

# Addressing housing barriers and insecurity among women and gender-diverse people impacted by criminalization

Summary report of findings and recommendations of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) Housing Project, November 2021 to December 2022

Prepared by Dr. Sarah Gelbard, University of Ottawa  
On behalf of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies

Submitted to the Neha Review Panel  
on the Government of Canada's failure to prevent and eliminate homelessness amongst women and gender-diverse people, and particularly those who are Indigenous.

April 2025

# Executive Summary

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Criminalized women and gender-diverse people face multiple systemic barriers to accessing and retaining safe and affordable housing. The trauma-informed, intersectional, and gender-based work of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) Housing Project reviewed in this report considers how housing need and criminalization intersect with experiences of violence, poverty, mental health and substance use issues, and recognizes how these disproportionately impact women, Indigenous peoples, 2SLGBTQIA+, and/or racialized women and gender-diverse people.

The CAEFS Housing Project (November 2021 through December 2022) brought together a team with diverse expertise to work together with the CAEFS National Office to assess the existing housing and housing-related programs across the network, to assess housing and housing-related barriers faced by criminalized women and gender-diverse people in accessing and retaining safe and stable housing, and to assist in the co-development of a CAEFS Housing Strategy.

The work of the CAEFS Housing Project was informed by and develops upon past housing initiatives by CAEFS, member societies, and community organizations. Particular focus was given to emerging rights-based frameworks surrounding the Right to Housing movement and National Housing Strategy.

This report highlights the following key initiatives undertaken by the CAEFS Housing Team:

- **CAEFS National Housing Portrait**

Created through December 2021 to April 2022, the National Housing Portrait is a network-wide scan of existing housing and residential programs offered by members of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Society. It is informed by interview with executive directors and housing support workers across the twenty-four member societies. The CAEFS National Housing Portrait identifies more than 1200 beds located within the network's emergency, transitional, and supportive housing portfolio, as well as within residences designated for criminalized women and gender-diverse people, such as bail houses and community residential facilities.

- **Literature Review and Critical Analysis**

To better understand the complex nature of the interconnections between gender, housing, and criminalization, along with the distinct housing needs and barriers faced by

women and gender-diverse people impacted by criminalization, the CAEFS Housing Team undertook an extensive review of existing literature. This includes past housing-related research by CAEFS, member societies, and housing sector reports and academic studies on intersecting issues. The literature review also looks at relevant critical and theoretical frameworks, including spatial justice, prison abolition, Indigenous homelessness, and the right to housing.

- **CAEFS Housing Strategy Development**

CAEFS is developing a rights-based housing strategy focused on building housing principles, resources, and advocacy that better respond to the distinct needs of criminalized women and gender-diverse people, disrupt the cycles and systems of criminalization and homelessness, and contribute to the meaningful co-creation of thriving communities without prisons. Combined with the data gathered from member societies and literature review this report outlines key strengths and weaknesses and identifies strategic opportunities within existing housing and housing-related services offered by member societies, among other women's housing organizations, across government programs, and within the private housing sector.

Informed by the research conducted by the CAEFS Housing Team and consultations within the CAEFS network, this report concludes with recommendations and considerations for: future housing and housing-related work by CAEFS and member societies; ongoing advocacy and knowledge exchange; and future research. Additional recommendations are directed at the Neha Review Panel, the Federal Government, provincial and municipal governments.

Key recommendations include:

**General recommendations**

- **Explicit acknowledgement of oppressive systems:** Both housing insecurity and criminalization are perpetuated through intersecting oppressive systems of patriarchy, settler colonialism, racism, and capitalism. These systems operate across the many institutions that govern our lives including the criminal legal system, the housing sector, urban planning, finance, and all levels of government. Upholding the right to housing includes an acknowledgment that these oppressive systems contribute to housing insecurity and criminalization.
- **Explicitly anti-carceral approaches:** The progressive realization of the right to safe, adequate and affordable housing for women, Two Spirit, Trans, and gender-diverse people and the government's duty to uphold this right should never be used to legitimize or expand Canada's policing or prison systems. We strongly stand against the further criminalization of homelessness, poverty, sex work, drug use,

and other survival and coping strategies by those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

- **Explicitly intersectional and diverse approaches:** Experiences of housing insecurity and criminalization are intersecting and intersectional. Upholding the right to housing needs to account for the diverse, unique, shared, intersecting, and compounding experiences as well as individual, communal, and systemic factors. We recommend greater recognition of the leadership and expertise of the most impacted and disproportionately over-represented groups in the criminal legal system, i.e. Indigenous, gender-diverse, trans, Black, people of colour, and people with mental health and substance use issues.

#### **Targeted recommendations:**

- **Neha Review Panel:** Partner with CAEFS and Elizabeth Fry Societies to facilitate testimony in prisons designated for women.
- **Federal Government, Ministry of Housing:** Recognition of people with experiences of criminalization as priority population in housing need in the National Housing Strategy and related funding programs. Further allocation of resources towards the progressive realization of the right to housing for those in greatest need, including affordability and gender-based targets.
- **Federal Government, Ministry of Public Safety:** Rights-based evaluation of release Correctional Service Canada imposed (parole) restrictions that violate the right to housing and/or unnecessarily restrict the access to and retention of adequate housing as defined by the NHSA. Review of release planning practices to improve access to and retention of adequate housing as defined by the NHSA.
- **Provincial and Municipal Governments:** Rights-based evaluation of exclusionary zoning bylaws and official planning policy that prohibit the location of transitional housing, community residential facilities, correctional community residential facilities, halfway houses, boarding houses, or other supportive housing within zones designated residential.
- **Provincial and Municipal Governments:** Improve tenant protections against discrimination on the basis of involvement with the criminal legal system. Rights-based evaluation and consultation with Elizabeth Fry Societies on tenant protection regulations and exemptions for residents in transitional housing, with attention paid to the potential for further criminalization or other rights violations.
- **Housing service providers:** Identify priority areas for building capacity for the provision of housing and/or housing-based services through knowledge exchange, resource development, funding opportunities, and collaborative partnerships.
- **Advocates:** Identify priority advocacy areas in protecting the rights of criminalized women and gender diverse people by seizing new opportunities under the National Housing Strategy Act and strategic partnerships with other housing rights

organizations and advocates. This includes securing funding for the construction and/or acquisition of permanent housing options, related operating expenses and wrap-around services.

- **Advocates:** Identifying the decision-making tables and ensuring representation from organizations that work with criminalized women and gender diverse people - including people with lived experience.
- **Researchers and academic partners:** Improve interdisciplinary collaborations and community engagements with experts with lived experiences of criminalization to advance knowledge, actions, visions towards housing as a key strategy for realizing a world without prisons with strong well-resourced communities.
- **Researchers and academic partners:** National strategy to ensure that provincially and federally incarcerated people are counted as unhoused people.

*Funding disclosure: The CAEFS Housing Project was funded through the Canadian Women's Foundation's Safer + Stronger Grants and generous funding through the Northpine Foundation.*

# Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
1 Introduction.....	3
1.1 About the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies.....	3
1.2 About Elizabeth Fry housing and housing-related services .....	3
1.3 About the CAEFS housing team and project .....	3
1.4 Report outline .....	4
2 Project Background and Definition .....	5
2.1 Mandate .....	5
2.2 Objectives .....	5
2.3 Housing project foundations .....	6
2.3.1 Past housing initiatives by CAEFS and member societies .....	6
2.3.2 Intersectional, feminist and abolitionist lenses .....	7
2.3.3 Emerging rights-based approaches to housing .....	7
2.4 Project questions .....	8
2.5 Major initiatives and key activities .....	9
3 CAEFS National Housing Portrait.....	10
3.1 Network-wide housing.....	11
3.2 Residential options .....	12
4 Literature Review and Analysis.....	13
4.1 Overview of research and reports included in the review .....	13
4.1.1 CAEFS housing and housing-related research and initiatives.....	13
4.1.2 Existing research and reports by member societies .....	15
4.1.3 Housing sector reports on intersecting key issues .....	16
4.2 Summary of key findings .....	16
4.2.1 GBA+ of housing need and homelessness.....	16
4.2.2 Housing insecurity and involvement with criminal justice system .....	17
4.2.3 Impacts of contemporary housing crisis .....	19
4.2.4 Common issues and barriers to accessing and retaining housing .....	19
4.2.5 Common issues and barriers for housing providers .....	20

4.3	Critical frameworks .....	21
4.3.1	Gender-based analysis, feminism and intersectional spatial justice .....	21
4.3.2	Abolition and abolition geography .....	22
4.3.3	Indigenous homelessness and settler colonialism.....	23
4.3.4	Right to housing and National Housing Strategy.....	24
5	CAEFS Housing Strategy Development and Recommendations.....	26
5.1	Housing and Residential Options Summits .....	26
5.2	CAEFS Housing Strategy Recommendations .....	28
5.2.1	Revise the CAEFS Housing Principles .....	28
5.2.2	Build network capacity and responsiveness .....	29
5.2.3	Participate in right to housing advocacy .....	31
5.3	CAEFS Residential Options Recommendations .....	32
5.3.1	Evaluate the role of community residential options.....	32
5.3.2	Set key strategic directions and priorities .....	33
5.4	Evaluating strategies, actions, and outcomes .....	35
6	Additional Recommendations.....	36
6.1	Neha Review Panel and the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate .....	36
6.2	Advocacy and Knowledge Exchange .....	38
6.2.1	Internal knowledge exchange and capacity building .....	38
6.2.2	Outreach and network development.....	39
6.3	Ongoing and future research collaborations .....	39
6.3.1	Mapping Housing Journeys.....	39
6.3.2	CRPOI .....	40
6.4	Targeted recommendations to government.....	40
6.4.1	Federal government, Ministry of Housing .....	40
6.4.2	Federal Government, Ministry of Public Safety .....	41
6.4.3	Provincial and Municipal Governments .....	41
	Appendix A CAEFS and member societies housing-related reports .....	42
	Appendix B Select bibliography of housing sector research and reports .....	44
	Appendix C List of housing sector and advocacy groups.....	52
	Appendix D List of discussion prompts from CAEFS Housing Summit .....	56

## **Authors**

This report was prepared by Dr. Sarah Gelbard to summarize the work, finding, and recommendations of the CAEFS Housing Team—Sarah Gelbard, Erica Harrison, Nat Pace, Amelia Reimer—in consultation with CAEFS staff and member Elizabeth Fry Societies. This report builds on past CAEFS housing projects and reports prepared by Kassandra Churcher, Safiyah Rochelle, and Nancy Poon.

