021**

Shelter occupancy rate (percent)



1. Includes Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

2. Includes Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

Note: The April 14, 2021 reference period reflects the survey snapshot day, a predetermined business day meant to represent a typical day of operations for shelters across Canada. Shelters are defined by their mandated expected length of stay, regardless of practice. Short-term shelters include shelters whose expected length of stay is less than three months. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council). The occupancy rate is calculated by dividing the total number of residents on the snapshot day by the total number of funded beds, multiplied by 100.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

The occupancy rates reported in 2020/2021 were much lower than what was reported in 2017/2018, when short-term Indigenous shelters were 75% occupied and about one-third (34%) of short-term Indigenous shelters were considered full (Maxwell 2020). The rates were also lower than those reported by short-term non-Indigenous shelters in 2017/2018 (80% and 36%, respectively) (Maxwell 2020). This decrease in occupancy may be the result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact that it had on shelters during this time period. As previously noted, shelters reported that the largest impact that they experienced throughout the pandemic was changes to their accommodation capacity. In order to follow provincial or territorial and public health guidelines, many shelters reduced their capacity and the number of victims that they were able to assist as residents (Women's Shelters Canada 2020).

However, this shift in occupancy appears to have impacted short-term Indigenous shelters (from 75% occupied in 2017/2018 to 41% occupied in 2020/2021) to a greater extent than short-term non-Indigenous shelters (from 80% occupied in 2017/2018 to 57% occupied in 2020/2021), which could indicate that victims from Indigenous communities felt it was harder for them to leave abusive situations during the pandemic period and seek shelter. Victims from smaller communities also sometimes need to leave their community in order to seek shelter because there are fewer facilities available to them which serve victims over large geographic areas (House of Commons 2019). This can often require transportation, which may have also been more difficult during the pandemic period. The greater decline in occupancy in Indigenous shelters may also indicate that it was harder for Indigenous shelters to continue to provide the same level of support and services to victims during this time period, or that victims may have assumed that support was unavailable and not open.

Throughout the country, occupancy rates differed, as did the proportion of shelters in a given province or territory that were considered full on the snapshot date. This may be due to differing rules and guidelines surrounding the pandemic period across the country, and it may also relate to varying numbers of victims seeking shelter in different regions, as well as the availability of other supports and services in the community. On the survey snapshot date, short-term Indigenous shelters in the territories reported the highest occupancy rate in the country (53%), followed by the Atlantic provinces (49%) and Ontario (46%), while Alberta reported the lowest occupancy rate (26%).

For Indigenous shelters on the survey snapshot date, there was very little difference in the occupancy rates of short-term shelters in urban areas and those located in rural areas (40% and 42%, respectively). However, short-term urban non-Indigenous shelters had a higher occupancy rate than short-term rural non-Indigenous shelters (59% versus 49%).

Looking at short-term Indigenous shelters specifically, there were differences in occupancy rates on the survey snapshot date depending on if the shelter was located on or off a reserve. One-third (33%) of the beds in short-term on-reserve shelters were occupied on the snapshot date, compared with 46% of the beds in short-term off-reserve shelters.

Lack of permanent and affordable housing continue to be the most common issues faced by shelters and their residents

Shelters responding to the SRFVA were also asked to report the top three challenges facing their facilities over the preceding year, as well as the three issues or challenges facing residents of their shelters. The top issue reported by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters in 2020/2021 was a lack of permanent housing (37% and 41%, respectively) (Table 9). The second most commonly reported issue for Indigenous shelters was low employee compensation (31%). Many Indigenous shelters also reported a lack of funding, as well as challenges meeting the diverse needs of clients as common issues (27%, each), while one-third (33%) of non-Indigenous shelters reported staff turnover as a common challenge that they faced.

Associated with a lack of permanent housing—the most common issue faced by shelters—was the most common issue for residents which was highlighted by both types of shelters in 2020/2021. The majority of Indigenous (75%) and non-Indigenous (82%) shelters reported that a lack of affordable housing was the most common challenge facing their residents (Table 10). Both types of shelters also reported the same issue as the second most common challenge for residents: underemployment and low incomes (50% of Indigenous shelters and 44% of non-Indigenous shelters). Nearly half (47%) of all Indigenous shelters reported substance use issues as a common challenge for their residents, while non-Indigenous shelters highlighted mental health issues (35%).

Most funding for shelters comes from provincial/territorial government sources

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse receive funding for their operations from a variety of different sources, including federal, provincial and regional government sources, private donations and fundraising activities.

In 2020/2021, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters reported that the largest proportion of their funding came from provincial or territorial government sources (52% and 71%, respectively) (Table 11). Overall, Indigenous shelters received much less funding than non-Indigenous shelters did. However, the amount of funding that they received was generally proportional to the number of shelters in Canada that Indigenous facilities represent.

There were a few notable differences in funding sources for Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters in 2020/2021. For instance, fundraising or donations accounted for 3% of the funding for Indigenous shelters, compared with 12% of the funding for non-Indigenous shelters. Also, a much higher proportion of the funding for Indigenous shelters comes from federal government sources (33%), compared with non-Indigenous shelters (6%). While the precise reason for these government funding differences is unknown, it could be partly reflective of federal government initiatives put in place recently to specifically support Indigenous populations. For instance, a recent Government of Canada Violence Prevention Strategy promised to provide funding and support for gender-based violence, with specific funding for shelters for Indigenous peoples (Government of Canada 2020). In addition, the Indigenous Shelter and Transitional Housing Initiative aims to expand supports for Indigenous women and children escaping gender-based violence through the construction of additional shelters for victims of abuse (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 2022). Notably, this difference in federal funding for Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters was also observed during the 2017/2018 cycle of the survey.

Most spending from shelters goes towards employee salaries

It is also important to understand the expenditures of shelters, in order to identify potential funding needs and to identify gaps in the ability of shelters to support clients and provide services to victims.

