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Juristat

Shelters for victims of abuse with ties to Indigenous communities or organizations in Canada, 2022/2023

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Shelters for victims of abuse with ties to Indigenous communities or organizations in Canada, 2022/2023: Highlights

- In 2022/2023, there were 96 shelters primarily mandated to serve victims of abuse that had ties to Indigenous (First Nations, Métis or Inuit) communities or organizations (also referred to as Indigenous shelters in this article) operating across Canada. About three-quarters (74%) of all Indigenous shelters were in First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities. More than four in ten (42%) Indigenous shelters were located on reserves and more than half (57%) of all Indigenous shelters were in rural areas.
- The large majority (93%) of Indigenous shelters were short-term facilities which have a general mandate of providing accommodation for less than three months, while a small proportion (7%) provided long-term accommodation of three months or more. In contrast, over three quarters (77%) of non-Indigenous shelters offered short-term accommodation and the rest (23%) provided long-term housing.
- There were 9,707 admissions to Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse in 2022/2023, the vast majority being admissions of adult women (61%) and accompanying children (38%).
- The number of admissions to Indigenous shelters in 2022/2023 was 30% higher than the number recorded in 2020/2021, the period which covered the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Non-Indigenous shelters also recorded a similar overall increase in admissions during this period (+34%).
- In 2022/2023, overall admissions to both Indigenous (-8%) and non-Indigenous facilities (-8%) were lower than the number of admissions in 2017/2018, suggesting that shelter admissions have still not returned to pre-pandemic numbers.
- On April 13, 2023, the survey snapshot date, there were 972 individuals residing in Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse: about half (52%) were adult women and more than four in ten (45%) were children who accompanied their parent.
- About six in ten (61%) women who were staying in Indigenous shelters on the snapshot date, and eight in ten (80%) women in non-Indigenous shelters were there because of intimate partner violence. Most commonly, women in Indigenous shelters were escaping abuse by a current common-law partner (40%) or a current spouse (12%). About eight in ten (81%) women in Indigenous shelters were living with their abuser prior to seeking shelter.
- Relative to their representation in the overall Canadian population, First Nations, Métis and Inuit women and children represented a large proportion of the residents in shelters for victims of abuse. On the survey snapshot date, 81% of women and 57% of accompanying children in Indigenous shelters, and about one-fifth of women (22%) and accompanying children (20%) in non-Indigenous shelters were First Nations people, Métis or Inuit. In comparison, 5% of women and 8% of children in Canada are Indigenous persons.
- Indigenous shelters reported that slightly more than half (52%) of the women in their facilities on the snapshot date had been previously served by the same shelter at least once in the preceding year, either receiving services as a resident (42%) or on an outreach basis only (10%). Urban Indigenous shelters reported a higher proportion of repeat clients than rural Indigenous facilities.
- There were 198 individuals turned away from Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse on April 13, 2023. Among women who were turned away, the majority (76%) were turned away because the facility was full.
- On the survey snapshot date in 2023, 69% of the beds in short-term Indigenous shelters were occupied and 24% of all short-term Indigenous shelters were considered full, much higher proportions than what was reported on the snapshot date in 2021. Short-term non-Indigenous shelters also reported a higher occupancy rate during this time (78%).
- According to respondent shelters, staff turnover and a lack of affordable long-term housing were the most common challenges facing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters and their residents in 2022/2023.

Shelters for victims of abuse with ties to Indigenous communities or organizations in Canada, 2022/2023

by Ashley Maxwell

In Canada, First Nations people, Métis and Inuit have long histories, which have been shaped by various social, cultural and political practices. These include the history of colonization and its related policies such as the residential school system and the Sixties Scoop, which forcibly separated Indigenous children from their families and communities, and prohibited Indigenous people from participating in their diverse cultural and spiritual practices, using their languages and practicing their religions (Aguiar & Halseth, 2015; Bombay et al., 2009; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). The continued impacts of these colonial practices are still felt by Indigenous populations and communities today, through the perpetuation of social inequities, economic deprivation and discrimination (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019). For example, research has shown that compared with their non-Indigenous counterparts, Indigenous people are more likely to experience various types of social inequality such as homelessness, poverty and financial instability (House of Commons Canada, 2021; Patrick, 2014; Statistics Canada, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2017a; Uppal, 2022). They are also more likely to have lower income and education levels, to live in poor housing conditions, and to experience issues related to mental health and substance abuse (Anderson, 2017; Carrière et al., 2018; Firestone et al., 2015; Melvin, 2023; Melvin & Anderson, 2022; Spillane et al., 2015; Statistics Canada, 2017b).

Colonial policies and practices also continue to impact Indigenous populations through the perpetuation of social and institutional marginalization, racism, discrimination, and many forms of trauma and violence, including intergenerational trauma and gender-based violence (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019). Research has shown that Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous women and girls, disproportionately experience many kinds of violence and victimization compared with non-Indigenous women and girls (Boyce, 2016; Heidinger 2022b; Heidinger, 2021; Perreault, 2022). This includes childhood victimization (Brownridge et al., 2017; Burczykca, 2017; Cotter & Savage, 2019; Heidinger, 2022b; Perreault, 2022), intimate partner and gender-based violence (Cotter, 2021b; Heidinger, 2022b; Heidinger, 2021), as well as homicide—the most severe form of violence (David & Jaffray, 2022; Sutton, 2023).

Providing culturally safe supports and services to victims from and within the numerous First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities throughout the country which take into account historical and contemporary context is essential. One of these victim services is shelters for victims of abuse, which provide victims escaping abusive situations with a safe and secure living environment as well as basic living needs. These facilities also provide different kinds of support and outreach services to victims. The availability of and access to shelter services is important for all victims, but particularly those from Indigenous communities, where there are ongoing challenges related to housing which can make it difficult for victims to find alternative and sustained living arrangements, often resulting in revictimization (House of Commons Canada, 2019). In addition, victims of abuse in Indigenous communities—especially those in rural areas—can also face many other challenges which can make it difficult to receive support. These include geographic isolation, the absence of confidentiality, limited access to telephone or Internet services, lack of emergency services, lack of affordable or public transportation which can make it difficult to safely travel to other communities, and others (House of Commons Canada, 2019; United Nations, 2019).

Using data from the most recent cycle of the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse (SRFVA), this *Juristat* article presents information on a specific subset of shelters for victims of abuse in Canada in 2022/2023: those that had ties to First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities or organizations (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 presents information on the characteristics of Indigenous shelters in Canada, such as the number of annual admissions and the types of services that they provide to victims. Additional information is also presented about the residents who are accessing these shelters for reasons of abuse. The SRFVA reports information based on two distinct time periods. Data pertaining to the characteristics of shelters are based on a 12-month reference period in 2022/2023 that preceded the collection of the survey data.² In addition, information related to individual residents is based on the predetermined snapshot date of April 13, 2023.³ Throughout this article, comparisons will be made between Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters.

This is the third cycle of the SRFVA. Where possible, results are compared with the two previous cycles of the survey (2020/2021 and 2017/2018) to highlight overall trends for Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse in Canada. However, it is important to note that the reference period for the 2020/2021 cycle of the SRFVA covered the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, data from that cycle may reflect how shelters adapted during that unprecedented period through the implementation of various health measures and protocols which were put in place in order to initially reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Comparing the 2022/2023 cycle of the SRFVA with the 2017/2018 cycle allows for a more representative comparison to how things were in shelters before the onset of the pandemic.

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Characteristics of Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse

Most Indigenous shelters provide short-term housing to victims of abuse

In 2022/2023, there were 96 shelters with ties to Indigenous communities or organizations operating across Canada that had a primary mandate to serve victims of abuse.⁴ The majority (74%, or 71 shelters) of these Indigenous shelters reported that they were located in a First Nations, Métis or Inuit community. About four in ten (42%, or 40 shelters) Indigenous facilities were located on a First Nations reserve, while 44% (42 shelters) were owned or operated by a First Nations government or band council.^{5,6} Overall, Indigenous shelters represented 17% of all shelters operating in Canada in 2022/2023. In comparison, there were 441 non-Indigenous shelters, representing the large majority (79%) of all shelters for victims of abuse in Canada in 2022/2023. The remaining 4% of shelters could not be identified as either Indigenous or non-Indigenous (See Text box 1).

Text box 1

Defining Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse

For the purposes of this article, the responses given to five survey questions in the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse (SRFVA) were used to identify shelters for victims of abuse that have ties to Indigenous communities or organizations in Canada. The questions were as follows:

1. Is your shelter an Indigenous organization?
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)?

A shelter was identified as Indigenous if it responded yes to at least one of these questions. A non-Indigenous shelter responded no to at least one of the questions and did not respond yes to any of the questions.⁷ In addition, historical imputation was used to identify Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters using data from previous cycles of the SRFVA.⁸ Those shelters that did not respond to these questions during any of the cycles were excluded from analysis in this article altogether. In 2022/2023, there were 23 shelters (and 222 residents) that were excluded from analysis.

When interpreting the results presented in this article, it is important to note that not all Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse are in an Indigenous community, such as those located in urban areas. In 2022/2023, 74% of Indigenous shelters reported to the SRFVA that they were located in a First Nations, Métis or Inuit community. Also, Indigenous shelters can provide services to non-Indigenous persons, and non-Indigenous shelters can provide services to Indigenous persons.^{9,10} On April 13, 2023, 22% of the women residents in non-Indigenous shelters were First Nations people, Métis or Inuit.¹¹ Data from the SRFVA also does not allow for comparisons between Indigenous groups, with the exception of information related to shelters on- and off-reserve.

Most (93%, or 89 shelters) Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse were short-term facilities, which generally provide accommodation to residents for less than three months in the form of individual beds. Examples of these types of facilities include domestic violence shelters, transition homes and private homes that are part of safe home networks. The remaining seven (7%) Indigenous shelters were long-term facilities, which generally provide housing for three months or longer through residential units such as apartments. In comparison, there were 340 (77%) non-Indigenous shelters that provided short-term housing, while there were 101 long-term non-Indigenous shelters, which accounted for 23% of all non-Indigenous facilities.