At the time of submission, Dr. Gelbard is a SSHRC Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa.

## **Land Acknowledgements**

CAEFS office is in the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin Nation, which is colonially known to many as Ottawa, Ontario. Algonquin territory remains home to many First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples from across Turtle Island. While our main office is located in this territory, our work is done across the country and so, our work takes place on the traditional territories of many different nations.

Many within the CAEFS network are white from European settler ancestry; some have come to these lands through other histories of colonialism rooted in slavery and forced migration; and there are many of us who are Indigenous to Turtle Island. Every day, we work to acknowledge our relationship to this land and to colonialism, and to work in solidarity with Indigenous people towards decolonization – especially by paying critical attention to the ways that our work environments continue to reproduce colonial logics.

The connection between colonization and the criminalization of Indigenous people is irrefutable and has led to a crisis of over-incarceration and disproportionate punishment for Indigenous women and gender-diverse people. The path forward to stopping this crisis must address the root causes and put Indigenous self-determination at the centre of any and all solutions. We echo the demands from Indigenous communities to the Canadian Government to implement the calls to action from the reports released by the National Inquiry into Missing Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

## **Acknowledgements**

The CAEFS Housing Team would like to acknowledge the ongoing efforts across the CAEFS network to advocate for the rights of criminalized women and gender-diverse people. We are grateful to contribute to this multi-dimensional rights-based work by advocating for the right to housing. The knowledge and experiences documented in this report are the result of decades of housing service provision, research, and advocacy by CAEFS and across our network of Elizabeth Fry Societies. Our work builds on countless reports, documents, interviews, and conversations by current and past staff informed this claim.



We would like to acknowledge and amplify the critical work of the human rights claims submitted to the Federal Housing Advocate prepared by the Women's National Housing & Homelessness Network (June 2022), and on behalf of the National Indigenous Feminist Housing Group (June 2022). We are grateful for the care and consideration with which these claims have been prepared. We see ourselves and the women and gender-diverse people we work with reflected in these claims. This report is offered in solidarity with and in addition to the voices and experiences documented in these two claims.

We are grateful for the advice, guidance, and support we have received from the Women's National Housing & Homelessness Network, Keepers of the Circle, the National Right to Housing Network, Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, the Pan-Canadian Voice on Women's Housing.

Finally, the CAEFS Housing Team wish to recognize those who have shared their stories and knowledge with us from their lived experience of housing insecurity and criminalization. We recognize the responsibility entrusted to us to use these stories with care and in the service of abolitionist strategies to nurture strong and well-resourced communities, not prisons.

### **Funding declaration**

This work was made possible through funding from the Canadian Women's Foundation's Safer + Stronger Grants and generous funding through the Northpine Foundation.

# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 About the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies

The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) works to address the persistent ways in which women and gender-diverse people impacted by criminalization are denied humanity and excluded from community. CAEFS is a self-governing organization, with a governance board comprised of representatives from our membership. Our team is comprised of full and part-time staff and volunteer regional advocates, located from coast to coast. CAEFS is a member-driven organization, whose membership is comprised of 22 self-governing local Elizabeth Fry Societies, organized into regional councils, who work with us towards a world without prisons with strong and well-resourced communities for everyone.

## 1.2 About Elizabeth Fry housing and housing-related services

Elizabeth Fry member societies have a long history of supporting criminalized women and gender-diverse people with direct housing provision and housing-related services. The CAEFS National Housing Portrait (detailed in Section 3 of this report) identified over 1000 beds located across the network's emergency, transitional, and supportive housing projects, as well as an additional 200 beds within residences designated for criminalized women and gender-diverse people, such as bail houses and community residential facilities (i.e., halfway houses). It also identified a variety of housing-focussed programs including rental subsidies, help in navigating housing searches, and eviction prevention support.

## 1.3 About the CAEFS housing team and project

In Fall 2021, CAEFS assembled a housing team to develop a rights-based housing strategy focused on building housing principles, resources, and advocacy. Working with the rest of the CAEFS National Office, the housing team brought additional subject area expertise in urban planning, architecture, spatial justice, social work, and community organizing. The CAEFS Housing Project was developed over three phases from November 2021 through December 2022.

The three phases of the CAEFS Housing Project are as follows:

**Phase 1: Housing assessment and project design**

*November 2021 to February 2022*

**Phase 2: Project development**

*March 2022 to August 2022*

**Phase 3: Consultation and future direction**

*September 2022 to December 2022*

The CAEFS Housing Team consisted of the following members:

- Sarah Gelbard, Housing Development Coordinator (Phases 1-3)
- Nat Pace, Housing Development Coordinator (Phases 1-2)
- Amelia Reimer, Housing Liaison (Phase 1)
- Erica Harrison, Housing Liaison (Phase 1)
- Darlene MacEachern, Project Supervisor (Phase 1)
- Jackie Omstead, Project Supervisor (Phases 2-3)
- Emilie Coyle, CAEFS Executive Director

## 1.4 Report outline


The following report provides an overview of the work undertaken by the CAEFS Housing Team between November 2021 and December 2022. The report begins with an overview of the mandate, objectives, and major initiatives of the project in Section 2 and some background on the foundations and context of our housing strategy including past housing work by CAEFS, feminist and abolitionist frameworks, and the recognition of the Right to Housing by the Canadian government. The CAEFS National Housing Portrait is summarized in Section 3 (the full report is available separately). Section 4 reviews existing literature and reports and summarizes the key findings, needs assessment, and critical frameworks. Section 5 presents findings of the CAEFS Housing and Residential Option Summits and offers recommendations for the further development of a CAEFS Housing Strategy. Additional recommendations are offered to the Neha Review Panel, advocacy and knowledge networks, academic and research partners, and all levels of government.

## 2 Project Background and Definition

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### 2.1 Mandate

Through its preliminary research and consultations with CAEFS staff and member societies, the CAEFS Housing Team developed the following mandate of the CAEFS Housing Project:



The co-development of an intersectional feminist and rights-based housing strategy and resources that support criminalized women and gender-diverse people.

### 2.2 Objectives

The CAEFS Housing Strategy should promote and support a **housing vision** that:

- *better respond to the distinct needs of criminalized women and gender-diverse people;*
- *disrupt the cycles and systems of criminalization and homelessness; and*
- *contribute to the meaningful co-creation of thriving communities without prisons.*

The CAEFS Housing Strategy should guide and support **housing actions** that:

- *foster collaborative opportunities for developing housing capacity and options with our member societies;*

- *reduce barriers to accessing and retaining safe and stable housing for criminalized women and gender-diverse people; and*
- *position our work within the right to housing advocacy, frameworks, and initiatives.*

## 2.3 Housing project foundations

Our mandate reflects intersections between three key foundations to our work: past housing and housing-related work by CAEFS; intersectional feminist and abolitionist frameworks; and emerging housing advocacy context of the Right to Housing movement. These are introduced below to provide preliminary context for the report. A deeper dive into each of these foundations is also provided in Section 4.

### 2.3.1 Past housing initiatives by CAEFS and member societies

In Spring 2021, CAEFS developed draft housing principles in consultation with the Executive Directors of Elizabeth Fry Societies from coast-to-coast. These draft principles were intended to guide the CAEFS network as they undertake housing and housing-related work. These principles informed but were also revisited throughout the CAEFS Housing Project. **Recommendations for revisions are included at the end of this report in Section 5.2.**

The draft CAEFS housing principles stated that:

- Housing is a human right.
- Jails and prisons are not safe or stable housing.
- Safe and stable housing is more than a physical space, it is being part of a community.
- Everyone – regardless of their race, class, ability, sex, gender, status, and criminal history – should have access to safe and stable housing.
- Safe and stable housing for all is essential to working toward a world without prisons.

In addition to the draft housing principles, the CAEFS Housing Project was informed by several key documents and past housing initiatives undertaken by both CAEFS and member societies. These include: Creating Choices: The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women (1990); CAEFS response to the Failures of Creating Choices in the Office of the Correctional Investigator’s Annual Report (2020-2021); and Beyond Bricks and Mortar: (Re)conceptualizing Housing for Elizabeth Fry Clients During the COVID-

19 Pandemic (2021). These reports and a selection of research and reports produced by member societies (2012-2022) informed the needs assessment and analyses and contributed to the development of strategies, principles, and resources (see Appendix A).

### 2.3.2 Intersectional, feminist and abolitionist lenses

Informed by broader issues and frameworks that inform the work of CAEFS, the CAEFS Housing Project is also rooted in intersectional feminist and abolitionist philosophies, approaches, and action. The CAEFS Housing Team recognize the value of learning from histories of community activism, scholarship, and those with lived experience.


**Intersectional feminist and abolitionist work help to focus critical attention to the reproduction of social, spatial, and economic marginalization through oppressive systems and how these contribute to both cycles of criminalization and housing insecurity.** This requires engagement with critical frameworks that are gender-based, anti-carceral, anti-colonial, and anti-oppression. Additionally, we looked to rich legacies of alternative housing models, housing principles, and community care practices as inspiration for and proof of transformative social and spatial justice. These critical frameworks are discussed in further detail in Section 4.3.

### 2.3.3 Emerging rights-based approaches to housing

With the federal government's launch of the *National Housing Strategy* in 2017, its recognition of the right to housing in 2019's *National Housing Strategy Act*, and an unprecedented share of 2022's budget marked for housing initiatives, the CAEFS Housing Team recognize we are in a critical strategic moment to assess housing activities across the CAEFS network. Diverse communities, non-profit organizations, and researchers are mobilizing both individually and collaboratively around the emerging rights-based approach to housing. Several key networks are emerging to share resources, to amplify initiatives, and to foster solidarity across those groups in greatest housing need. **The CAEFS Housing Team recognize the critical shift in narrative from housing as service provision to housing as a human right as informing our work.** This shift suggests we also shift our framing of the people who access the housing and housing-related service of our member societies from service-users to rights holders. Our work explores that potential to transform relationships, housing models, and advocacy approaches. The right to housing movement, legislative frameworks, and network developments are discussed in further detail in Section 4.3.

## 2.4 Project questions


The CAEFS Housing Team developed the following project questions to guide our work:



What would a rights-based strategy to **intersectional feminist** and **abolitionist** housing be like?



How are member societies currently involved in the direct provision of housing and housing-related programs and supports?



What are the housing-related barriers, needs, and experiences of criminalized women and gender-diverse people?