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters reported that the largest portion of their expenses in 2020/2021 went towards employee salaries (65% and 72%, respectively) (Table 11). Both types of shelters also reported that their next largest expense was direct client costs, representing 8% of the expenditures of Indigenous shelters and 6% of the expenditures of non-Indigenous shelters. Overall, there were minimal differences in the proportion of the budgets of Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters that went towards the different expense types.

Summary

Shelters for victims of abuse that have ties to Indigenous communities or organizations in Canada primarily serve people from the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities throughout the country. Compared with other population groups, these individuals are often at a greater risk for most types of victimization—such as intimate partner violence—and they also frequently experience various other forms of social inequality and disadvantage. The experiences of Indigenous people in Canada are rooted in colonial policies such as the residential school system and the Sixties Scoop, which have contributed to intergenerational trauma, cycles of abuse, as well as greater exposure to violence in general. It is important to understand the characteristics of the victim services such as shelters for abuse which primarily serve Indigenous people in First Nations,

Métis and Inuit communities, as well as information about those who are accessing these shelters, in order to continue to develop strategies and appropriate support and services to address abuse, gender inequality and victimization.

According to the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse (SRFVA), in 2020/2021, there were 93 shelters for victims of abuse that had ties to Indigenous communities or organizations operating across the country, representing 17% of all shelters in Canada. Most Indigenous shelters reported that they were located in a First Nations, Métis or Inuit community, and nearly four in ten (39%) were specifically located on reserves. About half (54%) of Indigenous shelters were located in rural areas.

The large majority (92%) of Indigenous shelters provided short-term accommodation to victims of abuse (less than three months), while a much smaller proportion (8%) provided long-term accommodation (three months or longer).

Similar to the last cycle of the survey which was conducted in 2017/2018, the majority of the residents in Indigenous shelters on the survey snapshot date of April 14, 2021—a date which represents a typical day of operations for shelters—were women and accompanying children, most of whom were there for reasons of abuse. Most shelters reported that the abuser of their residents was often a current or former intimate partner with whom they were living with prior to seeking shelter.

In order to help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus and to look out for the health and safety of those within their facilities, while continuing to provide a safe place to stay, shelters implemented a variety of different measures throughout the pandemic period. These measures included implementing enhanced health protection and cleaning practices, using new forms of community outreach, using new technologies to communicate with victims and adding or adapting new programs and services. Many shelters also reported making changes to their shelter spaces in order to limit the spread of the virus by reducing the number of beds or units in their facilities, or creating designated areas where residents could self-isolate.

Many shelters reported being greatly impacted by the pandemic and the associated lockdowns and restrictions which were implemented across the country. About one-third of Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters reported being impacted by the pandemic overall to a great extent (32% and 34%, respectively). Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters indicated that the pandemic brought an increase in the number of crisis calls that their shelters were dealing with, as well as an increase in the use of support and services to assist those outside of their shelters on an outreach basis. Both types of shelters reported that their greatest challenge throughout the pandemic was accommodation capacity. In addition, shelters experienced a number of other challenges including difficulties providing professional services or programs, difficulties communicating with victims externally, and staffing-related challenges such as difficulties with staff availability due to family or care-giving responsibilities or self-isolation requirements.

In 2020/2021, shelters for victims of abuse admitted fewer people to their facilities over a one-year period, compared with 2017/2018. Indigenous shelters admitted over 7,400 individuals in 2020/2021, the majority of whom were women and accompanying children. On the survey snapshot date, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters reported much lower occupancy rates than what was reported in 2017/2018. Indigenous shelters reported that 41% of their short-term beds were occupied on this date and 12% of short-term Indigenous shelters were considered full (at least 90% occupied).

Shelters for victims of abuse face many challenges which can impact the way they operate and the types of supports and services that they provide, as well as challenges related to the populations of people that are accessing these services. In 2020/2021, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters reported that a lack of permanent housing and a lack of affordable long-term housing were the most common issues facing shelters and their residents.

Survey Description

Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse

The Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse (SRFVA) is a census of Canadian shelters (also referred to as residential facilities) primarily mandated to provide residential services to victims of abuse (defined as ongoing victimization). The SRFVA was conducted for the second time in 2020/2021, following a major redesign of its predecessor: the Transition Home Survey. The first cycle of the SRFVA was conducted in 2017/2018.

The objective of the SRFVA is to produce aggregate statistics on the services offered by these shelters during the previous 12-month reference period, as well as to provide a one-day snapshot of the clientele being served on a specific date (mid-April of the survey year). The intent of the survey is to provide information that is useful for various levels of government, sheltering and other non-profit organizations, service providers and researchers to assist in developing research, policy and programs, as well as identifying funding needs for shelters for victims of abuse.

Data collection

Active data collection for the SRFVA took place between April and August of 2021. Data collection was conducted through a self-administered electronic questionnaire. Follow-ups by Statistics Canada interviewers for non-respondents and cases of incomplete questionnaires were facilitated through the use of computer-assisted telephone interviews.

With the exception of analysis related to the impact of the pandemic on shelters which refers to pre- and post-pandemic periods, the information presented in this article refers to two distinct time periods: first, data pertaining to the number of annual admissions, average length of stay and financial information are based on a 12-month reference period (2020/2021) that preceded the SRFVA. Respondents were asked to select a 12-month reference period that most closely resembled the period their shelter refers to in its annual reports. Categories included a standard fiscal year (April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021), a calendar year (January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020) or a 12-month period of their choosing. In 2020/2021, 92% of shelters responding to the survey reported their annual information based on the standard fiscal year. Second, the characteristics of shelters and the types of services offered, as well as the profile of those using shelters are based on the snapshot date of April 14, 2021. The snapshot date is a predetermined business day meant to represent a typical day of operations for shelters across Canada. The April 14, 2021 date was selected based on consultations with service providers. It reflected a period of relative stability in terms of admissions and respondents could maximize the resources available to respond to the survey. The snapshot day does not reflect seasonal differences in shelter use nor long-term trends throughout the year.