Although most shelters for victims of abuse in Canada provide short-term housing, the value and importance of long-term facilities is not to be overlooked, particularly in First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, where there are fewer long-term shelters and greater challenges related to housing (Maki, 2020; Maki, 2019). Indigenous communities tend to have more housing shortages than non-Indigenous communities, and the housing that does exist is often of poor quality (Anderson, 2017; House of Commons Canada, 2019; Melvin & Anderson, 2022; Senate of Canada, 2015). This housing instability makes it more difficult to establish long-term shelters in these areas because they also tend to be geographically isolated and in remote parts of the country, which also makes the availability of and access to victim services even more critical. Long-term shelters, which are often referred to as second- or third-stage housing, further help victims of abuse gain stability and independence and transition to a living environment that is free from abuse (Maki, 2020; Maki, 2019).

Like previous cycles of the SRFVA (Maxwell, 2022; Maxwell, 2020), more than half (57%) of the shelters that had ties to Indigenous communities or organizations in Canada in 2022/2023 were located in rural areas.¹² By comparison, just under three in ten (29%) non-Indigenous shelters were located in rural areas. About half (51%) of all rural Indigenous shelters were located on reserves.

The number of Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse in each of the provinces and territories generally corresponded with the areas of the country where Indigenous populations tend to reside. Ontario and British Columbia had the largest number of short-term Indigenous shelters in 2022/2023 (21 and 17 shelters, respectively), followed by the territories (Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut), which had 12 short-term Indigenous shelters combined.¹³ According to the 2021 Census of Population, Ontario and British Columbia also have the highest population of First Nations people, Métis and Inuit, though the proportion of the population who are Indigenous is highest in the territories and the western provinces of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022).

More than half of Indigenous shelters mandated to serve women and children only

Shelters for victims of abuse typically have a general mandate or policy that governs their facility operations and defines the populations that they assist. In 2022/2023, over half (55%) of Indigenous shelters and nearly two-thirds (65%) of non-Indigenous shelters reported that they were mandated to serve women and children only.¹⁴ Nearly one in five (18%) Indigenous shelters and about one in ten (11%) non-Indigenous shelters were mandated to specifically serve women only.

Few shelters for victims of abuse were mandated to exclusively serve men or individuals of another gender.¹⁵ However, there were facilities that included these populations in their mandates. Over one-fifth of Indigenous (22%) and non-Indigenous shelters (23%) reported that they were mandated to serve adults of another gender, while small proportions of shelters were mandated to serve men (6% and 3%, respectively).

However, despite their mandates, some shelters admitted residents to their facilities in 2022/2023 other than those identified in their policies. In 2022/2023, 25% of Indigenous shelters and 18% of non-Indigenous shelters admitted individuals outside of their mandates. For example, 11% of Indigenous shelters and 6% of non-Indigenous shelters admitted children who were accompanying an adult to their facilities even though they were not specifically mandated to serve children.¹⁶

Shelter mandates also specify the types of abuse or violence experienced by the populations they are serving. According to the SRFVA, all (100%) Indigenous shelters and the vast majority (93%) of non-Indigenous shelters reported that they were mandated to serve victims experiencing various kinds of abuse.¹⁷ All (100%) Indigenous shelters indicated that they were mandated to serve victims of spousal violence, while the large majority reported that they served victims of other family relationship abuse¹⁸ (94%) and other intimate relationship abuse (89%). Smaller proportions of Indigenous shelters reported having a mandate to serve victims of senior abuse (78%) and abuse by an acquaintance or friend (64%).

Indigenous shelters most commonly provide housing referrals and advocacy on behalf of victims

Shelters for victims of abuse provide more than just a safe living space to those who are experiencing violence or leaving abusive situations, by offering many different services and programs to clients that consider their various social and economic backgrounds and circumstances. The type and availability of services offered can vary based on the size and location of the shelter, as well as the kind of accommodation that is provided. In addition, the programs and supports offered can also be shaped by the community needs of the populations that these facilities are serving.

Many of the services that shelters offer to victims provide the additional support that may be necessary to leave abusive situations, such as help securing different employment, or assistance finding alternate housing. Access to these additional forms of support at shelters may impact a victim's decision to leave an abuser and can help further support them and minimize their need to return to an abusive situation (Maki, 2020).

Apart from offering culturally sensitive services for Indigenous populations,¹⁹ it is important that shelters provide services that consider some of the unique circumstances that Indigenous populations face, while taking into account the various colonial policies and practices which contributed to these circumstances. According to the SRFVA, the large majority (94%) of Indigenous shelters reported offering culturally sensitive services for Indigenous populations in 2022/2023 (Table 1). In comparison, just over half (54%) of non-Indigenous shelters offered these types of services.

In 2022/2023, most Indigenous shelters reported offering general services to victims of abuse such as housing referrals (95%), advocacy on behalf of individuals (92%) and crisis phone line support (86%). Similar proportions of non-Indigenous shelters also reported offering these types of services to victims (89%, 93% and 85%, respectively).

Larger proportions of Indigenous shelters than non-Indigenous shelters reported offering professional services for addictions or substance use (41% versus 22%) and employment services (42% versus 33%), while smaller proportions reported offering group counselling for adults (53% versus 63%).

Admissions to shelters

More than 9,700 admissions to Indigenous shelters in 2022/2023

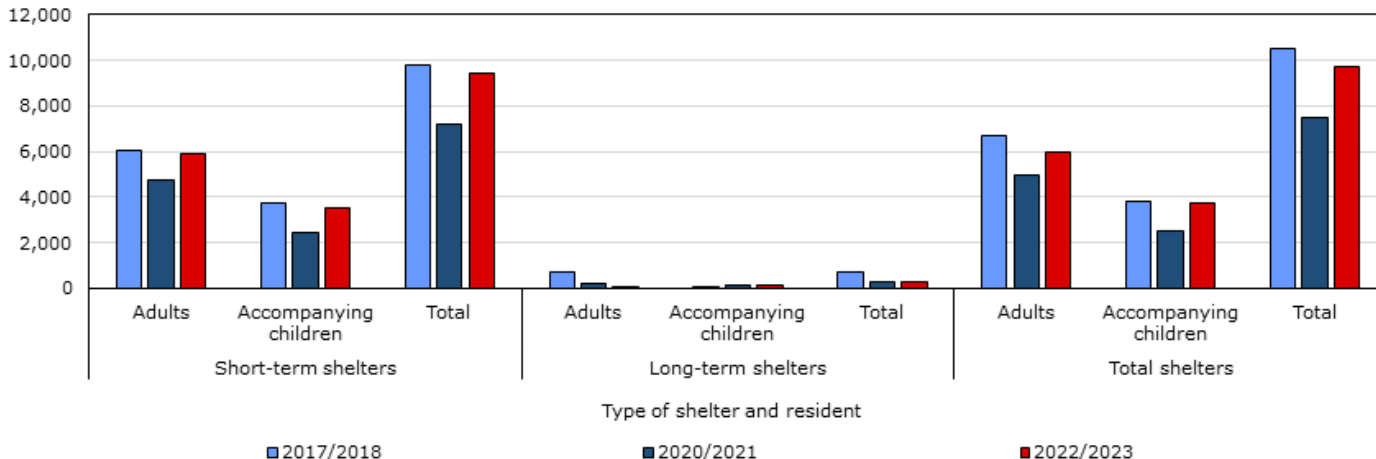
In 2022/2023, there were 9,707 admissions²⁰ to shelters for victims of abuse that had ties to Indigenous communities or organizations (Table 2). Just over six in ten (61%) of these admissions were adult women. Over a 12-month period,²¹ there were 5,919 adult women, 29 adult men and 35 adults of another gender admitted to Indigenous shelters. Additionally, there were 3,724 accompanying children admitted. In comparison, there were over 48,700 admissions to non-Indigenous shelters in 2022/2023, 60% of which were admissions of adult women.

Admissions to Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters lower than pre-COVID admissions numbers

The number of admissions to Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse in 2022/2023 was 30% higher than the number recorded during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic period in 2020/2021, but it was 8% lower than what was recorded in 2017/2018 (Chart 1). There was also a similar increase in overall admissions to non-Indigenous shelters in 2022/2023 compared with 2020/2021 (+34%), as well as a similar decrease compared with 2017/2018 (-8%).

Chart 1
Admissions to Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter, Canada, 2017/2018, 2020/2021 and 2022/2023

number of admissions



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.

The overall decline in admissions to shelters for victims of abuse in 2020/2021 was likely due to the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on shelters, which does not necessarily reflect a decrease in victims’ need for shelter services (Ibrahim, 2022; Maxwell, 2022). During this period, many different protocols were implemented in shelters in order to maintain the health and safety of staff and residents and reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Examples of these practices include making physical changes to shelter spaces and implementing enhanced health protection or cleaning practices. According to the 2020/2021 cycle of the SRFVA, more than six in ten Indigenous (65%) and non-Indigenous shelters (61%) reported reducing the overall number of beds or units in their facilities because of the pandemic, while nearly half of all Indigenous (46%) and non-Indigenous shelters (47%) reported that they were impacted in their ability to operate at full capacity due to physical distancing measures (Maxwell, 2022). Other research during this time also found that for some victims of abuse, there was a reluctance to seek help during the onset of the pandemic for various reasons such as fears of contracting COVID-19 while doing so, confusion related to shelter availability and accessibility, and concerns over other pandemic-related stressors such as losing one’s job and school closures (Moffitt et al., 2020; Trudell & Whitmore, 2020; Women’s Shelters Canada, 2020).

Almost all provinces and territories in Canada recorded an overall increase in admissions to Indigenous shelters in 2022/2023 compared with 2020/2021, except for Alberta (-12%) and British Columbia (-8%), where declines were recorded. Notably, Indigenous shelters in Quebec recorded the largest increase in admissions (+121%). Overall increases in admissions to non-Indigenous shelters were also seen in most provinces throughout the country, except for the territories (-61%) and Saskatchewan (-2%).

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters recorded increases in overall admissions to short-term facilities in 2022/2023 compared with the early COVID-19 pandemic period (2020/2021). Overall, there were 31% more admissions to short-term Indigenous facilities in 2022/2023 than in 2020/2021, and 35% more admissions to short-term non-Indigenous shelters (Table 3). However, there were different findings related to long-term facilities. In 2022/2023, there were 11% fewer admissions to long-term Indigenous facilities than in 2020/2021, while long-term non-Indigenous shelters recorded a 23% increase in admissions.

