



Improving Shelter Experience For Indigenous Women

Policy Brief



Circling Buffalo Inc.



University of Manitoba

For more details on the study, access our full report here

Intimate partner violence (IPV) disproportionately impacts Indigenous women in Manitoba.

- Indigenous women experience higher rates of IPV and more severe forms of IPV, such as strangulation or intimate partner homicide.
- As a result, Indigenous women access women's shelters for support at high rates.

Barriers can make it difficult to access shelters or negatively impact experiences while staying there.

- Such as discrimination, a lack of culturally safe services, and the geographic isolation of many Indigenous communities

These barriers underscore the need to enhance shelter services to support the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous women.

To understand and improve the experiences of Indigenous women seeking help for IPV at shelters across Manitoba, RESOLVE Manitoba and Circling Buffalo Inc. developed a research study titled *Improving Shelter Experience for Indigenous Women*. In this brief, we share findings from the study to help inform policy and decision making.

Project Overview

Goals:

- Learn about Indigenous survivors' experiences accessing and staying at women's shelters.
- Understand Indigenous and non-Indigenous service provider experiences facilitating Indigenous women's access and stay at women's shelters
- Identify ways that shelter services, programs, and policies could be improved to better meet the needs of Indigenous women who experience violence from their partners

Steps:

- Survivors and service providers were invited to share their experiences and perspectives in one-on-one conversations (interviews).
- 12 Indigenous survivors and 12 service providers working closely with Indigenous communities participated
- All interviews were recorded and transcribed, then entered into qualitative analysis software (Dedoose) for coding.
- After organizing and coding, we looked closely at the stories shared by our participants to understand the main patterns and themes in their experiences.

Results

What Survivors Told Us

- **Stories of Abuse:** physical abuse; emotional or psychological abuse; verbal abuse; financial abuse; coercive control; substance use coercion.
- **Stories About Shelters :** survivors accessed shelters in various locations and various types of shelters
- **Shelter Services:** cultural supports, counselling, transportation services, child support, clothing, employment income support, housing and legal assistance.
- **Challenges and Difficulties Faced When Staying in Shelter:** navigating difficult emotions after abuse; limited staff supports; racism; homophobia/transphobia; discrimination; lack of awareness on Indigenous cultures in shelters; having to follow to shelter rules they did not find useful.
- **Shelter Experiences:** mostly positive experiences; one neutral; one negative.
- **Type of Help-Seeking:** informal help-seeking (family members; friends; Elders; co-workers; community); formal help-seeking (police; Chief and Council; counselling and substance use services; hospital); no or limited help-seeking.
- **Barriers to Seeking Supports:** previous negative experiences; shame and stigma; transportation; difficulties reaching and locating shelters; shelters' limited capacity.
- **Factors Affecting Their Access to Shelter:** having a safe and peaceful environment; accessibility (close proximity to residence and resources, financial coverage); previous positive experiences.

What Service Providers Told Us

- **Shelter Information:** service providers worked at two types of shelters: Indigenous Rural or Non-Indigenous Urban.
- **Shelter Services:** cultural supports, counselling, hygiene kits, and facilitating access to additional supports/services.
- **Challenges & Barriers Survivors Face:** navigating feelings of loneliness; adapting to shelter rules; obtaining housing; shelter policy limitations; substance withdrawal symptoms; transportation; accessing income assistance; difficulties contacting shelters.
- **Challenges Staff Face:** lack of addiction resources and support services on reserves and in rural communities; challenges obtaining housing and social assistance for survivors; difficulties supporting older male children with disabilities; safety risks encountered at work and in their personal lives due to their work; experiences with emotional fatigue due to their role.
- **Shelter Policy and Administration:** intake, referral and transfer procedures; shelter criteria and instances where individuals were not eligible for service; experiences networking with other social service sectors; funding needs.

What Could Be Better (Participant Recommendations)

<i>Expanding Shelter Resources, Supports, & Services</i>	<i>Offering Cultural Services for Indigenous Survivors</i>
• Referrals to additional resources, supports, and services (and navigators to aid in accessing services); • Gender-inclusive supports • Mental health and addictions support • Supports for perpetrators • Supports for people with disabilities • Evening and weekend activities • Materials and infrastructure	• Access to Elders (specifically female Elders, grannies or aunties) • Sharing circles (including spaces to reflect on dreams) • Ceremonies and cultural gatherings (full moon ceremonies, pow wows, jingle dress classes) • Beading and art-based services • Language classes • Smudging
<i>Addressing Staffing Shortages and Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Longer Shelter Stays and Transitional Housing</i>
• Address understaffing • Hire staff with lived experience • Provide training on cultural sensitivity & Indigenous history • Practice patience and support in relationships	• 60-day limit on shelter stays should be extended to 90-days • IPV survivors should be prioritized for social housing under Manitoba Housing programs
<i>Increased Education and Outreach</i>	<i>Referrals and Collaboration Amongst IPV Services</i>
• To increase awareness about shelter services in Indigenous communities • To recruit potential shelter employees	• Cross-sector referrals needed to connect survivors with services • Partnerships needed to fill service provision gaps

Lessons and Insights for Policy and Decision Makers

Extend the length of shelter stays and create pathways to transitional housing	Advocate for increased funding to support program delivery, retain shelter staff, and expand shelter services	Ensure shelter staff are equipped with the knowledge, training, resources, and experience to support survivors
• Increase the length of shelter stays to 90 days to give survivors and service providers the necessary time to connect with essential resources and housing supports. • Develop pathways for survivors to secure housing after staying in shelter, specifically prioritizing IPV survivors for social housing under Manitoba Housing programs.	Service expansion can involve: • Improving transportation options, especially in rural and fly-in communities • Developing addiction services, particularly in rural communities; • Offering cultural supports and services • Providing weekend and evening programming	• Implement training and education on Indigenous cultures and the impact of colonization on Indigenous communities; cultural safety; and trauma-informed care • Hire staff with lived experience • Connect staff with supports for their wellbeing