Target population and response rates

Shelters surveyed were identified by Statistics Canada through its consultations with provincial and territorial governments, transition home associations, other associations and a review of entities on the Statistics Canada Business Register. Shelters potentially in-scope were then contacted prior to the collection of the survey to determine their primary mandate. These may include short-term, long-term and mixed-use shelters; transition homes; second stage housing; safe home networks; satellites; women's emergency centres; emergency shelters; interim housing (Manitoba only); rural family violence prevention centres (Alberta only); family resource centres and; any other shelters offering services to victims of abuse with or without children.

Of the 557 shelters who identified their primary mandate as providing services to victims of abuse in 2020/2021, 437 returned their questionnaire for a response rate of 78%. For those respondents who did not provide their information through the questionnaire, and for those respondents who did not answer some key questions in their questionnaires, imputation was used to complete the missing data for key questions. Imputation methods included the use of trend-adjusted historical data when available and donor imputation, where values are taken from a similar record in terms of shelter location, type and size. The key questions for which imputation was carried out are: number of beds, number of units, number of residents for reasons of abuse, whether or not facility serves repeat clients, relationship to primary abuser, number of people turned away from shelter, number of departures from shelter, average length of stay, number of admissions, revenues and expenses.

For more information and copies of the questionnaire, refer to the Statistics Canada survey information page: [Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse](#).

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Notes

1. For further information on all shelters for victims of abuse in Canada, see Ibrahim 2022.
2. Respondents were asked to select a 12-month reference period that most closely resembled the period their shelter refers to in its annual reports. Categories included a standard fiscal year (April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021), a calendar year (January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020) or a 12-month period of their choosing. In 2020/2021, 92% of shelters responding to the survey reported their annual information based on the standard fiscal year.
3. The snapshot date is a predetermined business day meant to represent a typical day of operations for shelters across Canada. For more information, see the Survey description section.
4. The number of Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse that are presented in this article may not match previously published data for all shelters in Canada in 2020/2021. This is due to a slightly different methodology which was used to identify Indigenous shelters in this article. For more information, see Text box 1.
5. In this article, the terms “shelters” and “residential facilities for victims of abuse” are used interchangeably.
6. All Indigenous shelters that reported that they were located on a reserve also reported that they were located in a First Nations, Métis or Inuit community. However, not all shelters located in a First Nations, Métis or Inuit community are on reserves.
7. There were 32 shelters for victims of abuse that could not be identified as Indigenous or non-Indigenous which were excluded from the analysis presented in this article. For more information, see Text box 1.
8. Respondent shelters were specifically asked: “Are you an Aboriginal organization?” However, for the purposes of this article, the term Indigenous is used to reference shelters for victims of abuse that have ties to First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities or organizations in Canada. In addition, this term is also used when referencing information related to Aboriginal identity from the 2016 Census of Population and Aboriginal victims from the General Social Survey on Canadians’ Safety (Victimization).
9. This method identified 69 Indigenous shelters and 361 non-Indigenous shelters.
10. Linking to the 2017/2018 data allowed for the identification of 24 additional Indigenous shelters and 71 additional non-Indigenous shelters that did not respond to their 2020/2021 survey questionnaire. Therefore, data presented in the current article for 2020/2021 may not match previously published results.
11. Information on Indigenous identity are based on the Aboriginal identity question from the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse. The survey asked about the number of residents by their Aboriginal identity, where being of Aboriginal identity was defined as: First Nations, Métis and Inuit. First Nations includes Status and Non-Status Indians.
12. Just over half (51%) of Indigenous shelters that reported the Indigenous identity information of their residents to the survey indicated that at least half of the residents in their shelters on the snapshot date were First Nations people, Métis or Inuit. More specifically, 18 Indigenous shelters (34%) reported that all of their residents were Indigenous persons.
13. Throughout this article, analyses exclude shelters that did not provide a response to the specific question being analyzed. At the national level, this includes between 26% and 32% of all shelters and between 25% and 29% of all adult female and accompanying children for analysis based on number of residents (unless otherwise specified). The percentage of excluded shelters or residents varies by question and by region, and for Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters. Imputation methods were used to calculate values for key questions in the survey, for which analyses are based on all shelters. For a list of these key questions, see the Survey description section. Also, the sum of the percentages may not always add up to 100% due to rounding.
14. Shelters were designated as being located in either rural or urban areas based on Statistics Canada’s Postal Code Conversion File Plus (PCCF+) tool. Rural shelters are those that are situated outside of a census metropolitan area (CMA) or census agglomeration (CA), or in some cases those served by a rural post office. Urban shelters are those that are situated within a CMA or CA and are not served by a rural post office. A CMA or a CA is formed by one or more adjacent municipalities centred on a population centre (known as the core). A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000 of which 50,000 or more must live in the core. A CA must have a core population of at least 10,000. To be included in the CMA or CA, other adjacent municipalities must have a high degree of integration with the core as measured by commuting flows derived from previous census place of work data, where 50% or more of the population commutes into the core.
15. The number of Indigenous shelters in each province or territory presented in this article may be underestimated. As such, they should be regarded as the number that reported to the survey this cycle, or those that could be identified using historical data, and may not necessarily include all Indigenous shelters that exist in a given jurisdiction.
16. In 2020/2021, the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse was updated to collect resident information based on gender instead of sex. The survey gender categories were: adult females, adult males, adults of another gender, accompanying female children, accompanying male children and accompanying children of another gender.
17. In this article, the terms “women” and “adult females” are used interchangeably and include transgender adults identifying as female.