Large increase in admissions of accompanying children to Indigenous shelters

The overall increase in admissions to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters in 2022/2023 was largely attributable to the increase in admissions of adult women (+22% and +34%, respectively), who overall, make up most of the admissions to residential facilities for victims of abuse. Compared with 2020/2021, there was also a large increase in the number of accompanying children admitted to shelters (+47% and +36%, respectively). That said, admissions of women and accompanying children to Indigenous shelters were both lower in 2022/2023 than they were in 2017/2018, down 12% and 2%, respectively.

Conversely, there was a decline in the number of men admitted to facilities in 2022/2023, particularly Indigenous shelters, where 29 men were admitted in 2022/2023 compared with 59 men in 2020/2021 (-51%). However, Indigenous shelters admitted more than two times (+119%) as many adults of another gender to their facilities in 2022/2023 compared with 2020/2021 (35 admissions versus 16).

Profile of shelters and their residents

Majority of residents in Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse are women and accompanying children

On the survey snapshot date of April 13, 2023,²² there were 972 residents staying in shelters for victims of abuse that had ties to Indigenous communities or organizations, considerably higher (+83%) than the number of residents that were staying in these facilities on the snapshot date in 2021 (532) (Table 4). On April 13, 2023, nearly all (97%) of the residents in Indigenous shelters were adult women and accompanying children. More specifically, there were 507 adult women (52%) and 439 accompanying children (45%) residing in Indigenous shelters. This was also higher (+28%) than the number of residents that were staying in Indigenous facilities on the 2018 snapshot date, when there were 758 residents in Indigenous shelters.

Adult women and accompanying children also represented nearly all (99%) of the residents in non-Indigenous shelters on the 2023 snapshot date. There were 6,387 persons staying in non-Indigenous shelters on April 13, 2023, and more than half (53%) of these individuals were adult women. This was also an increase (+37%) from the number of residents that were staying in non-Indigenous shelters on the snapshot date in 2021, and was slightly higher (+4%) than the number of residents that were residing in these facilities on the snapshot date in 2018.

Both short- and long-term shelters for victims of abuse reported that most of their residents were adult women and accompanying children. This pattern was also consistent for shelters in rural and urban areas, as well as those located on and off reserves.

About nine in ten residents in Indigenous (89%) and non-Indigenous shelters (91%) were staying in the facilities on the survey snapshot date for reasons of abuse. Although shelters have a general mandate which determines the people that they assist, not all the individuals who utilize their services as residents are there because of abuse. Some may seek shelter for other reasons such as crisis intervention or emergency shelter, or because there may be a limited number of shelters in general in their communities to assist them with their needs. This may be particularly the case for Indigenous communities, which tend to have fewer shelters overall than non-Indigenous communities (House of Commons Canada, 2019). In addition, victims of abuse may also be experiencing other types of social inequality and disadvantage such as poverty and homelessness. These types of circumstances can also coincide with abuse or be a consequence of leaving an abusive situation (Maki, 2020).

The following analysis will focus on presenting information for those individuals who were residing in shelters on April 13, 2023 (the survey snapshot date) for reasons of abuse.

Eight in ten women in Indigenous shelters are First Nations people, Métis or Inuit

About four in ten (42%) Indigenous shelters did not report the Indigenous identity information of their residents on the survey snapshot day to the SRFVA. However, analysis of those that did suggests that compared with their representation in the overall Canadian population, First Nations people, Métis and Inuit were overrepresented as residents in Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse on April 13, 2023. According to the SRFVA, Indigenous women accounted for 81% of the residents in Indigenous shelters on the snapshot date, a higher proportion than what was reported during the last two cycles of the survey (60% of the women residents in Indigenous shelters on the snapshot date in 2021 were Indigenous and 70% of the women residents in Indigenous shelters on the snapshot date in 2018 were Indigenous) (Maxwell, 2022; Maxwell, 2020). Indigenous women were also overrepresented in non-Indigenous shelters, accounting for 22% of the residents.²³ In comparison, 4.7% of the total Canadian population of women are Indigenous.²⁴

Indigenous children were also overrepresented in shelters for victims of abuse on the survey snapshot date, compared with their representation in the Canadian population. First Nations, Métis and Inuit children represented 57% of the children in Indigenous shelters and 20% of the children in non-Indigenous shelters. Comparatively, 8.2% of the children in the Canadian population are Indigenous.²⁵

Overall, Indigenous women accounted for a greater proportion of the residents in rural shelters for victims of abuse than urban shelters. On the survey snapshot date, 89% of the women residents in rural Indigenous facilities were Indigenous compared with 78% of the women in urban Indigenous shelters. There was also a higher proportion of Indigenous women in rural non-Indigenous shelters (34%) than urban non-Indigenous shelters (20%).

Indigenous shelters located on reserves also had a higher proportion of Indigenous residents than shelters located off reserves. Among women residents, 92% of the residents in on-reserve Indigenous facilities were Indigenous, compared with 72% of the residents in Indigenous shelters located off reserves.

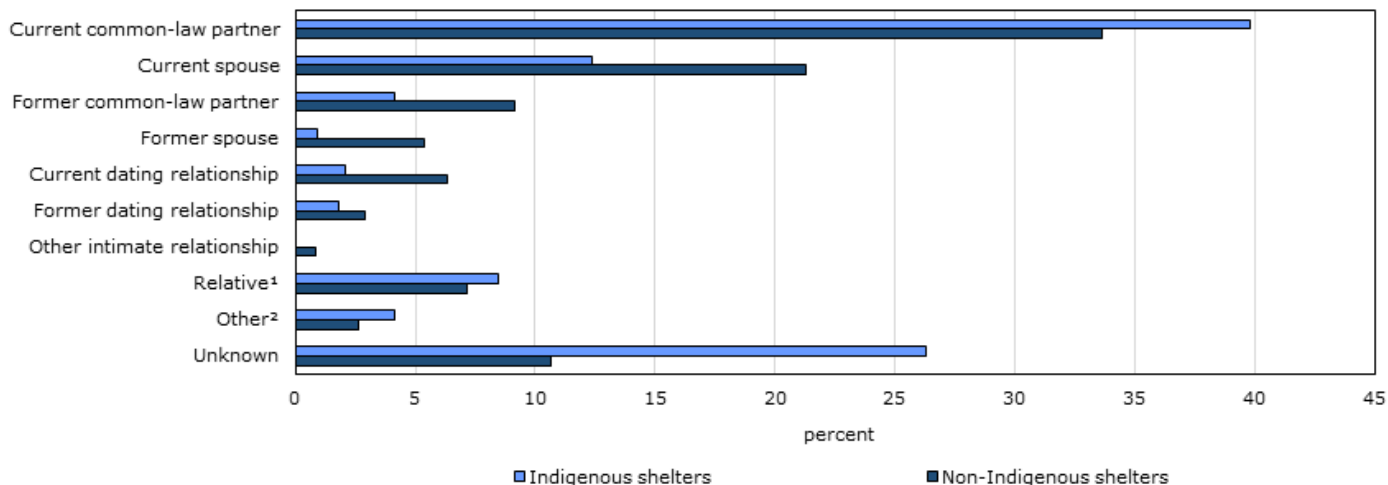
Most women residing in Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters because of intimate partner violence

Police-reported and self-reported data have consistently shown that intimate partner violence²⁶ is one of the most prevalent forms of victimization in Canada, which disproportionately impacts certain populations (Cotter, 2021b; Heidinger, 2021; Savage, 2021b). Women tend to experience the most severe forms of this violence, including being physically and sexually assaulted (Burczycka, 2019; Burczycka, 2016). In some situations, intimate partner violence also leads to homicide (David & Jaffray, 2022). Indigenous women, in particular, are more likely to be impacted by both intimate partner violence (Boyce, 2016; Burczycka, 2016; Heidinger, 2022b; Heidinger, 2021), and homicide resulting from this kind of violence (David & Jaffray, 2022; Sutton, 2023), because of the intergenerational impacts of colonial policies and practices (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019).

On the SRFVA snapshot date, about six in ten (61%) women in Indigenous shelters and eight in ten (80%) women in non-Indigenous shelters were escaping abuse from a current or former intimate partner (Chart 2). More specifically, women residents were most often seeking shelter because of abuse involving a current common-law partner (40% of women residents in Indigenous facilities and 34% of women residents in non-Indigenous facilities), followed by abuse from a current spouse (12% of women residents in Indigenous facilities and 21% of women residents in non-Indigenous facilities). A small proportion of women in shelters were escaping abuse from a current (2% and 6%, respectively) or former dating relationship (2% and 3%, respectively).²⁷

Chart 2
Relationship of abuser to women in shelters primarily for reasons of abuse, by type of shelter,
Canada, April 13, 2023

Relationship of abuser to women



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. Women residents include transgender adults identifying as female. The April 13, 2023 reference period reflects the survey snapshot day, a predetermined business day meant to represent a typical day of operations for shelters across Canada. Calculations exclude 3% of women residents in Indigenous shelters and 2% of women residents in non-Indigenous shelters. 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.

Shelters also reported that some of their women residents were seeking shelter because of abuse that they were experiencing in a non-intimate partner relationship. On the survey snapshot date, 8% of women in Indigenous facilities and 7% of women in non-Indigenous facilities were there because of abuse from a relative such as a parent, sibling or extended family member.

The SRFVA also asked shelters about whether the women residents in their facilities had been living with their abuser prior to seeking shelter. On the survey snapshot date, more than eight in ten (81%) of the women residents in Indigenous shelters and about two-thirds (63%) of the women in non-Indigenous shelters had been living with their abuser prior to seeking shelter. These results are similar to research on police-reported intimate partner violence which found that victims of intimate partner violence often reside in a shared dwelling with their abuser (Burczycka, 2019). Other research has also found that leaving an abusive relationship can be more difficult if a victim is sharing a home with their abuser (Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

Women residents in Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters most commonly experience emotional or psychological abuse

Shelters for victims of abuse reported that the women residents who were staying in their facilities on the survey snapshot date experienced many kinds of abuse. According to the SRFVA, emotional or psychological abuse (57%) was most commonly experienced by women residents in Indigenous shelters, followed by physical abuse (53%) (Table 5).²⁸ Women residing in non-Indigenous shelters on the survey snapshot date also most commonly experienced emotional or psychological abuse (85%) and physical abuse (74%).