- What is home?
- What is adequate housing?
- What does it mean to be at home and in community?
- What barriers do we still need to navigate when addressing immediate housing needs and long-term movement towards intersectional, feminist, and abolitionist housing?
- What are common issues in providing housing and housing-related supports?
- What resources do we need to build capacity and to offer more responsive housing?
- What opportunities does the human right to housing framework, funding, narrative open for CAEFS and member societies?
- What experiences of housing and homelessness are missing from the National Housing Strategy and related policies and advocacy work?
- What critical frameworks and opportunities can help advance housing as a right for criminalized women and gender-diverse people?

## 2.5 Major initiatives and key activities

The CAEFS Housing Team pursued our mandate, objectives, and project questions through the following major initiatives:

- CAEFS National Housing Portrait (Section 3)
- Literature Review and Analysis (Section 4)
- CAEFS Housing Strategy Development (Section 5)
- Additional Recommendations (Section 6)

The following timeline outlines the key activities of the CAEFS Housing Team in each of these major initiatives by project phase:

### **Phase 1: Housing assessment and project design**

*November 2021 to February 2022*

- CAEFS National Housing Portrait: interviews and data collection
- Literature Review and Analysis: housing research and needs assessment

### **Phase 2: Project development**

*March 2022 to August 2022*

- CAEFS National Housing Portrait: analysis and final report
- Literature Review and Analysis: network development with community organizations engaged in Right to Housing advocacy, strategies, and policies
- CAEFS Housing Strategy: project design and development

### **Phase 3: Consultation and reporting**

*September 2022 to December 2022*

- CAEFS Housing Strategy: CAEFS National Housing and Residential Options Summit
- Final report and recommendations
- CAEH conference presentation



### 3 CAEFS National Housing Portrait

The CAEFS National Housing Portrait is a cross-Canada view of housing provision and housing-related services offered by members societies. Data was collected between Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 via interviews with all 24 member societies of CAEFS, typically with Executive Directors. Board members, program managers, support workers were interviewed in certain cases. **We draw an important distinction between “housing” and “residential options” where residents are supervised according to parole, probation, or bail conditions.** Separate reports were produced for the network-wide housing and residential options, summarized separately below.

## CAEFS NATIONAL HOUSING PORTRAIT

Housing Programs and Services Offered by Members of the Canadian Association Of Elizabeth Fry Societies

### PACIFIC

Kamloops & District Elizabeth Fry Society  
Prince George and District Elizabeth Fry Society  
Central Okanagan Elizabeth Fry Society  
Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver  
The South Cariboo Elizabeth Fry Society  
Archway Society



Most CAEFS members are directly involved in enabling women and gender-diverse people to obtain and/or retain housing, either through direct provision of housing or housing-related services.



### PRAIRIES

Elizabeth Fry Manitoba  
Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan  
Elizabeth Fry Society of Calgary  
Elizabeth Fry Society of Northern Alberta



### ONTARIO

Elizabeth Fry Society of Ottawa  
Elizabeth Fry Society of Peterborough  
Elizabeth Fry Toronto  
Elizabeth Fry Simcoe Muskoka  
Elizabeth Fry Peel Halton  
Elizabeth Fry Society of North Eastern Ontario  
Elizabeth Fry Society of North Western Ontario  
Elizabeth Fry Society Southern Ontario  
Elizabeth Fry Kingston

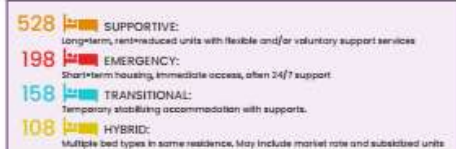
### QUEBEC

Société Elizabeth Fry Quebec



### ATLANTIC

Elizabeth Fry New Brunswick  
Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton  
Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia  
Elizabeth Fry Society of Newfoundland and Labrador



### 3.1 Network-wide housing

Overall, as of Spring 2022, 14/24 members operate physical housing projects, representing nearly 1000 beds, which can be sorted into the following broad categories:

- **Emergency shelters:** Short-term housing, immediate access, often 24/7 support
- **Transitional housing:** Temporary stabilizing accommodation with supports.
- **Supportive Housing:** Long-term, rent-reduced units. Typically offers individualized, flexible and/or voluntary support services for people with low-to-high needs.
- **Hybrid:** Multiple bed types in same residence. May include market rate units to offset the cost of subsidized units.

Housing varies greatly by region. The Pacific region operate a significantly higher volume of housing than the rest of the network's regions. This is true even after accounting for population density. Roughly 2 in 3 network beds are located in the Pacific region. Almost 1 in 5 beds is located Surrey alone.

Recent increases in funding availability, in part as a result of the National Housing Strategy, have seen a notable expansion in housing programs for several member societies. Between Fall 2021 and Fall 2022, three CAEFS members have launched their first housing projects. In 2022, eight projects and 287 beds were projected to open, mostly in the Pacific region.

Housing is operated within a diversity of various building types. While the greatest share of beds is now located in multi-unit residential buildings and temporary hotel conversions, most of projects within the membership contain 10 beds or less. A variety of ownership structures and funding models were also noted.

In addition to the direct provision of housing, member societies are also engaged in a variety of housing-based services including subsidy programs, rent banks, housing first case management, housing outreach, and discharge planning.

The project demonstrates the rapid growth of the CAEFS networks as housing providers in the past few years, though this varies by region. Certain network members have successfully adopted and adapted emerging development practices and models such as modular building, hotel conversions, and community land trusts. Still, there remains significant barriers to housing development and provision, such as restrictive development funding, exclusionary zoning practices, escalating land prices, and lack of operational funding.



Finally, the Portrait highlights several policy areas for further investigation including Indigenous housing needs, avoiding displacement of “hard to house” individuals, trans and gender-diverse inclusion, and orienting housing towards the mission of abolition. Some of these are discussed further below in our recommendations for developing the CAEFS Housing Strategy (see Section 5.2).

## 3.2 Residential options

As noted above, CAEFS draws a clear distinction between “housing” and forms of carceral “residential options” where residents are supervised according to parole, probation, or bail conditions. There are several supervised residential options operated across the network, which can be roughly sorted into three categories: community-based residential facilities (CBRFs, also referred to as CRFs) and similar provincial facilities, bail beds, and others. In some cases, Elizabeth Fry societies provide a bed while an external partner holds the bail supervision contact with Correctional Services Canada. In others, Elizabeth Fry societies provide both the bed and supervision services. CBRFs within the network include community-based residential facilities and satellite apartments with some CBRF beds co-located within emergency shelters.



As a network, CAEFS members operate 9 out of the 25 community-based residential facilities designated exclusively for people exiting women’s institutions in Canada. The network's first CBRF was opened in 1952, the Phyllis Haslam Residential Program in Toronto. The most recent project opened in 2005, with the Satellite Apartment in Sydney, Nova Scotia. The majority of CBRFs were established in 1989 or earlier.

*\*Additional information regarding the findings of the CAEFS National Housing Portrait, individual housing profiles, and statistics can be requested by contacting CAEFS head office.*

## 4 Literature Review and Analysis

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To better understand the complex nature of the interconnections between gendered forms of housing need, pathways into the criminal justice system, and the impacts of criminalization on access and retention of housing following release, the CAEFS Housing Team undertook an extensive literature review. Our review begins with reports produced by CAEFS and member societies 2012 to 2022 (see Appendix A) followed by civil sector, government, and academic reports and research on a variety of housing-related issues including impacts on women and gender-diverse people, Indigenous people, and people with experiences of criminalization (see Appendix B). We conclude with a review of critical academic and community frameworks that we believe are relevant to understanding the systems that contribute to housing injustices and to informing our actions in addressing those injustices.

### 4.1 Overview of research and reports included in the review

The following section highlights a few key reports and summarizes the types of existing research and reports included in the literature review on housing insecurity and criminalization as experienced by women and gender-diverse people and intersecting issues. This research informed the CAEFS Housing Team through the development of the project and grounded their work in the knowledge shared by a broad range of community activists, scholars, and those with lived experience.

#### 4.1.1 CAEFS housing and housing-related research and initiatives

##### **The Failure of Creating Choices: CAEFS Response to the Office of the Correctional Investigator's 2020-2021 Annual Report**

April 2020 marked the 30-year anniversary of Creating Choices, the report that was to serve as the blueprint for “women’s corrections” in Canada. In February 2022, the Office of the Correctional Investigator released its annual report including an evaluation of the impacts of Creating Choices. In a press release on the Failures of Creating Choices (February 10, 22) CAEFS acknowledged what Creating Choices did and what it failed to do:

*“Creating Choices recognized the social causes of incarceration, and its principles were intended to create community-centered responses that provided meaningful opportunity to resolve the economic and social determinants of incarceration and criminalization.”*

*“The OCI’s report confirms what the CAEFS – and anyone who has been incarcerated in a federal prison designated for women - has long known: the principles of Creating Choices were never fully implemented, at least not in practice. The philosophy of the document was undermined by a shift to punitive responses.”*

Although the Creating Choices report was not specific to housing, it offers perhaps the clearest example of potential principles. **The five principles of Creating Choices—empowerment, meaningful and responsive choices, respect and dignity, supportive environment, and shared responsibility—are echoed in many of the housing and housing-related initiatives and reports examined below.** The failure of Creating Choices points not necessarily to flaws in the principles, or simply a failure to implement recommendations. We must also consider ways that pursuing solutions through reform failed to address the underlying systemic marginalization of women and gender-diverse people through intersecting systems of power.

### **Beyond Bricks and Mortar:**

#### **(Re)conceptualizing Housing for Elizabeth Fry Clients During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

In December of 2020, CAEFS embarked on a nationwide research project, in collaboration with local Elizabeth Fry Societies’ Executive Directors, frontline staff, housing managers, and clients. This project was undertaken to better understand both the housing-related challenges and needs of women, trans, non-binary and Two Spirit people during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how local Elizabeth Fry Societies responded. This research, led by Safiyah Rochelle, identified specific issues these stakeholders face in accessing and retaining housing and housing supports, highlighting pressing housing needs that have only become more apparent during the pandemic. The report also drew much-needed attention to the many innovative responses to housing challenges that have been undertaken by our network during this time. The challenges and responses engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the extent to which **collaboration, community, and critical responses operated as central pillars** in not only supporting clients seeking housing and housing-related supports through Elizabeth Fry Societies, but also in reconceptualizing housing and housing-supports.

The Beyond Bricks and Mortar report concludes with the following recommendations for local Elizabeth Fry Societies: (1) Increase and facilitate intra-agency collaboration and formalize community partnerships to advocate for alternative housing models; (2) Identify housing-related needs and supports during client intake; and (3) Expand the use of online platforms and technologies to provide programming, meet housing-related needs, and facilitate easy access to ongoing, responsive assistance. **It also makes the following recommendations for policymakers and government agencies:** (1) Provide funding for housing-related wrap-around services and support; (2) Implement policies and funding streams that enable women, trans, non-binary, and Two Spirit people exiting prisons and

jails to be housed in community; and (3) Implement policies that recognize the importance of meeting housing needs as part of the stated preventative and reintegration goals of the criminal justice system.