18. The number of shelters that were mandated to serve only men or exclusively serve individuals of another gender could not be reported due to small data counts. Individuals of another gender include people whose current gender was not reported exclusively as male or female, as well as persons who are unsure of their gender, persons who identify as both male and female, or neither male nor female.
19. Accompanying children include adult children (typically aged 18 and older) accompanying a parent or caregiver, such as adult children with disabilities and those who are caretakers of a parent experiencing abuse.
20. Excludes 27% of Indigenous shelters and 17% of non-Indigenous shelters that did not provide a response to the survey question about the types of abuse that their facility is primarily mandated to address.
21. Other family relationship abuse includes violence by a father, step-father, mother, step-mother, son, step-son, daughter, step-daughter, brother, sister, and extended family including in-laws, uncle and aunt.
22. Detailed information related to services offered at short or long-term shelters is not presented in this article due to the small number of long-term shelters, specifically long-term Indigenous shelters.
23. In this article, all calculations related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on shelters exclude between 32% and 33% of Indigenous shelters and between 20% and 21% of non-Indigenous shelters that did not respond to any questions in the corresponding section of the survey.
24. The waves and phases of lockdowns implemented to combat the pandemic varied across the provinces and territories. As such, the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse did not specify particular dates or timelines in the questions on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, respondents were instructed to provide responses based on the experiences in their respective province or territory during the following periods: period of initial lockdown measures; period immediately after lockdown measures were relaxed (initial provincial or territorial re-opening phase); period of lockdown relaxation; period of second wave; current period (at time of survey collection between April and August of 2021); and overall, from the beginning of the pandemic.
25. COVID-19 information for the provinces and territories are not presented separately in this article due to small data counts.
26. In this article, all calculations related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indigenous shelters exclude between 33% and 36% of on-reserve shelters and 32% of off-reserve shelters that did not respond to any questions in the corresponding section of the survey.
27. The period of initial lockdown measures refers to the time where schools and non-essential businesses were closed and travel was restricted.
28. The second wave refers to the period where the number of COVID-19 cases began to increase again in the respondent's province or territory.
29. Crisis calls include calls that may or may not have resulted in admission to shelters.
30. Of note, a larger proportion of on-reserve Indigenous shelters reported decreases in demand for admissions during the pandemic than off-reserve Indigenous shelters. For instance, 42% of on-reserve shelters reported decreases in demand for admissions of families, compared with 32% of off-reserve shelters.
31. Some shelters reported increases in demand for adult admissions during the pandemic period (24% of Indigenous shelters and 33% of non-Indigenous shelters), or increases in demand for admissions of families (19% of Indigenous shelters and 26% of non-Indigenous shelters). The remaining shelters reported that demand for admissions for these two categories of individuals remained about the same.
32. In 2020/2021, information was collected based on gender, while in 2017/2018 it was based on sex. Also, during the 2017/2018 cycle, information regarding adults and children of another gender was not collected.
33. An admission refers to the official acceptance of a resident into the shelter with the allocation of a bed, child's bed, crib, bedroom or bedroom unit, or apartment. The total number of admissions is based on all admissions for a 12-month reference period and includes those who may have been admitted more than once. Each shelter visit is counted as a separate admission. For example, the same person being admitted to a shelter three times in a year would count as three admissions.
34. See note 3.
35. Analyses exclude 43% of Indigenous shelters and 26% of non-Indigenous shelters that did not provide a response to the Indigenous identity question.
36. Populations based on projected estimates for 2021 based on the 2016 Census of Population, produced by Statistics Canada's Centre for Demography. The data were adjusted to reflect various factors, including census net under coverage and incompletely enumerated Indian reserves and Indian settlements and were calibrated to match exactly the population estimates on July 1, 2021, by province or territory, age and sex.
37. See note 36.

38. In the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces, intimate partner violence is defined as any act or behaviour committed by a current or former intimate partner, regardless of whether or not these partners lived together.
39. Unless otherwise specified, characteristics of residents in the shelters on the snapshot date are based on people residing in the shelters for reasons of abuse.
40. Calculations include an unknown answer category. Therefore, totals do not add to 100%.
41. Dating relationship includes couples who do or do not live together.
42. Respondents could select multiple types of abuse experienced by residents, therefore totals may exceed 100%.
43. For the purposes of this article, adult women residents who did not have custody of their children or who had adult children living outside of the home are considered without parental responsibilities. Analysis includes 5% of adult women residents in Indigenous shelters and 4% of adult women residents in non-Indigenous shelters for whom parental responsibility information was unknown.
44. It is not possible to determine the reasons why a woman with parental responsibilities was not admitted with her children (e.g., children were not permitted, the shelter did not have space for the children as well, etc.) using the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.
45. Protection of children includes protecting those under the age of 18 as well as adult children under the care of their parent(s), such as those with disabilities.
46. Calculations are based on the number of residents with parental responsibilities (whether admitted with their children or not). Respondents could select multiple types of abuse that residents were protecting their children from, therefore totals may exceed 100%.
47. Calculations for age include an unknown answer category. Therefore, totals do not add to 100%.
48. Spousal violence includes physical and sexual violence, according to the General Social Survey (GSS) on Canadians' Safety (Victimization). It includes those who are legally married or living common law, and those who are separated or divorced from a legal marriage or common-law union and have had contact with their former partner in the past five years. Spousal relationships include same-gender relationships.
49. The proportion of women in Indigenous shelters reporting their abuse to the police was also higher than what was reported among young victims in general (29%) who were involved in a violent incident, according to the General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety (Victimization) (Cotter 2021a).
50. It is important to note that unlike the General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety (Victimization), the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse cannot distinguish between abusive situations that are self-reported by the victim to the police, from abuse that comes to the attention of the police in some other way (such as from family or friends).
51. The status of whether charges were laid was not known for 26% of adult female residents in Indigenous shelters and 43% of adult female residents in non-Indigenous shelters.
52. An order can be a peace bond, a restraining order, an undertaking to keep the peace and have good conduct, a condition of probation, an emergency intervention order, an emergency protection order, a victim's assistance order or an order to abstain from persistently following a person about from place to place.
53. The status of whether an order had been obtained was not known for 22% of adult female residents in Indigenous shelters and 38% of adult female residents in non-Indigenous shelters.
54. Includes residents with permanent and temporary mobility, visual, hearing, developmental or intellectual, or other disabilities. Due to small data counts, analysis by type of disability is not feasible. Calculations include an unknown answer category.
55. The lower prevalence of disabilities among women in shelters may also be related to differences in thresholds or definitions between different data sources. For instance, shelters may only collect information on more serious disabilities that might impact their services. In addition, they may not identify mental health as a disability, the way that other data sources do.
56. Wheelchair accessibility includes shelters that are either fully or partially wheelchair accessible based on whether or not at least one building entrance, bedroom or bathroom is wheelchair accessible; excludes the provision of additional services for persons with mobility disabilities.
57. Repeat client is defined in the survey as, persons previously served by the shelter in the last year, including as a resident, ex-resident or non-resident. Analyses exclude 15% of Indigenous shelters and 5% of non-Indigenous shelters that did not respond to the survey question regarding whether or not their facility allows repeat clients.
58. Outreach refers to situations where services are provided but the individual is not living in the shelter (i.e., not a resident). For example, an individual may receive counseling services, or support through a crisis phone line, etc.
59. Calculations include unknowns.