According to shelters, for many types of abuse, a smaller proportion of women in Indigenous facilities experienced a particular kind than women in non-Indigenous facilities. For example, one-quarter (26%) of women residents in Indigenous shelters experienced financial abuse, compared with just over half (52%) of the women in non-Indigenous facilities. Furthermore, one-quarter of the women in Indigenous shelters experienced harassment (25%) and about one-fifth experienced sexual abuse (18%), compared with about one-third of the women in non-Indigenous facilities (32% and 35%, respectively).

Like previous cycles of the SRFVA (Maxwell, 2022; Maxwell, 2020), on the survey snapshot date, a small proportion of women residents in Indigenous (4%) and non-Indigenous shelters (6%) experienced abuse related to human trafficking. According to other research on human trafficking, Indigenous women and girls are at an increased risk of experiencing this form of violence and sexual exploitation (House of Commons Canada, 2018; Native Women's Association of Canada, 2023; Public Safety Canada, 2020; Public Safety Canada, 2019; Sethi, 2007). The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls found that this is connected to the continued impacts of colonial policies and practices which have resulted in a perpetuation of economic deprivation, racism, discrimination and abuse, and have also led to an increased vulnerability to various forms of victimization such as human trafficking (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019).

About three-quarters of women parents in Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters admitted with their children

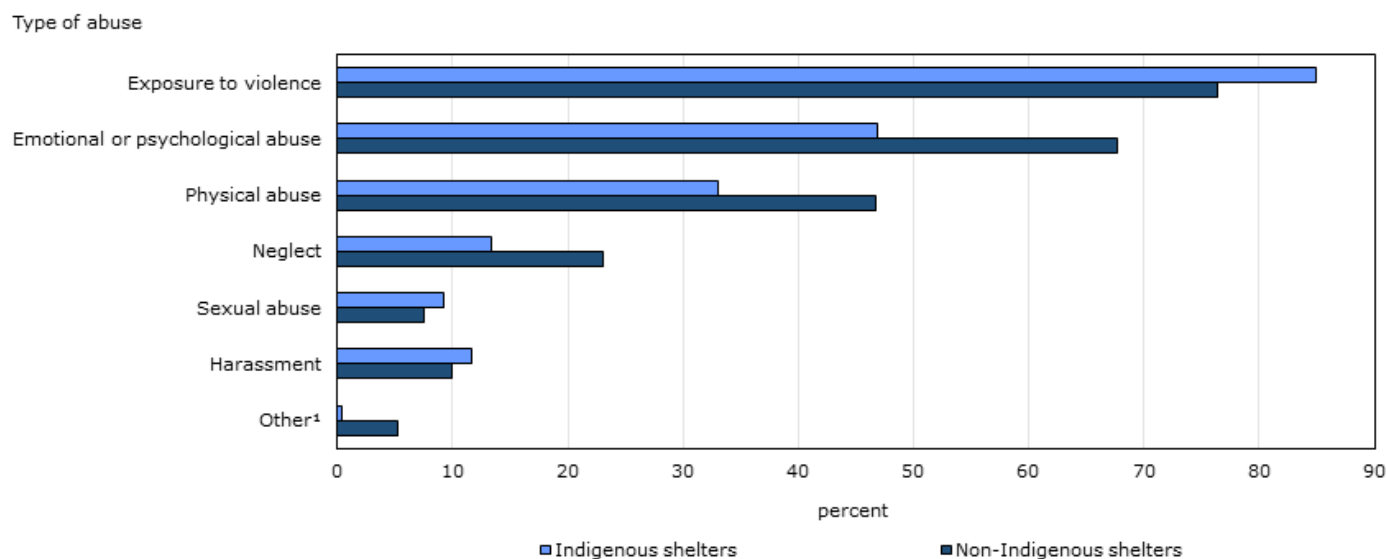
On the survey snapshot date, more than seven in ten women residing in Indigenous (75%) and non-Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse (72%) had parental responsibilities.²⁹ Indigenous shelters reported that 74% of the women residents who had parental responsibilities were admitted with one or more of their children, while 26% were admitted without their children.³⁰ These proportions were similar for women residents with parental responsibilities in non-Indigenous facilities (75% and 25%, respectively).

Women in Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters most commonly protecting their children from exposure to violence

Women with parental responsibilities may seek shelter from an abusive situation to protect their children from witnessing or experiencing violence. According to recent self-reported victimization data, more than one in four (27%) Canadians have experienced childhood victimization, such as physical or sexual abuse (Heidinger, 2022a), while about one in five (21%) have witnessed violence in the home committed by a parent or guardian during childhood (Cotter, 2021a). These types of experiences were more common for Indigenous persons than non-Indigenous persons, and they were also more likely to occur on multiple occasions (Perreault, 2022). In addition, recent police-reported data found that about one-third (32%) of violence against children and youth that came to the attention of the police was committed by a family member, most commonly a parent (Conroy, 2021).

The SRFVA also collected information on the types of abuse that residents in shelters on the snapshot date were protecting their children from. Indigenous shelters reported that the majority of the women residing in their facilities who had parental responsibilities were protecting their children from exposure to violence (85%) (Chart 3).^{31 32} This was also the most common type of abuse that women in non-Indigenous shelters were protecting their children from (76%). Just under half (47%) of the women in Indigenous shelters were protecting their children from emotional or psychological abuse, and one-third (33%) were protecting them from physical abuse. In comparison, non-Indigenous shelters reported that about seven in ten (68%) women in their facilities who had parental responsibilities were protecting their children from emotional or psychological abuse, while just under half (47%) of the women were protecting their children from physical abuse.

Chart 3
Types of abuse women were protecting their children from by going to a shelter for victims of abuse, by type of shelter, Canada, April 13, 2023



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. Women residents include transgender adults identifying as female. The April 13, 2023 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). 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.

Almost six in ten women residents in Indigenous shelters are aged 18 to 34

Research has consistently found that young age is often associated with a higher risk of violent victimization (Conroy & Cotter, 2017; Cotter & Savage, 2019; Perreault, 2015; Savage, 2021b), especially among particular populations, such as Indigenous women and girls (Boyce, 2016). It has also found that certain types of violence, such as intimate partner violence, are more likely to impact younger individuals (Burczycka, 2019; Cotter, 2021b; Savage, 2021b).

Overall, women residents in Indigenous shelters were younger than women residents in non-Indigenous facilities. On the survey snapshot date, nearly six in ten (58%) of the women residing in Indigenous shelters were between the ages of 18 and 34, compared with just under half (48%) of the women in non-Indigenous shelters.³³ More specifically, 14% of the women in Indigenous shelters were between the ages of 18 and 24, 21% were aged 25 to 29 and 23% were aged 30 to 34. About one in five (19%) women in Indigenous shelters were aged 35 to 44.

The large majority of the children that were staying in Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse on the survey snapshot date were under the age of 12 (80% and 78%, respectively). These proportions were consistent with the 2020/2021 survey results (Maxwell, 2022), and were similar for boys and girls.

About one-quarter of women in Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters reported their abuse to the police

Shelters were also asked to indicate whether the women residing in their facilities on the snapshot date had reported the abusive situation that led them to seek shelter to the police. According to the SRFVA, about one-quarter of the women in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters had reported their abuse to the police (26% and 27%, respectively).³⁴ These findings differed from previous cycles of the SRFVA, when a higher proportion of women residents in Indigenous shelters than non-Indigenous shelters reported their abuse to the police (Maxwell, 2022; Maxwell, 2020).³⁵

For Indigenous facilities in particular, there were slight differences in reporting to police by women residents staying in shelters in rural (29%) and urban areas (25%). However, there were notable differences for facilities located on and off reserves: 15% of women residents in shelters on reserves reported their abuse to the police, compared with more than double (35%) the proportion of women in off-reserve shelters.

Yet, despite similar overall levels of reporting to police, smaller proportions of women in Indigenous shelters than non-Indigenous shelters saw charges laid against the person suspected of abuse. According to the SRFVA, 7% of the women residing in Indigenous shelters and 14% of the women in non-Indigenous shelters saw charges laid against the person accused of abusing them.³⁶ Indigenous shelters also reported that a smaller proportion (8%) of women in their facilities had a court order³⁷ in place to keep their abuser away, such as a peace bond or a restraining order, compared with women in non-Indigenous shelters (15%).³⁸

These findings suggest that some Indigenous victims of violence or abuse may have less trust in law enforcement to deal with their abuser formally through the criminal justice system. Research has found that for First Nations, Métis and Inuit populations, there tends to be an overall lower level of confidence in the police, as well as a more critical perception of police performance and the criminal justice system in general, compared with non-Indigenous people (Cotter, 2022). This is connected to the intergenerational impacts of colonial policies and practices, and systemic racism, police violence and profiling that were implemented by the government and government institutions and continue to impact Indigenous populations in Canada to the present day (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019).

About one in ten women in Indigenous shelters have a disability

Research has found that individuals with a disability are at an increased risk of violent victimization, compared with those without a disability (Burczycka, 2018; Conroy & Cotter, 2017; Cotter, 2021a; Cotter, 2018; Perreault, 2022; Perreault, 2015; Savage, 2021a). They are also more likely to experience particular kinds of violence, such as intimate partner violence (Savage, 2021a), and are generally more likely to experience this type of violence if they also belong to other population groups, such as young women and Indigenous persons (Heidinger, 2022b; Heidinger, 2021; Perreault, 2020; Savage, 2021b). For people with disabilities, there may be an increased reliance on their abusers for support and care, which makes them more vulnerable to victimization.

According to the SRFVA, on the survey snapshot date, about one in ten (11%) women in Indigenous shelters had a disability, slightly lower proportions than what was reported among women in non-Indigenous shelters (13%).³⁹ In addition, about 1 in 11 children in Indigenous (9%) and non-Indigenous shelters (7%) on the snapshot date had a disability.