#### 4.1.2 Existing research and reports by member societies

The CAEFS Housing Team compiled and reviewed housing research reports and studies produced by or in partnership with CAEFS and member societies from 2012 to present (see Appendix A). These reports provide a robust understanding of key housing challenges experienced by criminalized women and gender-diverse people, and the capacity of Elizabeth Fry Societies to respond to their distinct needs. **Overall, these reports document the existing landscape of available facilities and housing-related resources provided by local Elizabeth Fry Societies; provide context and updates on external research and data about the demographic profile of the women and gender-diverse people who use Elizabeth Fry services; contribute original research to address site-specific context, specific sub-population need, or time-sensitive issue; and identify gaps in knowledge, resources, and service.**

The reports include representation from Pacific, Prairies, Central, and Atlantic regions, and include data from national, provincial/territorial, and municipal sources. The reports combine quantitative and qualitative data gathering and knowledge sharing, using a variety of methods and sources surveys, interviews, focus group, case studies, and literature reviews. **Many of the reports note the use of gender-based and/or trauma-informed methods with frequent emphasis on engaging people with lived experience of housing insecurity and/or criminal justice-related institutions.** The reports also include the participation and perspective of Elizabeth Fry Society directors and staff to learn from their experiences in providing housing and housing-related services and their experiences from working closely with criminalized women and gender-diverse people.

Some of the reports discuss alternative housing models and practices designed to respond to the distinct needs and support the goals of criminalized women and gender-diverse people. Case studies include alternative to incarceration or transitional housing (e.g., healing lodges, community release, home placements), but also more general community-based housing alternatives to mainstream market housing (e.g., non-profit housing, co-ops, shared housing, co-housing, modular housing). Lessons learned and recommendations are offered about gender-responsive design and social arrangements, operations, and programming.

The overarching goal of these housing reports is to improve the capacity of local Elizabeth Fry Societies to provide housing and housing-related supports that better responds to the needs of criminalized women and gender-diverse people, that better facilitate their transition back into community and reduce the barriers to accessing safe and stable housing. The specific recommendations largely focus on improving funding, accessibility,



user experience, design, wrap-around supports, operational efficiency, and overall capacity. Key findings from these reports are reviewed in the analysis and needs assessment outlined below.

### 4.1.3 Housing sector reports on intersecting key issues

The CAEFS Housing Team similarly compiled and reviewed an extensive body of reports, research, and materials on key issues that intersect with the housing experiences of criminalized women and gender-diverse people (see Appendix B for a select bibliography). This literature includes existing research grounded in social work, sociology, criminology, urban planning, public policy, geography, architecture, government data, and lived experience. The collected literature provides important insights and documents experiences of both housing insecurity and criminalization, with particular attention to the impacts on marginalized groups and communities including gender, racialized people, Indigenous people, 2SLGBTQ+ folk, and intersecting issues of poverty, mental health, substance use, and ability.

## 4.2 Summary of key findings

The literature clearly pointing to the bi-directional relationship between homelessness and incarceration and the deepening of the “revolving door” as a result of the current housing crisis are clearly established. However, there remains little research on the unique gendered experiences of women, girls, and gender-diverse people. The few existing studies and reports highlight the extent to which housing insecurity affects women’s involvement with the criminal justice system and identify the importance of safe and stable housing for women both prior to and post incarceration. Below, we summarize some of the key findings from our literature review.

### 4.2.1 GBA+ of housing need and homelessness

The pathways into housing insecurity and homelessness reported by women and gender-diverse people who use Elizabeth Fry services reflect many of those documented in claims previously submitted to the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate. In the preparation of this report, the authors reviewed the human rights claims submitted June 14, 2022 on behalf of the Women’s National Housing and Homelessness Network (WNHHN) and the National Indigenous Feminist Housing Working Group (NIFHWG). Their gender-based analysis and Indigenous knowledge are key to understanding some of the systemic barriers and violations of the right to housing experienced by criminalized women and gender-diverse people. The literature reviewed by the CAEFS Housing Team builds upon the evidence, arguments, and recommendations about ways that the violation of the right to housing is experienced by women, gender-diverse people, Indigenous women, and two-spirit people.

**The risk of both housing insecurity and criminalization increase for those with intersecting experiences of violence, poverty, mental health and substance use issues. These experiences disproportionately impact Indigenous women and girls, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, racialized communities, and people living in northern, rural, and remote communities.**

*Across all our research, one thing has become clear: women and gender-diverse people are facing widespread, systematic violations of their right to housing and their right to substantive equality. These violations all derive from a common systemic issue: the invisibilization of our unique circumstances, needs, dignity, and rights as women, girls, and gender-diverse people. (WNHHN)*

In particular, the grossly disproportionate representation of Indigenous women and two-spirit people in Canadian prisons suggests that the collective trauma, oppression, and dispossession documented in the NIFHG claim are at the core of spatial injustices that are experienced both through housing insecurity and criminalization. The Office of the Correctional Investigator 2022-2023 Annual Report found that the over-representation of Indigenous women in correctional facilities now hovers around 50% of all women in custody. The factors and risk indicators for both criminalization and housing insecurity are systemic, intersecting, and compounding.

#### **4.2.2 Housing insecurity and involvement with criminal justice system**

Criminalized women and gender-diverse people face additional and distinct experiences, barriers, and impacts of housing need both within and beyond their involvement with the criminal justice system. **CAEFS and members Elizabeth Fry Societies, directly see the consequences of a lack of safe, appropriate and affordable housing for their clients, as a pathway into prison, while incarcerated, and following release from prison.** The number of people in prisons designated for women increased by 32.5% between 2009 and 2019.

A key example of a common pathway to involvement with the criminal justice system is the impact of the feminization of poverty on housing stability. As a result of economic marginalization, women and gender-diverse people are more likely to depend on social support systems and interpersonal relationships to access housing. This dependency leaves them vulnerable to disruptions and violence in those relationships. **Many women and gender-diverse people are left with little options other than remaining in unsafe living conditions (including intimate partner violence or unsuitable housing) that may put them at risk for involvement with the criminal justice system. Others may engage in unsafe survival strategies, many of which are criminalized.** Women-led households are also particularly vulnerable with the additional demands and expenses of caregiving.



Harmful systemic social inequalities and decades of austerity and reductions of various social safety nets leave many without needed support.

The systemic economic, social, and spatial barriers experienced by women and gender-diverse people in accessing and retaining safe and affordable housing are further complicated and intensified for those exiting prisons. **Housing options are frequently limited because of the disruption incarceration has on housing and support systems. Even short-term detention can result in eviction, loss of employment, and disruptions to interpersonal relationships needed to secure new housing.** The institutionalization that prisons designated for women engrain creates further social barriers for transitioning back into community.

**For people exiting correctional facilities, many have no home to return to, they face discrimination by landlords, difficulties navigating systems for accessing support, exclusionary municipal planning regulations, and restrictive release conditions.** As a result, many people are released into homelessness, into unsafe housing situations, or situations where they are at increased risk of violating release conditions. **Additionally, the lack of sufficient or appropriate housing and supports, particularly for women, result in many women exiting prison to be relocated far from their communities and family or denied release altogether.** Housing insecurity greatly increases risk of criminalization, revictimization, prolonged incarceration, and further disruptions to family and community connections.

Safe and stable housing is essential in stopping this cycle of (re)incarceration, often referred to as the “revolving door.” **Homelessness, housing instability, and the lack of appropriate housing and sufficient wrap-around supports often contributes to a breach of conditions or further involvement with the criminal justice system.** This systemic issue persists for many criminalized Canadians as social services and community supports are severely under-resourced. Many of the existing housing and residential options and release conditions do not meet the distinct needs of women and gender-diverse people. Decades of innovative proposals for alternative community housing models have largely gone unrealized due to lack of funding, regulatory restrictions, and limitations on the capacity of frontline community to provide housing.

Current housing solutions for people exiting prisons are generally limited to increasing supply of existing transitional residential options including community-based residential facilities or halfway houses including strict supervision and oversight and often disconnected from the supports and community connections. **Community housing providers such as Elizabeth Fry societies and residents continue to identify ways that these models fail in providing sufficient or appropriate housing that responds to the distinct needs of women and gender-diverse people and fails to support them in achieving their reintegration goals and successful transition back into community.** A variety of service and resource improvements and supports are required, including

attention on funding, accessibility, user experience, design, wrap-around supports, operational efficiency, and overall capacity.

### 4.2.3 Impacts of contemporary housing crisis

The unique housing issues outlined above have been exacerbated by the current housing crisis including the financialization of housing, the lack of affordable housing, rising rental costs, the clearing of encampments, and more. As of 2018, 1.6 million Canadians lived in core housing need with unaffordable housing accounting for 74% of these cases. The lack of transitional and affordable housing and necessary housing-related supports in Canada directly affects the most vulnerable and marginalized populations, including those accessing support from member Elizabeth Fry societies. **The lack of sufficient action toward the progressive realization of the right to housing and prioritization of those in greatest housing need by all levels of government is directly placing more women and gender-diverse people at risk not just of homelessness but of involvement with the criminal justice system with increased barriers to successful reintegration and housing stability.**

### 4.2.4 Common issues and barriers to accessing and retaining housing

The reports reviewed highlighted many of the common barriers experienced by criminalized women and gender-diverse people in attaining and retaining safe and stable housing. A summary of these barriers are categorized below as examples of (a) economic, (b) social, and (c) spatial barriers along with difficulties in (d) navigating systems. The economic, social, spatial, and institutional marginalization of women and gender-diverse people as a pathway to involvement with the criminal justice system, throughout their incarceration, and following release from prison creates and reinforces barriers and discrimination to accessing and maintaining safe and stable housing.