60. Due to small data counts, the proportion of women that were turned away from an Indigenous shelter because the shelter was full is not able to be released.

61. The Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse cannot determine the reason why an individual departed a shelter.

62. Due to small data counts, the other locations of where women went after they left short-term Indigenous shelters cannot be reported.

63. A history of homelessness includes living in locations not intended for human habitation such as on the street or in parks, cars, laneways, sidewalks, or in a makeshift shelter or an abandoned building. It also includes living in temporary accommodations for people without housing, such as homeless shelters or extreme weather shelters, or as a temporary house guest staying with family, friends or strangers (e.g., room rental guest, or other overnight guest). This also includes those who had previously resided in shelters for victims of abuse.

64. It was unknown whether 13% of the women in Indigenous shelters and 21% of the women in non-Indigenous shelters had a prior history of homelessness.

65. Beds refers only to the number of funded beds, including children's beds and cribs if applicable, regardless of source of funding. Excludes unfunded beds, which may include emergency beds such as cots, sofas and sleeping bags. Units refers to the number of apartments or houses available. An individual unit may house multiple people and are typical of long-term facilities.

66. The occupancy rate is calculated by dividing the total number of residents on a given day by the total number of funded beds, multiplied by 100. The occupancy rate provides an indicator of the total bed space being used at a given point in time.

Detailed data tables

Table 1
Percent of shelters for victims of abuse offering selected services, by type of service and type of shelter, Canada, 2020/2021

Selected services	Indigenous shelters ¹	Non-Indigenous shelters
	percent	
General services		
Crisis phone line	88	84
Transportation	84	77
Recreation area or services	74	65
Classes or tutoring	22	21
Pet accomodation ²	25	30
Food bank	46	41
Clothing items	85	77
Housing referrals	88	86
Furniture items	46	42
Advocacy on behalf of individuals	90	91
Political or social action	28	32
Public education	72	68
Professional services		
Medical services	22	10
Addictions or substance use	42	25
Mental health services	60	69
Legal ³	50	33
Employment	68	63
Assistance with applications for funding	16	10
Financial compensation	58	49
Services for adults		
Individual counselling	77	88
Group counselling	52	61
Safety or protection planning	95	98
Life skills training ⁴	88	83
Parenting skills training	68	72
Services for children		
Childcare	63	57
Counselling ⁵	84	90

See notes at the end of the table.

Table 1
Percent of shelters for victims of abuse offering selected services, by type of service and type of shelter, Canada, 2020/2021

Selected services	Indigenous shelters ¹	Non-Indigenous shelters
	percent	
Services for vulnerable populations		
Specialized services for older adults	48	42
Culturally sensitive services for Indigenous persons	97	56
Services for gender and sexuality diversity	47	43
Services in non-official languages	35	56
Services for immigrants or refugees	34	61
Wheelchair accessibility ⁶	75	74
Services for persons with mobility disabilities	19	18
Services for persons with visual disabilities	13	21
Services for persons with hearing disabilities	16	32
Services for persons with developmental or intellectual disabilities	21	27

1. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council).

2. Excludes accommodation of service animals.

3. For example paralegal services, assistance with legal documents, legal aid.

4. For example help with budgeting, banking, groceries, day-to-day management.

5. For example play therapy, role playing and goal oriented programming.

6. Includes shelters that are either fully or partially wheelchair accessible based on whether or not at least one building entrance, bedroom or bathroom is wheelchair accessible; excludes the provision of additional services for persons with mobility disabilities.