In terms of shelter accessibility, more than eight in ten (82%) Indigenous shelters and just under three-quarters (73%) of non-Indigenous shelters reported that they were either partially or fully wheelchair accessible in 2022/2023.⁴⁰ More specifically, most short-term shelters reported wheelchair accessibility (82% of short-term Indigenous shelters and 81% of short-term non-Indigenous shelters). However, while most (86%) long-term Indigenous shelters reported being wheelchair accessible, this was only the case for half (50%) of long-term non-Indigenous shelters. In addition, Indigenous shelters located on reserves (90%) were more likely to report that they were wheelchair accessible than shelters not on reserves (76%).

A smaller proportion of Indigenous shelters than non-Indigenous shelters reported offering services for those with disabilities, such as persons with mobility disabilities (13%), visual disabilities (13%) and hearing disabilities (18%) (Table 1). In contrast, larger proportions of non-Indigenous shelters reported offering these services for vulnerable populations (20%, 22% and 27%, respectively).

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

For some victims of abuse, it can be difficult to permanently leave an abusive situation because of their connection to and reliance on their abuser, particularly if there are children involved, and if they are in a situation of economic dependence (House of Commons Canada, 2019). Consequently, victims may need to access and use victim services such as shelters that exist in their communities on multiple occasions, before fully escaping their abuse (Burczycka, 2016).

According to the SRFVA, in 2022/2023, the large majority of shelters reported that their facility allowed repeat clients (98% of Indigenous shelters and 93% of non-Indigenous shelters).⁴¹ On the survey snapshot date, more than half (52%) of the women residents in Indigenous shelters had been served by the same facility more than once in the preceding year, double the proportion than what was reported among women residents in non-Indigenous shelters (26%).⁴² More specifically, 42% of women in Indigenous shelters previously received services as a resident and 10% of women previously received services on an outreach basis only.⁴³ A higher proportion of women residents in Indigenous shelters located on reserves (66%) were repeat clients, compared with those located off reserves (40%). In addition, it was unknown whether 17% of the women residents in Indigenous shelters and 28% of the women residents in non-Indigenous shelters were repeat clients.

There were differences in the proportion of residents that were repeat clients depending on whether the shelter was located in an urban or rural area. On April 13, 2023, more than half (56%) of the women residents in urban Indigenous shelters were repeat clients: 44% received services as former residents and 13% received services on an outreach basis only. In contrast, 42% of the women in rural Indigenous shelters were repeat clients (38% as residents and 4% on an outreach basis only). These findings differ from the last cycle of the SRFVA in 2020/2021, when rural Indigenous shelters reported a higher proportion of repeat clients than urban Indigenous facilities (52% versus 28%) (Maxwell, 2022).

For non-Indigenous shelters, there was a higher proportion of repeat clients in facilities located in rural areas than in urban areas. About four in ten (41%) women in non-Indigenous shelters in rural areas were repeat clients, compared with about one-quarter (23%) of the women in urban non-Indigenous shelters. This may be due to the fact that it is harder for victims to find alternative living arrangements in rural areas and smaller communities because of a physical lack of housing and infrastructure. Also, in urban areas and larger cities, there are often more facilities where victims can go to seek help.

About one in four Indigenous shelters reported turning people away on the snapshot date, the majority were women seeking shelter in urban areas

On April 13, 2023, about one-quarter (26%) of Indigenous shelters and just over one-third (35%) of non-Indigenous shelters reported turning people away from their facilities. In total, there were 198 individuals turned away from Indigenous shelters and 697 people turned away from non-Indigenous shelters on the survey snapshot date. Most of the people turned away from both types of shelters were women (82% of turn-aways from Indigenous shelters and 74% of turn-aways from non-Indigenous shelters). The majority of the women turned away from Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters were from facilities located in urban areas (83% and 91%, respectively), which often report higher overall shelter occupancy rates than facilities in rural areas.

For Indigenous shelters in particular, there were 153 more individuals (+340%) turned away on the snapshot date in 2023 than on the snapshot date in 2021. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the ability of many shelters to operate at full capacity and accept all victims seeking shelter because of abuse, it may have also impacted the willingness of victims to leave their abusers and enter the shelter system. As previously noted, admissions to shelters declined during the early pandemic period (Maxwell, 2022), as did the number of victims seeking shelter who were turned away.

The most common reason a woman was turned away from both an Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelter on the survey snapshot date was because the shelter was at full capacity (76% and 84%, respectively).⁴⁴ Some Indigenous shelters reported turning women away because of safety issues (7%), such as the person was on a non-admit or caution list, transportation issues (6%), or because the type of abuse experienced by the victim was outside of the shelter's mandate (6%). Of note, Indigenous shelters did not report the reason why 33% of the women were turned away and non-Indigenous shelters did not report why 7% of the women were turned away.

It was unknown where most women went after they left Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse

There were also people who departed shelters for victims of abuse on April 13, 2023. On that date, there were 145 individuals who departed Indigenous shelters and 131 people who departed non-Indigenous shelters.⁴⁵ The large majority (82%) of the individuals who left Indigenous shelters were women, while just under six in ten (57%) of the departures from non-Indigenous shelters were women. A large proportion of the departures from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters were in urban areas (66% and 79%, respectively).

It was unknown where the vast majority (96%) of the women who left Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse on April 13, 2023 went after they departed.

About four in ten women in Indigenous shelters have a history of homelessness

There is an interconnection between violence—particularly intimate partner violence—and homelessness (Meyer, 2016; Sullivan et al., 2019; Yakubovich & Maki, 2021). According to research, a lack of alternative housing and the risk of homelessness can often be a deterrent for victims from leaving an abusive situation (Women's Shelters Canada, 2020). This can also be heightened for those who have children, because victims with children may not want to leave a violent living environment and risk becoming homeless because of doing so (Saunders, 2020).

On the survey snapshot date, close to four in ten (38%) of the women residing in Indigenous shelters and just under one-third (31%) of the women in non-Indigenous shelters had a previous history of homelessness,⁴⁶ meaning they had been homeless at some point in their life prior to seeking shelter at a residential facility for victims of abuse.^{47 48} Indigenous shelters also reported that more than three in ten (31%) of their child residents had been homeless before, while non-Indigenous shelters reported the same for just over one in five (22%) of their child residents. These findings are consistent with other research which has found that Indigenous persons are more likely than non-Indigenous persons to have past experiences of homelessness (Uppal, 2022). This is often due to the intergenerational effects of colonial policies and practices which impact areas such as employment and the workplace, education and the housing market (Belanger et al., 2012; Leach, 2010).

Indigenous shelters reported that about half of the women residents in facilities in rural areas (52%), as well as those located off reserves (48%) had a prior history of homelessness, compared with lower proportions in urban areas (32%) and shelters on reserves (24%).

Women in Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters most commonly self-refer

Women who were staying in short-term shelters for victims of abuse on the survey snapshot date were most commonly self-referred to the facility. Short-term Indigenous shelters reported that 58% of their women residents were self-referred, while short-term non-Indigenous reported the same for 44% of their women residents. Smaller proportions of women in short-term Indigenous facilities were referred by hospitals or health care practitioners (11%), police (10%) or by an Indigenous organization (9%).

Long-term Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse reported that their women residents were most commonly self-referred (47%) or that they were referred by another residential facility for victims of abuse (19%). Long-term non-Indigenous shelters also reported these as the most common referral sources for their women residents (29% and 37%, respectively).

Average length of stay and shelter occupancy

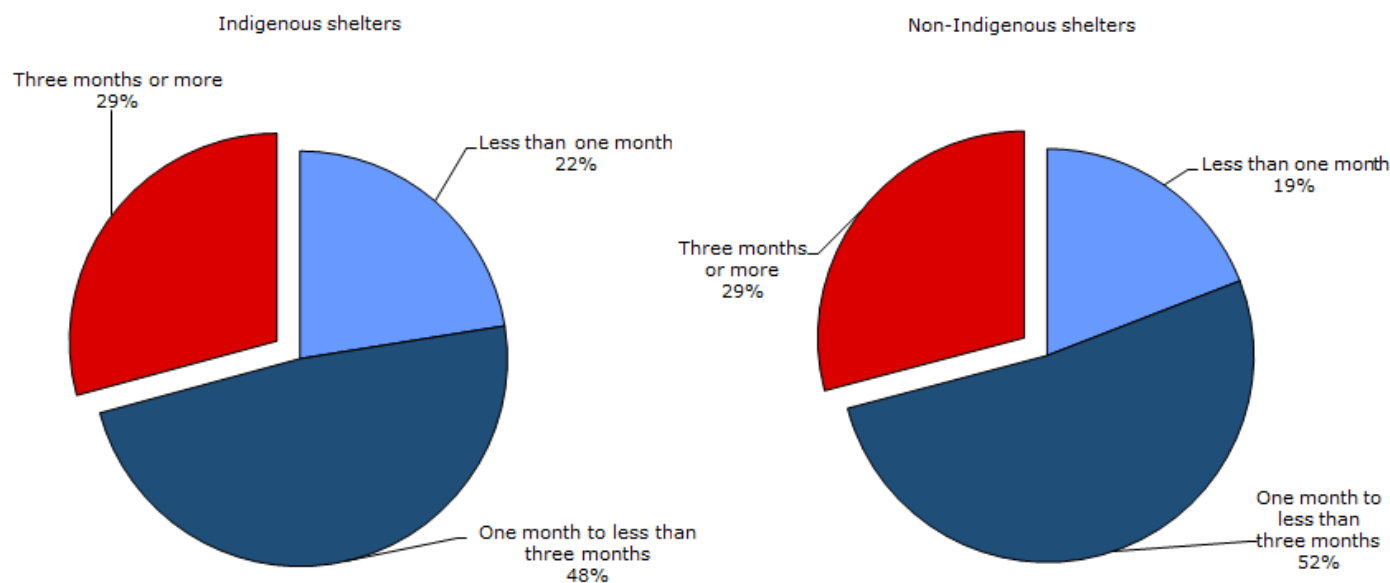
About three in ten short-term Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters report average lengths of stay of three months or longer

As outlined previously, shelters for victims of abuse have a general mandate which governs a variety of areas of their operations, including the populations that they serve, as well as the amount of time that individuals can use their services. There are different expected lengths of stay in shelters depending on whether it has a mandate to provide short-term (less than three months) or long-term (three months or more) accommodation to victims.