<b>Economic marginalization and financial barriers</b>	<b>Social marginalization and social barriers</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of pre-existing housing</li> <li>• Loss of employment/income</li> <li>• Bad or no credit history</li> <li>• Lack of savings for down payment or rent deposit</li> <li>• Engaging in criminalized and unsafe survival strategies to meet housing cost</li> <li>• Criminalization and feminization of poverty</li> <li>• Lack of affordable, appropriate, and stable housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discrimination by landlords, employers, government agents, correctional services, social services, neighbours, police etc. based on criminal background, intersecting identities</li> <li>• Social stigma of criminalization, and co-contributing mental health and substance use issues, and/or income source</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disruption of personal relationships and support network</li> <li>• Institutionalization affects capacity to care for self, to be “good” tenant, and thrive in community</li> </ul>
<b>Spatial marginalization, barriers, and lack of suitable housing</b>	<b>Issues navigating the system</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restrictive place-based release conditions</li> <li>• Zoning restrictions on transitional housing and residential options</li> <li>• Lack of gender-appropriate transitional housing</li> <li>• Released into negative environment, eg substance use, violence</li> <li>• Located far from community, family, social networks</li> <li>• Lack of access to necessary services and supports</li> <li>• Lack of cultural appropriateness</li> <li>• Housing options not suitable for or do not permit children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barriers to accessing social assistance or housing subsidies</li> <li>• Missing necessary documents and references</li> <li>• Lack of release planning and support</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge about housing-related services and supports or how to access them</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge of housing rights or how to protect them</li> <li>• Lack of trust</li> </ul>

#### 4.2.5 Common issues and barriers for housing providers

The CAEFS Housing Team also encountered several accounts within the reports and literature reviewed, and in discussions with member societies, regarding **common structural, social, and systemic issues and barriers faced in providing appropriate housing for the women and gender-diverse people seeking assistance**. Some of the recurring issues include:

- Underfunding and lack of longterm operational funding;
- Downloaded responsibility from governments onto the not-for-profit sector without corresponding supports;
- Restrictive and unrealistic terms of work and oversight by Correctional Services Canada for Community-based Residential Facilities and other supervised residential options
- Transitional housing models that do not sufficiently meet the needs of residents, particularly those deemed as having “high needs”

- Conflicting client needs and release conditions
- Zoning restrictions on the location of Community-based Residential Facilities, other supervised residential options, and transitional/supportive housing
- Insufficient access to wrap-around services
- Staff burn-out and high employee turnover
- Inability to accommodate residents with children, fleeing violence, etc.
- Difficulties adapting to and recovering from Covid-19 Pandemic

## 4.3 Critical frameworks

In developing our understanding of housing and housing-related needs, barriers, and opportunities the CAEFS Housing Team looked to four key critical frameworks that emerge at the intersections of community activism, spatial justice, and scholarship. Our literature review concludes with these critical frameworks for understanding the systemic issues that contribute to both housing insecurity and criminalization including intersectional feminism, prison abolition, and Indigenous knowledge. Foundations in the Right to Housing Movement and contemporary framing of the housing insecurity through the National Housing Strategy and related community advocacy also contributed to our analysis. Each of the four critical frameworks were selected and recognized for the ways in which they support not only the mandate of the CAEFS Housing Project but also the broader vision and purpose of CAEFS. **These additional lenses identify criminalization as a gendered and colonial form of systemic oppression and contribute to our understanding of the violations of the right to safe and adequate housing that we argue includes incarceration, detention, and carceral “residential options” where residents are supervised according to parole, probation, or bail conditions.** A summary of key relevant arguments and issues is outlined below.

### 4.3.1 Gender-based analysis, feminism and intersectional spatial justice

In her 1980 article, feminist architecture scholar Dolores Hayden poses a fundamental question: “What would a non-sexist city be like?” Through a feminist lens she argues that patriarchal and capitalist paradigms embedded in the male-dominated professions of architecture and urban planning developed housing into spatial and social tools that constrained women physically, socially, and economically. Hayden also makes a point to emphasize that women are not just subject to these constraints but that they also actively come together to resist and defy them. Her vision for a non-sexist city not only includes alternative design and housing typologies but also understands the need to position them within and contributing to transformative social and economic models.

Gender-based analysis and feminist projects have continued to give us critical frameworks for making visible the largely implicit biases in how we design cities, neighbourhoods, and homes; and who we design them for. They tell us about how women experience space

differently and what distinct needs and preferences they have. Alternative histories and heritage of women's housing projects have been important in revealing legacies of how women have organized themselves within the city and within community. They offer social and spatial innovations to reimagine our relationship with each other in and with space. **In her 1988 study of Canadian Women's Housing Cooperatives Gerda Wekerle, for example, found that the women's housing projects that explicitly operated with feminist goals empowered women to be in control and share control of their environment, fostered supportive communities where friendships and mutual aid networks could thrive, and offered opportunities to learn new skills.** In other words, community was as important as shelter to these feminist housing models.

There are, however, important limitations of gender-based feminist approaches. While these critiques, policies, design standards, and best practices can improve the built environment for some women they often reproduce systemic inequities and spatial injustices that further marginalized gender-diverse, 2SLGBTQ+, BIPOC, religious minorities, immigrants and refugees, and other groups. Intersectional analysis deepens our understanding of the spatial, structural, social, and economic inequities observed by feminist scholars and activists while also accounting for the diversity and discrepancies in experiences across marginalized and multiply marginalized groups. As many Black, Indigenous, and queer scholars argue, the implicit organizing principles of planning and architecture not only reflect the male-dominated professions but also the oppressive systems of cis-hetero patriarchy, racial capitalism, and settler colonialism. An understanding of these intersecting identities and intersecting systems are needed if we are to address root systemic causes of spatial injustice.

#### 4.3.2 Abolition and abolition geography

The emerging field of abolition geography offers important ways of understanding spatial and material relationships to systemic forms of oppression from an abolitionist perspective. Although abolition is commonly raised as a stance against prisons and policing, geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore argues that: "abolition geography starts from the homely premise that freedom is a place." By proposing that abolition begins "in the context of household or community building rather than criminalization"—in the home rather than the prison—Wilson Gilmore reminds us of our social capacity to organize people, land, and resources together in place and in community. She asks us to imagine home as making freedom, as building community and trust. From this starting place of freedom, we can better understand the places of un-freedom where the organization of people, land, and resources are controlled rather than co-constructed. The fundamental system of this control and un-freedom is that of racial capitalism.

Racial capitalism, according to Wilson Gilmore, is the mode of settler colonial production developed on captive land stolen from Indigenous Peoples and with captive labour stolen

through slavery. Elites shape political, economic, and cultural institutions as mechanisms to continue this extraction of value from and control of labour and land. This concept of racial capitalism helps to shift the way we think of prisons as places of punishment to seeing them as systems for control and extraction that is not limited to the space of the prison, or the people contained within it. Imprisonment disproportionately targets marginalized people and communities, while creating jobs and resource demand across an array of state, private, and non-profit actors, services, programs, and spaces. **The movement of people through the criminal justice system—particularly the movement that traps them in the revolving door of criminalization—is instrumental to propping up and controlling entire ecosystems of economic growth.** This ecosystem is often referred to as the Prison Industrial Complex that is ultimately dependent on keeping prisons and other carceral spaces not only full but expanding.

The social divestment and austerity measures of the past forty years has seen the state increasingly withdraw from providing or funding social services and programs (e.g. healthcare, public housing, education, income supports, arts and culture). **This state divestment has increased the use of prisons and policing as a catchall state solution to social problems including mental health and substance use issues, abuse, poverty, and homelessness.** At the same time, states are increasingly downloading the responsibility for social welfare to the community, most directly in the form of financial support to non-profit organizations including those closely connected to the system of spaces that make up carceral geography from prisons and detention centres, to supporting businesses, to shelters, to transitional housing, etc. In 2017, INCITE!, a network of radical feminists of colour, published “The Revolution Will Not Be Funded” anthology to make visible the ways non-profit structure and relationship to the state obstructs radical movements through the Non-profit Industrial Complex.

#### 4.3.3 Indigenous homelessness and settler colonialism

The interconnections of criminalization and homelessness with settler colonialism and racism are also centred in the work of Indigenous abolition activists and scholars, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIW). **The NIMMIW identifies barriers to housing, along with education, employment, health services, and standard of living that are disproportionately experienced by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBRQQIA people as social and economic marginalization that maintain colonial violence.** Systemic and institutionalized marginalization and barriers to accessing basic life needs and security perpetuate violence and trauma and place individuals and communities at high risk for involvement with the criminal justice system. By framing Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBRQQIA people as rights holders, and human rights as interrelated, the NIMMIW insists on solutions for ending violence by addressing underlying systemic causes and the ways colonialism perpetuates the violation of human rights and dignity.

Métis-Cree author and scholar Jesse Thistle draws on Indigenous teachings and his own lived experience of homelessness, trauma, and addiction to explain how the state and systems of oppression have produced Indigenous homelessness through the multiple institutions that displace, dispossess, and destabilize people and land. Thistle critiques the state definition of homelessness as a further example of control and institutional erasure of traditional worldviews. He explains how the Canadian Definition of Homelessness as unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated, or at risk of homelessness, reproduces a Western definition of home as “structures of habitation.” Thistle elaborates that these structures of habitation are both the “brick and mortar” physical structure and the social and political forces of daily life that delineate gender roles, family structures, and work habits that reinforce “dominant capital-driven notions of home space as commodity and the anchor of social relationships.” Defining homelessness relative to these structures of habitation fails to acknowledge or recognize the full extent of Indigenous homelessness, the many ways “being without All My Relations” is experienced, and the many ways it is systemically reproduced by the settler colonial state, racism, patriarchy, and capitalism.

#### 4.3.4 Right to housing and National Housing Strategy

The right to housing builds on the concept of the right to the city and the general aspiration to imagine an alternative to the capitalist city where the city was collectively made for people rather than in service of capital. The right to housing has foundations in anti-capitalist politics and academic theory, and in radical grassroots organizing that translate abstract ideals into concrete demands for transformative social, political, and economic change. The right to housing is also increasingly adopted in more formal institutional pursuits, legislation, and policies by governments, legal supports, non-profits and social agencies promoting and protecting human rights, social justice, and equality.

In 1948, the United Nations recognized the right to adequate housing in the Declaration of Human Rights and again in the 1966 International Covenant on Economics, Social and Cultural Rights. The right to housing is broadly interpreted as the right to live somewhere in security, peace, and dignity, and is “recognized as a fundamental human right because it is integral to core human rights values such as dignity, equality, inclusion, well-being, security of the person and public participation.” The essential features of adequate housing are further defined as: legal security of tenure; availability of services and materials; affordability; habitability; accessibility; location; and cultural adequacy.