Note: Information in this table excludes some additional services that were collected in the survey. Information for services in this table excludes the following percent of Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters that did not report services offered in a particular category: General services excludes 20% of shelters, professional services excludes 45% of shelters, services for adults excludes 20% of shelters, services for children excludes 31% of shelters, wheelchair accessibility excludes 19% of shelters and services for other vulnerable populations excludes 36% of shelters. The percentage of excluded shelters varies for Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters. The sum of the response categories can exceed 100% as respondents could mark all categories that apply.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

Table 2
Impact of COVID-19 on shelters for victims of abuse, by pandemic period and type of shelter, Canada, 2020/2021

Pandemic period	Indigenous shelters ¹	Non-Indigenous shelters
	percent	
Period of initial lockdown measures²		
To a great extent	43	52
To a moderate extent	32	30
To a minor extent or not at all	25	17
Period immediately after lockdown measures were relaxed (initial provincial or territorial re-opening phase)³		
To a great extent	19	21
To a moderate extent	39	47
To a minor extent or not at all	42	30
Period of lockdown relaxation⁴		
To a great extent	16	16
To a moderate extent	32	43
To a minor extent or not at all	50	39
Period of second wave⁵		
To a great extent	27	34
To a moderate extent	41	40
To a minor extent or not at all	30	25
Current period⁶		
To a great extent	30	22
To a moderate extent	27	40
To a minor extent or not at all	43	37
Overall impact, from the beginning of the pandemic		
To a great extent	32	34
To a moderate extent	43	44
To a minor extent or not at all	25	21

1. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council).

2. Period where schools and non-essential businesses were closed and travel was restricted.

3. Period where non-essential businesses began to re-open in the respondent's province or territory, while physical distancing measures and other restrictions may have been put in place.

4. Period where all businesses were open and regular activities resumed in the respondent's province or territory, while some measures may have remained in place (e.g., wearing masks).

5. Period where the number of COVID-19 cases began to increase again in the respondent's province or territory.

6. The current period refers to the point in time at which the respondent was completing the survey, between April and August of 2021.

Note: Information in this table excludes between 32% and 33% of Indigenous shelters and between 20% and 21% of non-Indigenous shelters that did not provide a response to these questions. "Not applicable" answer category was included as a valid response, therefore totals may not add up to 100%.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

Table 3**Percent of shelters for victims of abuse reporting a great extent of impact due to the COVID-19 pandemic, by type of impact and type of shelter, Canada, 2020/2021**

Type of impact	Indigenous shelters ¹	Non-Indigenous shelters
	percent	
Shelter's current ability to provide services being impacted by the following challenges		
Accommodation capacity	46	47
Shortage of funding	X	11
Difficulties accessing resources such as food or clothing	11	11
Difficulties accessing personal protective equipment (PPE) or cleaning products	X	7
Difficulties providing professional services or programs	41	29
Difficulties communicating with victims outside the facility or residents	32	19
Difficulties communicating or working with other agencies	13	15
Difficulties following or applying government or public health recommendations and measures related to COVID-19	11	8
Shelter's current ability to provide services being impacted by the following staffing challenges		
Staff availability or reluctance to work due to health concerns or mental health challenges	23	16
Staff availability due to self-isolation requirements	26	11
Staff availability due to family or caregiving responsibilities	28	15
Challenges related to staff shifting to working from home	11	9
Challenges related to hiring or training new staff	23	36
Challenges related to volunteer work	23	33
Staff being restricted to work at one location only	16	19

x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*

1. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council).

Note: Information in this table excludes between 33% and 34% of Indigenous shelters and 21% of non-Indigenous shelters that did not provide a response to these questions. Other possible valid responses included "To a moderate extent", "To a minor extent", "Not at all" and "Not applicable".

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

Table 4
Admissions to shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter and region, 2020/2021

Region	Indigenous shelters ¹					Non-Indigenous shelters				
	Total admissions ²	Adult females	Adult males	Adults of another gender	Accompanying children ³	Total admissions ²	Adult females	Adult males	Adults of another gender	Accompanying children ³
					number					
Atlantic ⁴	247	155	0	0	92	2,135	1,509	0	26	600
Quebec	509	318	X	X	189	9,515	5,582	X	X	3,923
Ontario	1,381	936	X	X	442	11,062	6,315	110	84	4,553
Manitoba	973	601	X	X	371	1,225	849	X	X	375
Saskatchewan	627	298	0	0	329	1,549	1,004	0	0	545
Alberta	978	690	X	X	279	5,382	3,011	29	7	2,335
British Columbia	1,691	1,092	0	9	590	4,719	3,133	18	58	1,510
Territories ⁵	1,072	781	51	0	240	664	462	0	0	202
Canada	7,478	4,871	59	16	2,532	36,251	21,865	164	179	14,043

0 true zero or a value rounded to zero

x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*

1. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council).

2. An admission refers to the official acceptance of a resident into the shelter with the allocation of a bed, child's bed, crib, bedroom or bedroom unit, or apartment. The total number of admissions is based on all admissions for a 12-month reference period and includes those who may have been admitted more than once. Each shelter visit is counted as a separate admission. For example, the same person being admitted to a shelter three times in a year would count as three admissions.

3. Accompanying children include adult children (typically aged 18 or older) accompanying a parent or caregiver, such as adult children with disabilities and those who are caretakers of a parent experiencing abuse.

4. Includes Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

5. Includes Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

Note: In 2020/2021, the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse was updated to collect resident information for adult females, adult males, adults of another gender, accompanying female children, accompanying male children, and accompanying children of another gender. Adult females include transgender adults identifying as female and adult males include transgender adults identifying as male. Adults and accompanying children of another gender include people whose current gender was not reported exclusively as male or female. Also includes persons who are unsure of their gender, persons who identify as both male and female, or neither male nor female.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

Table 5
Beds, units and admissions, by type of shelter for victims of abuse and region, 2020/2021

Region	Indigenous shelters ¹						Non-Indigenous shelters					
	Short-term shelters ²			Long-term shelters ²			Short-term shelters ²			Long-term shelters ²		
	Shelters	Beds ³	Admis- sions ⁴	Shelters	Units ⁵	Admis- sions ⁴	Shelters	Beds ³	Admis- sions ⁴	Shelters	Units ⁵	Admis- sions ⁴
	number											
Atlantic ⁶	9	97	237	X	4	10	28	398	2,046	X	92	89
Quebec	9	83	509	0	0	0	92	1,176	9,165	19	154	350
Ontario	20	307	1,381	0	0	0	94	1,946	10,158	30	433	904
Manitoba	4	61	973	0	0	0	11	162	1,101	10	45	124
Saskatchewan	5	94	X	X	X	X	X	197	1,480	X	21	69
Alberta	9	162	970	X	13	8	29	667	4,525	X	192	857
British Columbia	20	241	X	X	44	X	55	532	4,237	X	208	482
Territories ⁷	10	78	X	X	X	X	X	35	623	X	23	41
Canada	86	1,123	7,179	7	65	299	322	5,113	33,335	110	1,168	2,916

0 true zero or a value rounded to zero

x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*

1. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council).