However, due to the small number of long-term shelters for victims of abuse in Canada—particularly in some parts of the country, such as Indigenous communities—there can be strain on existing short-term shelters that may need to help victims seeking long-term accommodation. This can also occur if there are housing shortages and other housing-related issues, and there is nowhere else for victims to go (Maki, 2020; Maki, 2019). Consequently, some victims end up staying in short-term facilities for longer periods of time.

In 2022/2023, most short-term shelters for victims of abuse in Canada reported that the average length of stay for residents at their facilities was within the mandated three-month period, findings which are consistent with what was reported during previous cycles of the SRFVA (Maxwell, 2022; Maxwell, 2020). About seven in ten short-term Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters (71%, respectively) reported overall average lengths of stay of less than three months (Chart 4). Conversely, 29% of short-term Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters reported that the average length of stay at their facility was three months or longer.

Chart 4
Average length of stay in short-term shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter, Canada, 2022/2023



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, 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). The sum of the percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

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

Indigenous shelters located on- and off-reserve reported similar average lengths of stay for residents at their facilities. About three in ten short-term on- (30%) and off-reserve facilities (29%) reported average lengths of stay that were three months or more.

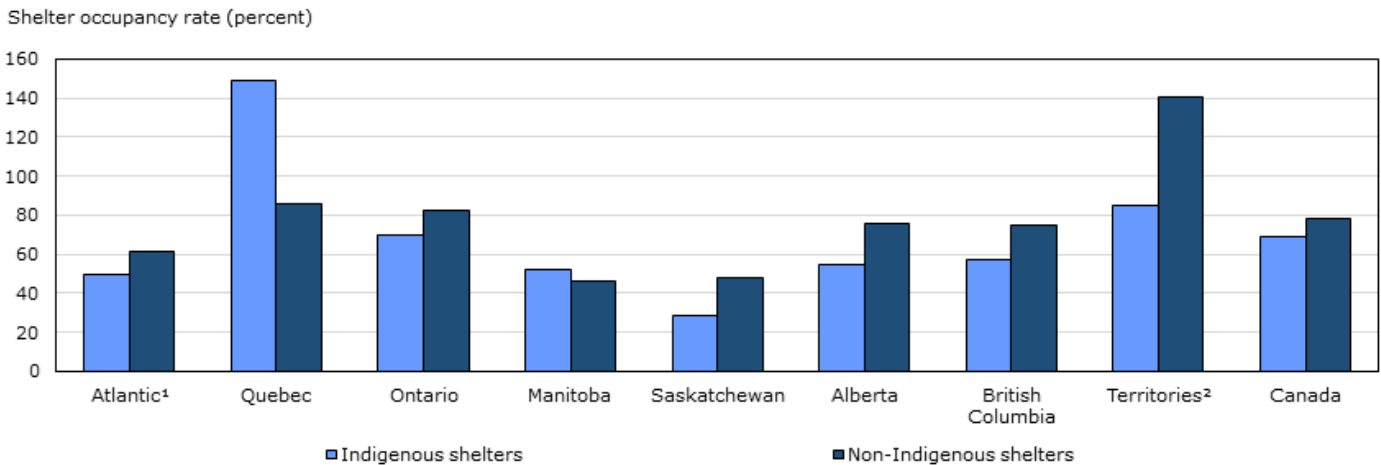
However, shelters located in urban areas reported longer average lengths of stay than shelters in rural areas. About one-third (32%) of short-term urban Indigenous shelters reported average lengths of stay of three months or more, compared with just over one-quarter (27%) of short-term rural Indigenous facilities. Similarly, average lengths of stay were longer in short-term urban non-Indigenous facilities than short-term rural non-Indigenous shelters, with 32% of short-term urban non-Indigenous shelters reporting average stays of three months or more, compared with 22% of short-term rural non-Indigenous shelters.

The longer average lengths of stay at short-term urban shelters than short-term rural shelters may be related to the lack of affordable housing to purchase or rent in many urban areas throughout the country (Homeless Hub, 2018; House of Commons Canada, 2019; Kirkby & Mettler, 2016). This can also contribute to a greater risk of revictimization, because a victim may be forced to return to an abusive situation if they do not have access to long-term shelters or other housing alternatives (House of Commons Canada, 2019).

About seven in ten beds in short-term Indigenous shelters were occupied on the snapshot date

In 2022/2023, there were 1,250 funded beds⁴⁹ in the 89 short-term Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse that were operating across Canada. In addition, there were 59 funded units⁵⁰ that were spread across seven long-term Indigenous facilities. On the survey snapshot date of April 13, 2023, about seven in ten (69%) beds in short-term Indigenous facilities were occupied and about one-quarter (24%, or 21 shelters) of all short-term Indigenous shelters were considered full (i.e., 90% occupancy or greater) (Chart 5; Table 6).⁵¹ In comparison, just over three-quarters (78%) of the beds in the 340 short-term non-Indigenous shelters were occupied on the snapshot date, with 36% (or 122 shelters) of all short-term non-Indigenous shelters reporting that they were considered full.

Chart 5
Occupancy rate for short-term shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter and region, April 13, 2023



1. Includes Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.
 2. Includes Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.
Note: The April 13, 2023 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). 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. Occupancy can exceed 100% if there are more residents staying in shelters than there are available funded beds.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse.

The occupancy rates reported on the snapshot date in 2023 were much higher than what was reported on the snapshot date in 2021, when 41% of the beds in short-term Indigenous shelters were occupied and 12% of these facilities were considered full (Maxwell, 2022). However, the occupancy rates on the snapshot date in 2023 were more in line with the rates from the snapshot date in 2018, when 75% of the beds in short-term Indigenous shelters were occupied and about one-third (34%) of these shelters were considered full (Maxwell, 2020).

The lower occupancy rates on the snapshot date in 2021 are likely reflective of the early period of the COVID-19 pandemic, as opposed to a decrease in need for shelter services. As previously noted, various practices and protocols were put in place in shelters during this time to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Shelters for victims of abuse reported to the SRFVA during 2020/2021 that these measures impacted their ability to provide the same level, quality and type of services to victims that they offered prior to the pandemic. Shelters also reported that the largest impact that they had was changes to their accommodation capacity due to provincial/territorial and public health guidelines (Maxwell, 2022), which impacted the number of victims that they could assist as residents and may have also reduced victims' ability to find help and access shelters (Women's Shelters Canada, 2020).

Shelters for victims of abuse reported different occupancy rates throughout the country, as well as different proportions of facilities that were considered full on the snapshot date. This may be due to differing levels of demand for services from victims requiring support, as well as varying numbers of shelters available to victims. Short-term Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse in Quebec (149%) reported the highest occupancy rate in the country on the survey snapshot date, followed by the territories (85%) and Ontario (70%).⁵² In contrast, 29% of the funded beds in short-term Indigenous shelters in Saskatchewan were occupied, well below the national occupancy rate for all short-term Indigenous facilities.

Short-term Indigenous shelters in urban areas more occupied than short-term Indigenous shelters in rural areas

Overall, a much higher proportion of beds in short-term Indigenous shelters in urban areas (86%) were occupied on April 13, 2023, compared with those in rural areas (53%). However, a smaller proportion of short-term urban Indigenous shelters were considered full. About one in five (19%) short-term urban Indigenous shelters were considered full on the survey snapshot date, compared with more than one in four (27%) short-term rural Indigenous shelters.

Similarly, a higher proportion of short-term non-Indigenous shelters in urban areas than rural areas were occupied on April 13, 2023. On the survey snapshot date, about eight in ten (81%) beds in short-term non-Indigenous shelters in urban areas were occupied and 39% of these facilities were considered full, compared with beds in short-term non-Indigenous shelters in rural areas which were two-thirds (66%) occupied and 30% of these shelters were considered full.

A larger proportion (75%) of beds in short-term Indigenous facilities located on reserves were occupied on the survey snapshot date, compared with those in short-term Indigenous shelters not on reserves (66%). However, similar proportions of on- and off-reserve shelters were considered full (24% and 23%, respectively).

Challenges

Staff turnover most common issue facing Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters, lack of affordable housing most common issue facing shelter residents

Shelters can face many different challenges which impact their ability to provide services and support to victims of abuse. The SRFVA asked respondent shelters to report the top three issues or challenges that they faced as facilities over the preceding year. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters reported that the top issue their facilities faced in 2022/2023 was staff turnover (40% and 44%, respectively) (Table 7). Indigenous shelters also commonly reported a lack of permanent housing (36%), a lack of funding (31%) and low employee compensation (31%) among the top challenges facing their facilities. Non-Indigenous shelters also listed these as common challenges that they faced (37%, 30% and 31%, respectively).

Nearly three times the proportion of Indigenous shelters reported that food costs (22%) was a top challenge facing their shelters in 2022/2023, compared with much smaller proportions of non-Indigenous shelters (8%). This difference suggests that this may be a unique challenge for Indigenous shelters related to food security.⁵³ Research has shown that Indigenous populations face food insecurity at a higher rate than any other demographic in Canada, with some of the most severe food insecurity faced disproportionately by rural and remote Indigenous communities (Arriagada, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2024; Uppal, 2023).

Shelters responding to the SRFVA also provided the top challenges that the residents of their facilities faced in 2022/2023. The large majority of Indigenous (80%) and non-Indigenous shelters (86%) reported that a lack of affordable long-term housing was the most common challenge facing their residents (Table 8). For the last three cycles of the SRFVA, this has consistently been the most common challenge for residents reported by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters (Maxwell, 2022; Maxwell, 2020), pointing to the need for affordable housing for victims of abuse. High housing and rental prices, as well as the lack of availability of housing negatively impacts victims' ability to permanently leave abusive situations and may result in some individuals choosing to return to live with their abuser if they have nowhere else to go. It may also result in experiences of homelessness if housing alternatives are not available to victims after leaving shelters (Meyer, 2016; Sullivan et al., 2019; Women's Shelters Canada, 2020; Yakubovich & Maki, 2021).

From the perspective of Indigenous shelters, other common challenges for their residents were substance use issues (51%), underemployment and low incomes (33%) and mental health issues (33%). Non-Indigenous shelters also reported these as some of the most common challenges for their residents (21%, 38% and 39%, respectively).

Funding and expenditures

Provincial and territorial government sources provide most Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelter funding

Many different sources provide funding to shelters for victims of abuse for their operations, including federal, provincial/territorial and regional government sources, private donations and fundraising activities.