The Right to Housing Campaign in Canada draws on decades of grassroots activism, the UN human rights bodies, housing and legal experts, and court challenges. This civil society and activist campaign to petition the government to enshrine the right to housing in legislation with appropriate rights-based accountability mechanisms, also led to the establishment of the National Right to Housing Network. The network includes “over 350

key leaders, organizations, subject matter experts, and people with lived experience of housing precarity and homelessness with a shared mission to fully realize the right to housing for all, and ultimately eliminate homelessness in Canada.” The right to housing is increasingly referenced and mobilized by an array of housing justice and tenant groups, grassroots and non-profit community organizations, social agencies, academics in multiple disciplines, and other social justice movements advocating for marginalized communities. The contemporary housing crisis includes high-profile struggles against housing insecurity including displacement, evictions, renovictions, gentrification, affordability, and homelessness. The violation of the right to housing is increasingly recognized as intersecting with the violation of other human rights and as contributing to systemic forms of oppression.

In response to the present housing crisis and Right to Housing campaign, the Government of Canada recognized the right to housing in the 2019 National Housing Strategy Act (NHSA). The NHSA recognizes that “the right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right affirmed in international law” and that “housing is essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person and to building sustainable and inclusive communities.” The legislation commits to the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing, improved housing outcomes that contribute to social, economic, health and environmental goals, and prioritizing improved housing outcomes for those in greatest need. Also included in the NHSA are commitments to participatory processes—especially vulnerable groups and persons with lived experience of housing need and homelessness—and commitments to rights-based accountability mechanisms.

The legal structure of the right to housing as a progressive right is intended to address systemic issues and violations rather than addressing individual cases. The NHSA “does not give rise to legally binding orders from a court or an official tribunal, but it creates meaningful accountability and access to justice for the right to housing through other means” Canada’s right to housing accountability mechanisms include the Federal Housing Advocate, the National Housing Council, and review panels. The new role of these mechanisms will be to hear from rights-claimants and “assessing whether assessing whether or not the Government of Canada has violated the right to adequate housing, and identifying measures necessary to address systemic barriers.” The intent and expectation are that these mechanisms move away from the existing adversarial approach of courts and landlord tenant board as the avenue for advocating for and asserting the right to housing.



## 5 CAEFS Housing Strategy Development and Recommendations

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A key initiative of the CAEFS Housing Project was to develop a rights-based housing strategy focused on building housing principles, resources, and advocacy that better respond to the distinct needs of criminalized women and gender-diverse people, disrupt the cycles and systems of criminalization and homelessness, and contribute to the meaningful co-creation of thriving communities without prisons. In addition to the individual interviews conducted as part of the CAEFS National Housing Portrait, member societies were engaged in the co-development of the housing strategy during a two-day housing and residential options summit held in Montreal in September 2022. The following section summarized the key activities and findings of this work and engagement. Combining the data gathered from member societies through the CAEFS National Housing Portrait and the key findings from the literature review with what we heard during the CAEFS Housing Summit, we offer recommendations and key considerations for the development of a CAEFS Housing Strategy (5.2) and additional recommendations and key considerations for evaluating the role of and improving conditions in residential options (5.3). We conclude this section with suggestions for applying abolitionist strategies to the evaluation of strategies, actions, and outcomes of CAEFS' ongoing housing work.

### 5.1 Housing and Residential Options Summits

The CAEFS Housing Summit brought together the Executive Directors and/or Housing Directors from member Elizabeth Fry Societies across Canada. Participants also included the Transformational Voices and Systems Change Committee and CAEFS National Office Team. The summit was held September 24-25, 2022 in Montreal. The summit was co-facilitated by the CAEFS Housing Development Coordinators Sarah Gelbard and Nat Pace. Members of the CAEFS National Office Team assisted with facilitating group discussions, taking notes, and coordinating logistics. The CAEFS National Office Team convened a day early for team building and facilitation training.

The summit followed a modified World Café methodology for facilitating group dialogue and meaningful discussions. This method was selected for its approach to creating a welcoming environment; exploring questions that matter; encouraging everyone's

contribution; connecting diverse perspectives; and listening together for patterns and insights.

The first day of the summit focused on discussions that could contribute to the revision of the CAEFS Housing Principles by thinking through definitions of housing and how to position our housing work within the newly implemented CAEFS vision and statement of purpose. The table discussions then moved into sharing ideas for improving available housing and housing-related supports; mobilizing around the right to housing movement and NHSA; and deeper dives into key issues identified by the CAEFS Housing Team. The CAEFS Housing Team also gave brief presentations on the Right to Housing, and findings of the National Housing Portrait. A list of the discussion prompts for the table discussions are included in Appendix D. Overall, the housing summit helped us to explore the following key questions:

- What role should CAEFS and member societies play in improving access to and quality of the housing and housing-related supports they provide?
- What role should CAEFS and member societies play in advancing the right to housing?
- What supports and resources do member societies need to fulfill the roles?
- What opportunities does the National Housing Strategy and Right to Housing movement create that CAEFS and/or Elizabeth Fry societies should mobilize?
- What should CAEFS prioritize in its housing work moving forward?

An evening reception included a poster display of the CAEFS National Housing Portrait and selections from the society housing profiles, and offered an informal setting for participants to carry on discussions from the day.

Day two of the summit focused on residential options including community-based residential facilities (CBRFs) and considered how these do and do not fit within our discussions of housing and the development of a CAEFS Housing Strategy. The CAEFS Housing Team began with a background presentation on Creating Choices (discussed above) and overview of residential options. In response to some difficult discussions and responses that emerged through the presentation, we recognized that additional work is needed to ground these difficult discussions, in particular with regards to better supporting and respecting the participation of those with lived experience and marginalized identities. Rather than proceed with the planned discussion prompts, the remaining time was used to debrief, and to discuss definitions of abolition and needed supports within community residential facilities. A list of the discussion prompts originally planned for day 2 are also included for reference in Appendix D.

## 5.2 CAEFS Housing Strategy Recommendations

The CAEFS Housing Team offers the following areas of development for the CAEFS Housing Strategy: (5.2.1) revise the CAEFS Housing Principles; (5.2.1) build network capacity and responsiveness; (5.2.3) advance participation in right to housing advocacy. Each recommendation is elaborated upon with key considerations based on our key findings from the literature review and what we heard during the CAEFS Housing Summit.

### 5.2.1 Revise the CAEFS Housing Principles

***Articulate shared housing principles and accountability frameworks for housing and housing-related programs across the CAEFS membership.*** CAEFS developed preliminary housing principles in 2021. We recommend revisiting these principles and to think through how they align with (a) the CAEFS Vision and Statement of Purpose; (b) new federal legislation recognizing the right to housing; and (c) findings of the CAEFS Housing Team. These shared principles will be key foundations for guiding strategic priorities and establishing evaluation and accountability frameworks in our housing strategy.

*Key considerations based on what we heard:*

**Language around housing:** The National Housing Strategy and the right to housing provide some useful language around housing that include seven dimensions of “adequate housing.” These could help to expand the housing principles to include more than just “safe and stable” as qualifiers for what is to be included in the CAEFS housing principles. We also heard about ways that housing and home can be experienced beyond these pragmatic and material qualities of “housing” and the need to consider emotional, psychological, sensorial, and social dimension of the “home” and how they contribute to individual and community well-being.

**Respecting diversity of experiences and meaning of home:** While recognizing the ways in which prisons fail to meet the human rights standards of adequate, appropriate, and safe housing, we also heard how for some women and gender-diverse people impacted by criminalization, prison may be the safest and most stable home they have known. For some, home has been a space of violence, trauma, and disbelonging. Additionally, while cultural appropriateness may be considered a condition of adequate housing, the standardized operational definition of housing reflects many colonial and Western institutional frameworks and worldviews that do not represent the diversity of cultural meanings, traditions, and relationships of home. Care should be taken when expressing principles about what home is or is not.

**Explicit acknowledgement of oppressive systems:** We heard repeatedly within the research and from those with lived experience how both housing insecurity and criminalization are perpetuated through intersecting oppressive systems of patriarchy,

settler colonialism, racism, and capitalism. These systems operate across the many institutions that govern our lives including the criminal justice system, the housing sector, urban planning, finance, and all levels of government. A strong statement of housing principles needs to acknowledge that these systems contribute to carcerality. This acknowledgement positions housing insecurity as one of the persistent ways in which women and gender-diverse people impacted by criminalization are denied humanity and excluded from community.

**Naming pathways forward and our role:** The interconnection between not only safe and stable housing but the sense of being at home in community reflects the CAEFS vision for strong and well-resourced communities for everyone as key to a world without prisons. Our housing strategy imagines more than just housing service provisions. It can also be a recognition of those seeking housing and housing-related services as rights holders within the legislative and social frameworks of the right to housing.

## 5.2.2 Build network capacity and responsiveness

***Identify priority areas for building capacity for the provision of housing and/or housing-based services through knowledge exchange, resource development, funding opportunities, and collaborative partnerships across the CAEFS network.*** CAEFS and member societies have identified many of the common barriers and issues encountered in providing housing and housing-related services to criminalized women and gender-diverse people. Based on what the Housing Team found in reviewing housing reports and following discussions about additional issues faced by and solutions pursued by members, we recommend identifying key resources and supports needed to address key barriers faced by our membership and expand the network's collective capacity for developing, operating, and maintaining sustainable and responsive community housing solutions for women and gender-diverse persons caught in the "revolving door" of homelessness and incarceration.

*Key considerations based on what we heard:*

**Gender diversity and trans-inclusivity:** Members approach gender inclusion using different protocols and policies. For example, some offer housing to anyone who identifies as a woman (i.e., including trans women but not trans men people or non-binary people). Others offer housing to all women and all gender-diverse people. Several housing outreach programs accept people of all genders, including cisgender men and boys. Gender-diverse people face unique barriers accessing housing. Additional engagement is needed to address how network members' housing programs can better respond to the specific needs of gender-diverse people.

**Indigenous leadership and reconciliation:** The severity of the disproportionate representation of Indigenous women, girls, and two spirited people impacted by both criminalization and housing insecurity demands acknowledgment of the particular

violence perpetuated through settler colonialism. Any housing strategy and action needs to carefully consider the intergenerational impacts of both housing insecurity, displacement, and criminalization and be conscious of imposing further colonial responses. There is a need for Indigenous-led housing solutions that assert Indigenous rights and sovereignty, and respect Indigenous traditions and teaching about being at home, in community, and in relation.

**Black voices and confronting racist systems:** We also heard that CAEFS and member societies have work to do in our own spaces and operations to better represent and support Black and other racialized people. There is a disproportionate representation of Black, Indigenous, and other racialized people in prison, and therefore also among those accessing services of CAEFS and member societies. We recommend acknowledging how existing service-provider to service-recipient relationship reproduces racialized power dynamics and the need to be more vigilant in the work to dismantle them. In recognizing intersecting systems of oppression, CAEFS must also take care not to erase or silence the unique histories and circumstances that impact Black communities and individuals and that shape their experiences of criminalization and housing insecurity within racist systems.