2. Shelters are defined by their mandated expected length of stay, regardless of practice. Short-term shelters include shelters whose expected length of stay is less than three months, and typically provide individual beds to residents, as opposed to separate apartments or units. Long-term shelters include shelters whose expected length of stay is three months or longer, and typically provide residential units (e.g. apartments) to residents.

3. Beds refers only to the number of funded beds, including children's beds and cribs if applicable, regardless of source of funding. Excludes unfunded beds, which may include emergency beds such as cots, sofas or sleeping bags.

4. An admission refers to the official acceptance of a resident into the shelter with the allocation of a bed, child's bed, crib, bedroom or bedroom unit, or apartment. The total number of admissions is based on all admissions for a 12-month reference period and includes those who may have been admitted more than once. Each shelter visit is counted as a separate admission. For example, the same person being admitted to a shelter three times in a year would count as three admissions.

5. Units refers to the number of apartments or houses available. An individual unit may house multiple people and are typical of long-term shelters.

6. Includes Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

7. Includes Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

Table 6
Residents in shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter and region, April 14, 2021

Region	Indigenous shelters ¹					Non-Indigenous shelters				
	Total residents	Adult females	Adult males	Adults of another gender	Accompanying children ² number	Total residents	Adult females	Adult males	Adults of another gender	Accompanying children ²
Atlantic ³	50	38	0	0	12	325	186	0	4	135
Quebec	33	22	0	0	11	1,051	587	0	0	464
Ontario	141	85	0	0	56	1,810	922	X	X	852
Manitoba	25	15	X	X	9	133	64	X	X	68
Saskatchewan	32	18	0	0	14	113	55	0	0	58
Alberta	50	32	X	X	16	553	289	X	X	256
British Columbia	159	101	X	X	57	617	345	X	X	261
Territories ⁴	42	33	4	0	5	59	34	0	0	25
Canada	532	344	X	X	180	4,661	2,482	48	12	2,119

0 true zero or a value rounded to zero

x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*

1. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council).

2. Accompanying children include adult children (typically aged 18 or older) accompanying a parent or caregiver, such as adult children with disabilities and those who are caretakers of a parent experiencing abuse.

3. Includes Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

4. Includes Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

Note: In 2020/2021, the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse was updated to collect resident information for adult females, adult males, adults of another gender, accompanying female children, accompanying male children, and accompanying children of another gender. Adult females include transgender adults identifying as female and adult males include transgender adults identifying as male. Adults and accompanying children of another gender include people whose current gender was not reported exclusively as male or female. Also includes persons who are unsure of their gender, persons who identify as both male and female, or neither male nor female. The April 14, 2021 reference period reflects the survey snapshot day, a predetermined business day meant to represent a typical day of operations for shelters across Canada.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

Table 7
Types of abuse experienced by adult female residents of shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter, Canada, April 14, 2021

Type of abuse	Indigenous shelters ¹		Non-Indigenous shelters	
	number	percent	number	percent
Total adult female residents²	198	...	1,788	...
Physical abuse	139	70	1,367	76
Sexual abuse	42	21	660	37
Financial abuse	67	34	1,015	57
Emotional or psychological abuse	149	75	1,622	91
Harassment	59	30	620	35
Forced marriage	0	0	40	2
Human trafficking: sex work or forced labour/other	13	7	70	4
Cultural abuse	14	7	147	8
Spiritual abuse	10	5	108	6
Other ³	4	2	47	3

... not applicable

0 true zero or a value rounded to zero

1. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council).

2. Includes residents in the shelters for reasons of abuse. In 2020/2021, the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse was updated to collect resident information based on gender instead of sex. Adult female residents include transgender adults identifying as female.

3. For example abuse through technology or cyber abuse, or abuse related to immigration status (withholding status or information).

Note: The sum of the response categories can exceed 100% as respondents could mark all categories that apply. The April 14, 2021 reference period reflects the survey snapshot day, a predetermined business day meant to represent a typical day of operations for shelters across Canada. Information in this table excludes 28% of Indigenous shelters and 22% of non-Indigenous shelters that did not provide a response to these questions.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

Table 8
Occupancy for short-term Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse, by urban or rural designation and region, April 14, 2021

Region	All short-term shelters				Urban short-term shelters ¹				Rural short-term shelters ¹			
	Shelters	Beds ²	Occupancy ³	Shelters full ³	Shelters	Beds ²	Occupancy ³	Shelters full ³	Shelters	Beds ²	Occupancy ³	Shelters full ³
	number		percent		number		percent		number		percent	
Atlantic ⁴	9	97	49	X	X	45	29	0	X	52	67	X
Quebec	9	83	40	X	X	15	7	0	X	68	47	X
Ontario	20	307	46	X	10	172	59	X	10	135	30	0
Manitoba	4	61	41	X	X	18	44	0	X	43	40	X
Saskatchewan	5	94	32	0	X	36	31	0	X	58	33	0
Alberta	9	162	26	0	4	87	23	0	5	75	29	0
British Columbia	20	241	41	X	14	200	37	0	6	41	66	X
Territories ⁵	10	78	53	X	X	8	50	0	X	70	53	X
Canada	86	1,123	41	12	37	581	40	X	49	542	42	16

0 true zero or a value rounded to zero

x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*

1. Shelters were designated as being located in either rural or urban areas based on Statistics Canada's Postal Code Conversion File Plus (PCCF+) tool. Rural shelters are those that are situated outside of a census metropolitan area (CMA) or census agglomeration (CA), or in some cases those served by a rural post office. Urban shelters are those that are situated within a CMA or CA, and are not served by a rural post office. A CMA or a CA is formed by one or more adjacent municipalities centred on a population centre (known as the core). A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000 of which 50,000 or more must live in the core. A CA must have a core population of at least 10,000. To be included in the CMA or CA, other adjacent municipalities must have a high degree of integration with the core as measured by commuting flows derived from previous census place of work data, where 50% or more of the population commutes into the core.