In 2022/2023, both Indigenous (55%) and non-Indigenous shelters (72%) reported that the largest proportion of their funding came from provincial or territorial government sources (Table 9). In addition, like the previous cycles of the SRFVA (Maxwell, 2022), Indigenous shelters reported receiving a much higher proportion of funding from federal government sources (24%) than non-Indigenous shelters (6%). In total, federal, provincial and territorial government sources accounted for 79% of the funding for Indigenous shelters and 78% of the funding for non-Indigenous shelters.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters reported some differences in the proportion of funding that they received from the different funding sources. According to the SRFVA, 5% of the funding that Indigenous shelters received in 2022/2023 came from fundraising or donations, compared with 11% of the funding for non-Indigenous shelters.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters spend the most on employee salaries

Understanding the expenditures of shelters can help provide insight into the ability of shelters to support victims and can also help identify any potential funding needs when compared against facility revenues.

Employee salaries accounted for the largest proportion of spending for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters in 2022/2023 (67% and 70%, respectively) (Table 9). After salaries, both types of shelters reported that their next largest expense was direct client costs, which represented 9% of the expenditures of Indigenous shelters and 7% of the expenditures of non-Indigenous shelters. Overall, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters allocated similar proportions of their budgets towards the different expense types.

Summary

Shelters for victims of abuse are an important victim service that support those who are experiencing or escaping abusive situations and relationships. In Canada, shelters that have ties to Indigenous communities or organizations primarily assist victims of abuse from the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities throughout the country. Information about the characteristics of these shelters, as well as details about those who are accessing them, allow for the continued development of gender-focused strategies and supports related to abuse and housing for Indigenous populations.

First Nations people, Métis and Inuit are at an increased risk of experiencing many kinds of violent victimization—such as intimate partner violence—and compared with non-Indigenous individuals, more often experience other forms of social inequity and disadvantage, such as poverty and homelessness. These experiences are rooted in historical colonial policies and practices which continue to impact Indigenous populations today and may result in increased exposure to violence, cycles of abuse and the perpetuation of intergenerational trauma.

Results from the 2022/2023 Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse (SRFVA) found that there were 96 shelters for victims of abuse that had ties to Indigenous communities or organizations operating across Canada, which represented 17% of all shelters. Most Indigenous facilities were located in a First Nations, Métis or Inuit community, with 42% specifically located on First Nations reserves. More than half (57%) of Indigenous shelters were in rural areas.

The large majority (93%) of Indigenous shelters provided short-term housing to victims of abuse (less than three months), while a small proportion (7%) of Indigenous facilities provided long-term accommodation (three months or longer). In comparison, long-term shelters accounted for 23% of all non-Indigenous facilities.

Over a one-year period, there were over 9,700 admissions to Indigenous shelters. The majority were admissions of adult women and accompanying children. The overall number of admissions to Indigenous facilities in 2022/2023 was 30% higher than the number recorded in 2020/2021, but was 8% lower than admissions in 2017/2018. These findings suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on shelters during the 2020/2021 period, and the protocols and measures put in place during that time likely impacted the number of individuals admitted to shelters. They also suggest that admissions to Indigenous shelters have still not returned to pre-COVID levels.

On the survey snapshot date of April 13, 2023—a date which represents a typical day of operations for shelters—the majority of the residents staying in Indigenous shelters were women and accompanying children, most of whom were there for reasons of abuse. Shelters reported that women residents were most often escaping abuse from a current or former intimate partner, and that they frequently experienced emotional or psychological abuse.

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters reported higher occupancy rates on the survey snapshot date in 2023 than what was reported in 2021. On the snapshot date in 2023, 69% of the beds in short-term Indigenous shelters were occupied and 24% of short-term facilities 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 to clients. Some of these challenges are also related to the populations of people that are accessing these facilities. In 2022/2023, Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelters reported that staff turnover and a lack of affordable long-term housing were the most common issues facing their shelters and 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. The SRFVA was conducted for the third time in 2022/2023, 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, policies 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 2023. 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 by computer-assisted telephone interviews.

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 (2022/2023) 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, 2022, to March 31, 2023), a calendar year (January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2022) or a 12-month period of their choosing. In 2022/2023, 90% 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 13, 2023. The snapshot date is a predetermined business day meant to represent a typical day of operations for shelters across Canada. The mid-April 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 date 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 560 shelters who identified their primary mandate as providing services to victims of abuse in 2022/2023, 457 returned their questionnaire for a response rate of 82%. Imputation was used to complete the missing data for key questions for those respondents who did not provide their information through the questionnaire and for those respondents who provided incomplete questionnaires. 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 indicators for which imputation was carried out are: number of beds, number of units, number of residents for reasons of abuse, whether or not the shelter 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 in 2022/2023, see Heidinger, 2024.
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, 2022 to March 31, 2023), a calendar year (January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022) or a 12-month period of their choosing. In 2022/2023, 90% 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 Survey description.
4. In this article, a slightly different methodology was used to identify Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse. As a result, the number of Indigenous shelters that are presented may not match previously published data for all shelters in Canada in 2022/2023. For more information, see Text box 1.
5. In this article, the terms “shelters” and “residential facilities” are used interchangeably.
6. All Indigenous shelters that responded to the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse that they were on a reserve also reported that they were located in a First Nations, Métis or Inuit community. However, not all shelters that are in an Indigenous community are on reserves.
7. This method identified 73 Indigenous shelters and 380 non-Indigenous shelters.
8. If a shelter did not respond to any of the Indigenous questions in the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse (SRFVA) during the 2022/2023 cycle, but they responded in previous cycles (2017/2018 or 2020/2021), then they were able to be identified as Indigenous or non-Indigenous by extracting the historical information that they provided for these five questions from a previous SRFVA cycle. This method allowed for the identification of 23 additional Indigenous shelters and 61 additional non-Indigenous shelters that did not respond to their 2022/2023 survey questionnaire.
9. Information on Indigenous identity is based on the Indigenous identity question from the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse, where being of Indigenous identity was defined as: First Nations, Métis and Inuit. First Nations includes Status and Non-Status Indians.
10. Almost eight in ten (79%) Indigenous shelters that reported the Indigenous identity information of their residents to the survey indicated that at least half of the women residents in their facilities on the snapshot date were First Nations people, Métis or Inuit. More specifically, 31 (55%) of these Indigenous shelters reported that all of their women residents were Indigenous.
11. Throughout this article, analyses exclude shelters that did not provide a response to the specific question being discussed. At the national level, this includes between 24% and 32% of all shelters and between 17% and 24% of all adult women 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 Survey description. Also, the sum of the percentages may not always add up to 100% due to rounding.
12. 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.
13. 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.

14. In 2020/2021, the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse was updated to collect resident information for women, men, adults of another gender, accompanying girls, accompanying boys and accompanying children of another gender. Women residents include transgender adults identifying as female and men residents 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, and also includes persons who are unsure of their gender, persons who identify as both male and female, or neither male nor female.
15. Data not shown.
16. 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.
17. Calculations exclude 25% of Indigenous shelters and 13% of non-Indigenous shelters that did not provide a response to this question.
18. Other family relationship abuse includes violence by a father, step-father, mother, step-mother, son, step-son, daughter, step-daughter, brother, sister or extended family including an in-law, uncle or aunt.
19. Examples of these types of services include the use of traditional healing methods, the provision of services by spiritual Elders and the integration of Indigenous cultural norms and beliefs.
20. 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.
21. See note 2.
22. See note 3.
23. Analyses exclude 20% of non-Indigenous shelters that did not provide a response to the Indigenous identity question for their residents.
24. Populations based on projected estimates for 2022 based on the 2021 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, 2022, by province or territory, age and sex.
25. See note 24.
26. Intimate partner violence is a form of gender-based violence which includes a range of behaviours such as emotional, psychological, financial, physical and sexual abuse committed by a current or former legally married spouse, common-law partner or dating partner.
27. Dating relationship includes couples who do or do not live together.
28. Respondents could select multiple types of abuse experienced by residents; therefore, totals may exceed 100%.
29. For the purposes of this article, 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 women residents in Indigenous shelters and 3% of women residents in non-Indigenous shelters for whom parental responsibility information was unknown.
30. 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.
31. 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.

32. 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%.

33. Calculations for age include an unknown answer category. Therefore, totals do not add to 100%.

34. It is important to note that 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).

35. On the survey snapshot date in 2021, 35% of the women residing in Indigenous shelters and 30% of the women in non-Indigenous shelters had reported their abuse to the police (Maxwell, 2022). Similarly, on the 2018 snapshot date, a higher proportion of women residents in Indigenous shelters (38%) than non-Indigenous shelters (28%) had reported their abuse to the police (Maxwell, 2020).

36. The status of whether charges were laid was not known for 66% of women residents in Indigenous shelters and 49% of women residents in non-Indigenous shelters.

37. 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.

38. The status of whether an order had been obtained was not known for 33% of women residents in Indigenous shelters and 44% of women residents in non-Indigenous shelters.

39. 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.

40. 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.

41. Repeat client is defined in the survey as persons previously served by the same shelter in the last year, including as residents, ex-residents or non-residents. Analyses exclude 10% of Indigenous shelters and 4% of non-Indigenous shelters that did not respond to the survey question regarding whether or not their facility allows repeat clients.

42. Calculations based on those shelters that indicated that they allowed repeat clients.

43. 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.

44. Calculations include unknowns.

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

46. 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.

47. It was unknown whether 38% of the women in Indigenous shelters and 27% of the women in non-Indigenous shelters had a prior history of homelessness.

48. The Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse also asked respondent shelters whether any of the residents who were leaving their facility on the survey snapshot date were departing to homelessness. However, this number cannot be reported due to small data counts.

49. 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.
50. Units refers to the number of apartments or houses available. An individual unit may house multiple people and are typical of long-term facilities.
51. 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.
52. Occupancy can exceed 100% if there are more residents staying in shelters than there are available funded beds.
53. Food security refers to "when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, 1996).