**Designs, supports, and accommodations for “high needs”:** Many current housing options and release plans fail to sufficiently support and/or accommodate the diversity of needs of women and gender-diverse people, let alone those impacted by criminalization. Housing should be thought of as not only contributing to, but encompassing a holistic understanding of wellbeing and being in community. Violence, trauma, mental health and substance use issues, and family reconnection can all be thought of in relation to housing needs. Better recognition is needed of how reliance on existing systems (or lack thereof) can perpetuate bad coping mechanisms and reliance on unhealthy relationships. There is need for better alternatives and for better social supports in general as prevention to criminalization and incarceration. People whose needs are met can spend their time in culture, community, instead of in survival mode.

**Reimagining tenancy through community belonging and rights:** By directly providing housing to residents, members are in a position of power over their residents. Within emergency, transitional, and supporting housing, residents are not protected by tenant-landlord law, further diminishing their legal power. Meanwhile, the underfunding of housing options, housing-related supports, and other necessary services places strain on the capacity of member societies to support residents in meeting their long-term housing and reintegration goals. The diverse needs of residents, staff, and neighbours are frequently at odds. Avoiding the reproduction of exploitative, “power over” dynamics is one the major challenges of providing housing as feminist abolitionists. There are various scenarios where a resident may be forced to move out against their will, such as coming to the end of a program length, changing circumstances (change in income, cohabitating with

partner), or breach of house rules. Sound eviction prevention strategies are necessary to eliminate forced evictions and support positive housing outcomes. We recommend further consideration of the ways that members' housing reproduce uneven power dynamics and what ways they do or can challenge those power dynamic. Additionally, we recommend a rights-based evaluation and consultation with Elizabeth Fry Societies on tenant protection regulations and exemptions for residents in transitional housing, with attention paid to the potential for further criminalization or other rights violations.

**Fostering collaboration and solidarity:** The scarce resources and institutional oversight under which the CAEFS network operates often places member societies in competition rather than in solidarity with one another. We have also experienced the strength of collaboration and ways that sharing knowledge and resources strengthens both individual and collective capacity to tackle the many barriers and challenges faced in supporting those impacted by criminalization. One of the most frequently suggested ways to advance CAEFS's housing work is for the creation of shared resource platform for members. Such a platform could assist members in many dimensions of their work and is not exclusive to housing, however, housing is an important dimension to be included in the development, implementation, and maintenance of such a platform. Housing operations guides, housing development guides, and shared funding applications were all identified as desired resources.

Improved collaboration across the network also raised an important area for both interpersonal and institutional learning. We not only heard about the need to develop our abilities to hold space for difficult conversations, diverse experiences, and different positionalities—we also encountered spaces where we failed to do so, particularly with our colleagues and collaborators with lived experience. These are areas for continued growth, compassion, and learning.

### 5.2.3 Participate in right to housing advocacy

***Identify priority advocacy areas in protecting the rights of criminalized women and gender diverse people by seizing new opportunities under the National Housing Strategy Act and strategic partnerships with other housing rights organizations and advocates.*** The CAEFS housing team conducted community sector outreach to other organizations engaged in the right to housing, community housing providers, housing advocacy, and housing research (see appendix C). We need to strategize how to best mobilize the current moment in housing rights advocacy to best defend and promote the rights of criminalized women and gender-diverse people.

*Key considerations based on what we heard:*

**Thinking about housing before, during, and after prison:** Poor housing situations, both before and after incarceration, have detrimental effects for women. Access to adequate

housing can significantly improve the social and environmental determinants of health and wellbeing and reduce the need to engage in various criminalized survival strategies. Safe and stable housing is shown to support post-incarceration goals and decrease rates of recriminalization for people exiting prisons. Housing can be a key strategy area to preventing both criminalization and recriminalization. As housing becomes a major area of government intervention, we can position CAEFS into contemporary advocacy efforts by framing our work within a rights-based approach that recognizes intersections between the housing and carceral continuums. To amplify our work and contribute to broader movement, we should continue relationship and partnership building with other rights-based housing organizations, networks, activists, and scholars.

**Human rights submission to the Federal Housing Advocate:** The CAEFS Housing Team began the work of drafting a submission highlighting the persistent ways that the housing sector and criminal justice system violate the right to housing of criminalized women and gender-diverse people. We recommend CAEFS continued engagement with the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, the Women’s National Housing and Homelessness Network, and the Neha Review Panel in addressing the persistent ways in which women and gender-diverse people impacted by criminalization are denied humanity and excluded from community as a result of the failure to prevent and eliminate homelessness. (see 6.1 for additional information). Include recommendations and supports for including representation from organizations that work with criminalized women and gender diverse people - including people with lived experience.

## 5.3 CAEFS Residential Options Recommendations

Following from the distinction made in the CAEFS National Housing Portrait between housing and “residential options” (spaces and services where residents are supervised according to parole, probation, or bail conditions), recommendations related to residential options are offered separately from the CAEFS Housing Strategy. The recommendations outlined in detail below include (5.3.1) evaluating the role of community residential options and their ongoing participation in carceral systems, and (5.3.2) key strategic directions and priorities to improving transitional residential options in the short and long run.

### 5.3.1 Evaluate the role of community residential options

***Identify what opportunities and/or barriers exist in realizing safe and stable housing through available community residential options.*** CBRFs are intended to transition people incarcerated within federal institutions back into community. The oversight of these facilities by Correctional Service Canada (CSC) and the restrictive conditions placed both on residents and service providers, however, frequently fail to address the distinct needs of criminalized women and gender-diverse people and frequently fail to support them in achieving their reintegration goals and transition back into community. We need to

continue considering how and if CBRFs and the variety of other residential options offered by CAEFS member societies fit within the housing principles and accountability frameworks discussed during the CAEFS Housing Summit and the CAEFS Vision and Statement of Purpose.

*Key considerations based on what we heard:*

**Community-based residential facilities (CBRFs) and reproduction of the carceral**

**system:** Across Canada, members collectively run about one-third of all CBRFs designated for women, representing a major strategic opportunity. CBRFs can enable women and gender-diverse people to leave prisons earlier and support their re-integration process. On the other hand, the operation as CBRFs and CSC oversight can be seen as contributing to the reproduction and growth of Canada's prison system. Some CAEFS members are strongly opposed to establishing said projects, while others express interest in establishing or expanding CBRFs as a key service provision for exiting prisons. There is clearly division of opinions throughout the network and exploring the issue deeper may prove enlightening for a strategic path forward.

### 5.3.2 Set key strategic directions and priorities

**Identify priority areas for improving community residential options in the short and long term.** The CAEFS Housing Team discovered that CAEFS members operate 9 out of the 25 Community Residential Facilities designated exclusively for people exiting women's institutions in Canada. We need to consider how we can mobilize the potential strength of this collective position (a) to leverage improved supports in funding, operations, supply, and access to CBRFs, and (b) to develop strategies for transforming community residential options to create better options for more supportive transitions to long term safe and stable housing.

*Key considerations based on what we heard:*

**Better decision-making in selecting housing options:** Currently, there is a disparity in access to CBRFs across Canada, both in terms of the number of available beds and appropriateness. As a result, some women and gender-diverse people are denied release because of the lack of available beds or alternatively, relocated to another region far from home, family, and/or appropriate supports. Release planning, when it happens, frequently does not include evaluating or selecting the most appropriate residential option. We heard interest in developing a systems map framework for navigating and evaluating the available options for community residential facilities. The map would assess the types of CBRFs operated by member Societies in relation to (a) the type of release, (b) the type of oversight, and (b) the type of services and supports required and/or offered. A systems map could provide important information as part of release planning in finding the best



available option. It also helps us to gain a global picture of how the system works or doesn't work.

**Harm reduction and improving available residential options:** Recognizing the barriers to fully realizing housing principles within the context of CBRFs as they currently exist, at least opens a call for harm reduction and improved options. Issues related to accessing CBRFs in a timely manner, geographic disparities, accommodating children, access to wrap-around supports, improved living conditions, staff burn-out and high turn-over, etc. were identified as areas the member societies need to address within CBRFs along with more dignified and respectful relationship between staff and residents. We heard requests for better staff training and best practices guidelines. CAEFS could also help to advocate for improved funding and to move oversight out of CSC control to give member societies operating CBRFs greater flexibility and opportunities to better respond to the needs of residents and to offer residential options that are as safe, stable, appropriate, and dignified as possible.

**Decision-making in day-to-day life within the residence:** The effects of institutionalization through incarceration present barriers for many of the residents in CBRFs. We heard about the importance of supporting residents without further entrenching patronizing care services. Increased decision-making by residents in their day-to-day life was identified as having substantial impact on the sense of dignity and wellbeing that can contribute to both independence and sense of belonging and responsibility to community.

**Improving transition to long-term housing:** The experience and conditions of transitional housing and community residential options can have significant impact on residents meeting their long-term housing and other post-incarceration goals. It is important to recognize the assistance that may be needed to overcome the many pragmatic issues to secure long term housing and the potential stabilizing impact housing can have on other measures of wellbeing. It is equally important to recognize the many "soft skills," wrap-around services, healing, and community connections that contribute to successful transitions back into community. It may be helpful to think through transitional housing supports as "housing first but not housing only."

**Divestment strategy and changes CSC oversight:** Orienting housing principles to support the CAEFS vision of a world without prisons comes with an obligation to develop a divestment strategy that moves CBRFs away from CSC oversight and increasingly towards community-based housing. While we acknowledge the pressure on the existing system and difficulties in meeting the demand for release beds, careful consideration must be given to the expansion of any carceral infrastructure including CBRFs. We suggest that a more sustainable and effective long-term solution involves divestment and efforts to reduce the demand for release beds both upstream through efforts to reduce incarceration rates, and downstream by improving options and supports for community release.

## 5.4 Evaluating strategies, actions, and outcomes

Reflecting the statement of purpose of CAEFS, housing strategies, principles, priorities, and actions should “work to address the persistent ways in which women and gender-diverse people are impacted by criminalization are denied humanity and excluded from community.” This work should contribute to the vision of “a world without prisons with strong and well-resourced communities for everyone.” As such, the CAEFS Housing Team identifies the housing work reported and recommended here as abolitionist, and that abolition is itself a work in progress. We recommend that evaluation and accountability frameworks be informed by abolitionist practices.