2. Beds refers only to the number of funded beds, including children's beds and cribs if applicable, regardless of source of funding. Excludes unfunded beds, which may include emergency beds such as cots, sofas, or sleeping bags.

3. Occupancy is calculated by dividing the total number of residents on the snapshot date by the total number of funded beds, multiplied by 100. A shelter was considered full if its occupancy was 90% or more.

4. Includes Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

5. Includes Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

Note: The April 14, 2021 reference period reflects the survey snapshot day, a predetermined business day meant to represent a typical day of operations for shelters across Canada. Shelters are defined by their mandated expected length of stay, regardless of practice. Short-term shelters include shelters whose expected length of stay is less than three months, and typically provide individual beds to residents, as opposed to separate apartments or units. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council).

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

Table 9
Top challenges facing shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter, Canada, 2020/2021

Challenges	Indigenous shelters ¹	Non-Indigenous shelters
	percent	
Lack of permanent housing	37	41
Low employee compensation	31	27
Lack of funding	27	26
Meeting the diverse needs of clients	27	28
Staff turnover	24	33
Capacity	20	15
Need for physical repairs	19	17
Accessibility issues related to structure	15	8
Mental health issues for staff	12	11
Skills development	12	8
Financial instability	10	12
Reliance on fundraising	8	21
Food costs	7	4
Providing culturally appropriate supports and services	7	4
Lack of administrative resources	X	9
Not having the mandate to serve male clients	X	2
Criminal justice system	X	7
Lack of affordable childcare	X	6
Transportation costs	X	5
Reliance on volunteers	X	X
Restrictions tied to external regulations	X	2
Advocacy	0	1
Other ²	12	8

0 true zero or a value rounded to zero

x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*

1. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council).

2. Includes security issues at the shelter, the COVID-19 pandemic, staffing related issues (e.g., not having enough staff, inadequate staff training), among others.

Note: Information in this table excludes 37% of Indigenous shelters and 21% of non-Indigenous shelters that did not provide a response to these questions. Percentages do not equal 100% as each shelter could provide up to three challenges.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

Table 10
Top challenges facing clients of shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter, Canada, 2020/2021

Challenges	Indigenous shelters ¹	Non-Indigenous shelters
	percent	
Lack of affordable long-term housing	75	82
Underemployment and low incomes	50	44
Substance use issues	47	27
Mental health issues	43	35
Affordable childcare	12	14
Lack of shelters	10	6
Lack of assistance and regulations related to income	8	9
Food costs	8	6
Safety	8	14
Affordable transportation	X	6
Lack of other services	X	12
Parenting issues	X	4
Lack of Legal Aid funding	X	14
Lack of follow-up support	X	4
Criminal justice system	X	8
Racism	X	4
Immigration regulations	0	4
Other ²	8	5

0 true zero or a value rounded to zero

x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*

1. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council).

2. Includes lack of secondary supports when clients leave the shelter, individual and intergenerational trauma, family court issues, among others.

Note: Information in this table excludes 35% of Indigenous shelters and 21% of non-Indigenous shelters that did not provide a response to these questions. Percentages do not equal 100% as each shelter could provide up to three challenges.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

Table 11
Funding sources and expenditures for shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter, Canada, 2020/2021

Funding sources and expenditures	Indigenous shelters ¹		Non-Indigenous shelters	
	thousands of dollars ²	percent	thousands of dollars ²	percent
Funding sources				
Federal	26,583	32.9	26,886	5.8
Provincial/territorial	42,131	52.1	329,715	70.7
Regional/municipal	2,518	3.1	15,667	3.4
First Nations	1,238	1.5	144	0.0
Foundations	1,634	2.0	17,426	3.7
Fees for service	2,465	3.0	6,761	1.4
Lotteries	205	0.3	1,144	0.2
Fundraising or donations	2,033	2.5	54,837	11.8
Other ³	2,099	2.6	13,994	3.0
Total	80,907	100.0	466,574	100.0
Expenditures				
Salary	47,764	64.9	292,661	71.8
Rent, mortgage, property taxes	3,091	4.2	15,223	3.7
Other housing costs	4,956	6.7	24,017	5.9
Administrative costs	4,067	5.5	15,922	3.9
Staff training	1,456	2.0	3,126	0.8
Office costs	2,090	2.8	8,524	2.1
Direct client costs	5,574	7.6	25,296	6.2
Reserve fund	228	0.3	5,664	1.4
Other ⁴	4,418	6.0	17,397	4.3
Total	73,644	100.0	407,830	100.0

1. Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse include shelters that are part of an Indigenous organization, are located in an Indigenous community, are located on a reserve, or are owned or operated by a First Nations government (band council).

2. Totals may not equal the sum of their parts due to rounding.

3. Other funding includes interest accrued on invested funds, and unspecified grants and rebates.

4. Other expenses include membership fees, association fees, programming fees, and costs associated with fundraising and volunteers.

Note: Percentage calculations are based on unrounded dollar amounts.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.