Detailed data tables

Table 1
Percent of shelters for victims of abuse offering selected services, by type of service and type of shelter, Canada, 2022/2023

Selected services	Indigenous shelters ¹	Non-Indigenous shelters
	percent	
General services		
Crisis phone line	86	85
Transportation services	81	73
Recreation area or services	73	68
Classes or tutoring	26	20
Pet accommodation ²	18	30
Food bank	45	43
Clothing items	78	76
Housing referrals	95	89
Furniture items	45	46
Advocacy on behalf of individuals	92	93
Political or social action	27	35
Public education	71	70
Professional services		
Medical services	12	8
Addictions or substance use services	41	22
Mental health services	54	51
Legal services ³	51	66
Employment services	42	33
Assistance with applications for funding	69	71
Financial compensation	14	13
Services for adults		
Individual counselling	86	83
Group counselling	53	63
Safety or protection planning	90	96
Life skills training ⁴	85	86
Parenting skills training	65	71
Services for children		
Childcare	61	61
Counselling ⁵	80	87

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, 2022/2023

Selected services	Indigenous shelters ¹	Non-Indigenous shelters
	percent	
Services for vulnerable populations		
Specialized services for older adults	45	43
Culturally sensitive services for Indigenous persons	94	54
Services for gender and sexuality diversity	46	48
Services in non-official languages	49	64
Services for immigrants or refugees	18	62
Wheelchair accessibility ⁶	82	73
Services for persons with mobility disabilities	13	20
Services for persons with visual disabilities	13	22
Services for persons with hearing disabilities	18	27
Services for persons with developmental or intellectual disabilities	28	30

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 and legal aid.

4. For example help with budgeting, banking, groceries and 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 16% of shelters, professional services excludes 37% of shelters, services for adults excludes 17% of shelters, services for children excludes 31% of shelters, wheelchair accessibility excludes 16% of shelters and services for vulnerable populations excludes 34% 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
Admissions to shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter and region, 2022/2023

Region	Indigenous shelters ¹					Non-Indigenous shelters				
	Total admissions ²	Women	Men	Adults of another gender	Accompanying children ³	Total admissions ²	Women	Men	Adults of another gender	Accompanying children ³
					number					
Atlantic ⁴	455	283	0	0	172	2,554	1,730	0	x	x
Quebec	1,124	654	x	x	x	12,250	7,748	71	56	4,375
Ontario	1,576	932	10	23	611	13,821	7,746	8	51	6,016
Manitoba	1,115	439	0	0	676	2,453	1,101	19	0	1,333
Saskatchewan	918	718	0	0	200	1,511	868	0	0	643
Alberta	856	501	0	0	355	10,060	6,374	52	7	3,627
British Columbia	1,557	995	x	x	548	5,842	3,605	0	12	2,225
Territories ⁵	2,106	1,397	x	x	x	256	144	0	x	x
Canada	9,707	5,919	29	35	3,724	48,747	29,316	150	134	19,147

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 women, men, adults of another gender, accompanying girls, accompanying boys and accompanying children of another gender. Women include transgender adults identifying as female and men 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 3
Beds, units and admissions, by type of shelter for victims of abuse and region, 2022/2023

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	Admissions ⁴	Shelters	Units ⁵	Admissions ⁴	Shelters	Beds ³	Admissions ⁴	Shelters	Units ⁵	Admissions ⁴
	number											
Atlantic ⁶	8	98	448	x	x	x	29	428	2,428	12	119	126
Quebec	10	134	1,124	0	0	0	94	1,368	11,757	20	146	493
Ontario	21	315	1,374	3	17	202	98	2,152	13,241	22	292	580
Manitoba	8	131	1,115	0	0	0	9	155	2,320	x	x	x
Saskatchewan	6	91	918	0	0	0	9	187	1,429	x	x	x
Alberta	7	134	856	0	0	0	34	793	8,430	14	220	1,630
British Columbia	17	223	1,525	x	x	x	63	629	5,298	23	221	544
Territories ⁷	12	124	2,080	x	x	x	4	61	256	0	0	0
Canada	89	1,250	9,440	7	59	267	340	5,773	45,159	101	1,069	3,588

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 4
Residents in shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter and region, April 13, 2023

Region	Indigenous shelters ¹					Non-Indigenous shelters				
	Total residents	Women	Men	Adults of another gender	Accompanying children ² number	Total residents	Women	Men	Adults of another gender	Accompanying children ²
Atlantic ³	57	38	0	0	19	402	237	0	0	165
Quebec	200	112	0	x	x	1,405	809	x	0	x
Ontario	261	131	x	0	x	2,261	1,111	x	x	1,134
Manitoba	68	24	0	x	x	134	61	x	0	x
Saskatchewan	26	20	0	0	6	165	71	0	0	94
Alberta	73	34	0	0	39	1,107	569	69	0	469
British Columbia	146	87	0	0	59	827	495	0	x	x
Territories ⁴	141	61	19	0	61	86	46	0	0	40
Canada	972	507	x	x	439	6,387	3,399	79	9	2,900

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 women, men, adults of another gender, accompanying girls, accompanying boys and accompanying children of another gender. Women residents include transgender adults identifying as female and men residents 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 13, 2023 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 5
Types of abuse experienced by women residents of shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter, Canada,
April 13, 2023

Type of abuse	Indigenous shelters ¹		Non-Indigenous shelters	
	number	percent	number	percent
Total women residents²	350	...	2,602	...
Physical abuse	186	53	1,915	74
Sexual abuse	64	18	918	35
Financial abuse	91	26	1,364	52
Emotional or psychological abuse	199	57	2,222	85
Harassment	87	25	820	32
Forced marriage	x	x	45	2
Human trafficking: forced sex work or forced labour/other	14	4	146	6
Cultural abuse	15	4	190	7
Spiritual abuse	28	8	135	5
Other ³	102	29	337	13

... not applicable

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 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. Women 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 13, 2023 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 42% of Indigenous shelters and 21% 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 6
Occupancy for short-term Indigenous shelters for victims of abuse, by urban or rural designation and region,
April 13, 2023

Region	All short-term shelters				Urban short-term shelters ¹				Rural short-term shelters ¹			
	Shelters	Beds ²	Occupancy ³	Shelters	Shelters	Beds ²	Occupancy ³	Shelters	Shelters	Beds ²	Occupancy ³	Shelters
				full ³				full ³				full ³
number	percent	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent					
Atlantic ⁴	8	98	50	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	59	x
Quebec	10	134	149	x	3	36	x	x	7	98	x	0
Ontario	21	315	70	33	12	192	69	25	9	123	70	44
Manitoba	8	131	52	x	3	66	58	0	5	65	46	x
Saskatchewan	6	91	29	0	3	46	26	0	3	45	31	0
Alberta	7	134	54	0	3	64	78	0	4	70	33	0
British Columbia	17	223	57	24	9	157	60	x	8	66	50	x
Territories ⁵	12	124	85	42	x	x	x	x	x	x	90	50
Canada	89	1,250	69	24	37	613	86	19	52	637	53	27

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 13, 2023 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 7
Top challenges facing shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter, Canada, 2022/2023

Challenges	Indigenous shelters ¹	Non-Indigenous shelters
	percent	
Staff turnover	40	44
Lack of permanent housing	36	37
Lack of funding	31	30
Low employee compensation	31	31
Meeting the diverse needs of clients	22	26
Food costs	22	8
Financial instability	18	13
Mental health issues for staff	18	10
Capacity	15	17
Accessibility issues related to structure	9	10
Reliance on fundraising	7	16
Need for physical repairs	7	18
Providing culturally appropriate supports and services	7	1
Skills development	5	4
Lack of administrative resources	5	6
Criminal justice system	x	6
Transportation costs	x	3
Advocacy	x	2
Not having the mandate to serve male clients	x	1
Restrictions tied to external regulations	x	1
Reliance on volunteers	0	x
Lack of affordable childcare	0	3
Other ²	13	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 inadequate access to supports and services to assist clients, housing issues (e.g., housing shortage, access to second-stage housing), staffing related issues (e.g., not having enough staff, inadequate staff training, difficulties recruiting qualified staff), among others.

Note: Information in this table excludes 43% of Indigenous shelters and 20% 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 8
Top challenges facing residents of shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter, Canada, 2022/2023

Challenges	Indigenous shelters ¹	Non-Indigenous shelters
	percent	
Lack of affordable long-term housing	80	86
Substance use issues	51	21
Underemployment and low incomes	33	38
Mental health issues	33	39
Food costs	18	18
Safety	15	16
Lack of other services	13	13
Lack of shelters	11	13
Lack of assistance and regulations related to income	9	9
Lack of follow-up support	9	4
Affordable childcare	7	11
Parenting issues	5	2
Racism	5	1
Lack of Legal Aid funding	x	11
Criminal justice system	x	7
Affordable transportation	0	3
Immigration regulations	0	3
Other ²	5	4

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 increased cost of living, family court issues, issues related to housing (e.g., lack of rental references), among others.

Note: Information in this table excludes 43% of Indigenous shelters and 19% 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 9
Funding sources and expenditures for shelters for victims of abuse, by type of shelter, Canada, 2022/2023

Funding sources and expenditures	Indigenous shelters ¹		Non-Indigenous shelters	
	thousands of dollars ²	percent	thousands of dollars ²	percent
Funding sources				
Federal government	21,939	24.3	33,109	6.2
Provincial/territorial government	49,904	55.2	382,386	71.5
Regional/municipal government	4,323	4.8	19,235	3.6
First Nations government	2,796	3.1	50	0.0
Foundations	1,245	1.4	12,182	2.3
Fees for service	1,547	1.7	6,103	1.1
Lotteries	31	0.0	3,165	0.6
Fundraising or donations	4,142	4.6	59,452	11.1
Other ³	4,510	5.0	18,803	3.5
Total	90,438	100.0	534,486	100.0
Expenditures				
Salary costs	59,023	67.0	360,839	70.4
Rent, mortgage, property taxes	2,481	2.8	12,699	2.5
Other housing costs	4,690	5.3	36,092	7.0
Administrative costs	4,075	4.6	20,400	4.0
Staff training	2,693	3.1	4,562	0.9
Office costs	1,967	2.2	11,774	2.3
Direct client costs	8,062	9.2	34,455	6.7
Contributions to reserve fund	145	0.2	2,625	0.5
Other ⁴	4,942	5.6	29,444	5.7
Total	88,079	100.0	512,891	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.