Inspired by the resource guide “So is this Actually an Abolitionist Proposal or Strategy” (<https://www.interruptingcriminalization.com/binder>) the following revised set of questions can help to guide the co-development of CAEFS Housing Principles, Strategies, and Resources and to evaluate actions and outcomes in move CAEFS’ housing work forwards towards a world without prisons.

- Does it provide material relief?
- Does it improve our capacity to provide material relief through improved housing options?
- Does it respect and advance the rights of criminalized women and gender-diverse people?
- Does it legitimize or expand the carceral system we’re trying to dismantle?
- Does it preserve existing power relations?
- Does it undermine efforts to organize and mobilize the most affected or most marginalized?
- How does it help us build power?

## 6 Additional Recommendations

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There is still a notable continued lack of research, policies, and program funding to address the housing crisis as experienced by criminalized women and gender-diverse people. In synthesizing the findings of the CAEFS National Housing Portrait, our work in developing a National Housing Strategy, and what we heard during the CAEFS Housing Summit, the CAEFS Housing Team has additional housing-related recommendations for responding to the distinct needs of criminalized women and gender-diverse people, disrupting the cycles and systems of criminalization and homelessness, and contributing to the meaningful co-creation of thriving communities without prisons. We direct these recommendations to (6.1) the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate and the Neha Review Panel; (6.2) ongoing advocacy and knowledge exchange; (6.3) ongoing and future research collaborations; and (6.4) targeted recommendations to all levels of government.

### 6.1 NEHA Review Panel and the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate

As part of the National Housing Strategy Act (NHSA), a new accountability mechanism was introduced through the creation of the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate. Included in the responsibilities of this new office is to receive submissions from people across Canada on the systemic housing issues they are facing. The Advocate conducts a review and/or requests the National Housing Council establish a Review Panel to hold a hearing on any systemic housing issue within federal jurisdiction. Recommendations are forwarded to the Minister responsible for housing who must respond within 120 days in the House of Commons and the Senate.

The housing experiences of and impacts on criminalized women and gender-diverse people shared across the reports and research reviewed, engagement with CAEFS and its member societies and lived experience experts in this report correspond directly to the terms of reference and call for written and oral testimony by the Neha Review Panel on the Government of Canada's failure to prevent and eliminate homelessness amongst women and gender-diverse people, and particularly those who are Indigenous. We recommend that CAEFS submit this report to the Neha Review Panel as a summary of some of the key visions, knowledge, reasons, and actions needed to address the housing experiences and rights violations of women and gender-diverse people impacted by criminalization.

**CAEFS endorsement of the WNHHN and NIFHWG human rights claims:** In their submission to the Federal Housing Advocate in June 2022, WNHHN argues that “hidden homelessness” is a common systemic issue and policy choice resulting in “gender-based violations of our right to housing and our right to substantive equality.” Other women’s rights organizations, housing advocates, and scholars similarly argue that women and gender-diverse people are under-represented and under-served by Canadian housing policies, programs, and the NHSA. The “sister claims” already submitted to the Federal Housing Advocate by WNHHN and National Indigenous Feminist Housing Working Group (NIFHWG) outline the human rights violations, failures of the NHSA to uphold its commitments and human rights framework, failures of the government of Canada to be accountable to its own commitments and highlight the disproportionate impact on women, gender diverse-people, Indigenous women and girls, and Two-Spirit people. The CAEFS Team participated in consultations by WNHHN throughout the preparation of their claim. CAEFS and the authors of this report endorse both the WNHHN and NIFHWG claims.

**Attention to the unique and diverse experiences and needs of criminalized women and gender-diverse people:** In addition to seeing the gendered experiences and needs of criminalized women and gender-diverse people represented in the WNHHN and NIFHWG claims, this report brings specific attention to their experiences and impacts as people with experiences of criminalization. This report outlines the bi-directional and intersectional framework for understanding the link between housing insecurity and criminalization; the distinct and compounding forms of discrimination and barriers to accessing and retaining housing for criminalized women and gender-diverse people; the structural and systemic barrier to providing the necessary housing and housing-related supports; and key recommendations. We recommend that the Neha Review Panel include findings on the particular ways in which the failures of the federal government to reduce housing need further contributes to the growing incarceration rates among women and gender-diverse people and the systemic criminalization of Indigenous women, Two-spirit, and gender-diverse people.

**Supporting oral testimony of both incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women and gender-diverse people:** Special considerations are needed when soliciting oral testimony from people with experiences of criminalization, particularly those still in prison or on parole. We recommend that the Neha Review Panel work with CAEFS and Elizabeth Fry Societies to coordinate oral testimony sessions for currently incarcerated women and gender-diverse people and those on parole to protect their rights and security.

**Recognition of diverse and intersecting “priority populations”:** We also recommend close consideration of how future claims representing other priority populations can be read as intersecting with and parallel to the gendered forms of housing need, criminalization and systemic oppression documented in this report and the claims

submitted by WNHHN and NIFHWG. We recommend that this review panel be an opportunity to address not only the economic and technical barriers to housing but an opportunity to meaningfully address the layers of social injustices, inequities, harm, and violations of human rights reproduced across and by the housing sector.

## 6.2 Advocacy and Knowledge Exchange

To disrupt the “revolving door” of homelessness and incarceration, we need supportive community-led housing models that meaningfully address the intersection of contributing systemic vulnerabilities experienced by criminalized women and gender-diverse people in securing housing and transitioning back into community. Frontline community organizations including Elizabeth Fry Societies (Elizabeth Fry societies) are essential community housing providers and innovators. Because Elizabeth Fry societies work closely with criminalized women and gender-diverse people transitioning back into community, they have a deep understanding of their distinct housing needs and barriers.

### 6.2.1 Internal knowledge exchange and capacity building

Through its network structure, CAEFS has the opportunity to mobilize member Elizabeth Fry societies to build a better collective understanding of local, regional, and national housing needs, barriers, and capacities. To translate knowledge and experience into effective and innovative housing solutions, we have identified two key challenges to address: (1) Member Elizabeth Fry societies face steep learning curves when undertaking housing development projects and need to build capacity for effectively navigating design, planning, construction, renovation, and maintenance of bricks and mortar housing solutions; (2) Member Elizabeth Fry societies are overextended, underfunded, and often forced into competitive funding and program support that stifle our capacity to collaborate and innovate.

**Build collaborative resources and advocacy tools:** To build capacity for Elizabeth Fry societies to more effectively lead the design, development, and operations of alternative housing solutions that respond to housing needs, we recommend the development of a collaborative platform for sharing resources and advocacy tools. The CAEFS Housing Team worked directly with network member to collaboratively create resources, and advocacy tools that can be included. The team wrote a briefing document about the underfunding of Community Residential Facilities and request for alternative funding models as part of a network-wide presentation to Correctional Services of Canada. The team also assisted a member society to challenge a land-use zoning restriction on a potential new residential facility. We recommend continuing this work to build knowledge sharing platforms, knowledge exchange workshops, and databases that will facilitate the sharing of best practices, development strategies, and funding applications across the network.

## 6.2.2 Outreach and network development

The CAEFS housing team engaged in community sector outreach to other organizations involved in the right to housing, community housing providers, housing advocacy, and housing research. From 2021-2022, we met with representatives of dozens of organizations, government agencies, and researchers (see Appendix C). We attended and participated in dozens of housing-related workshops, seminars, conferences, and summits. We also collected and reviewed hundreds of housing-related reports, studies, and other reference material. The knowledge, experience, and support of the many people, communities, and organizations working to end homelessness have informed and guided our work throughout the project. Sarah Gelbard presented work on behalf of the CAEFS Housing Team at the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness Conference in 2022 as part of the Realizing the Right to Housing session stream. A recording of her presentation is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qosQoTdL3po>.

The CAEFS Housing Team's outreach activities facilitated critical knowledge exchange, networking, and potential collaborations with other community-led organizations and researchers operating at the intersections of housing, human rights, criminalization, and gender-based violence. We recommend ongoing relationship building and development of these advocacy networks.

## 6.3 Ongoing and future research collaborations

### 6.3.1 Mapping Housing Journeys

Dr. Sarah Gelbard is continuing some of the research started as the CAEFS Housing Development Coordinator with a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and a SSHRC Partnership Engage Grant. This research will bring together people with lived experience, frontline community workers and activists, and academic researchers in a series of storytelling and counter-mapping workshops to produce collective stories of housing insecurity, spatial injustice, gender, and criminalization. This study will use narrative analysis and speculative co-creation to examine the stabilizing and destabilizing forces, systems, and relationships that move us closer to, or further away from, being at home and being safe in community. This research fellowship is under the co-supervision of Dr. Justin Piché and Dr. Jennifer Kilty at the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa. The project is being developed through ongoing collaborations between Dr. Gelbard, CAEFS, and the Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network.

### 6.3.2 The Centre for Research into the Processes, Outcomes, and Impacts of Incarceration (CRPOI)

This recently launched centre brings together a national interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral network of researchers, non governmental advocacy organizations, and experts with lived experience of incarceration into a connected research community to increase evidence about the impacts of incarceration in Canada on individuals, families, communities, and on society. CRPOI promotes community engaged and participatory action research. We center meaningful engagement with impacted populations as a mechanism to deepen cultures of responsible research, while encouraging knowledge mobilization, especially working to ensure research informs policy and legislative change related to incarceration in Canada. They provide several leadership opportunities as a mechanism to support positive social engagement for criminalized peoples; this includes leadership through our Expert Advisor Roster, an amazing list of individuals who researchers and ngo's can reach out to, to participate in research teams, and CRPOI's National Steering Committee, which includes 8 individuals with lived experience of incarceration who provide thought leadership and direction for the Centre.

## 6.4 Targeted recommendations to government

### 6.4.1 Federal government, Ministry of Housing

**Inclusion of people with experiences of criminalization as a priority population in the NHSA:** Although the demographics of those who seek housing and housing-related supports from Elizabeth Fry societies include almost all the priority populations outlined in the National Housing Strategy Act (NHSA), there is no explicit recognition of criminalized people and no mechanism for recognizing the intersectionality of priority populations that exists within the criminal justice system and housing sectors. The NHSA also fails to acknowledge the systemic inequities that make these groups vulnerable to housing insecurity and fails to acknowledge the responsibility of institutionalized systems that continue to reproduce housing insecurity and pathways to criminalization, mental health and substance use issues, violence, and trauma. We call for the inclusion of people with experiences of criminalization as a recognized group in great housing need. Additionally, we call for a national strategy to ensure that provincially and federally incarcerated people are counted as unhoused people.

**Increase funding for housing-related wrap-around services and support for women and gender-diverse people:** The reduction and elimination of homelessness among women and gender-diverse people can significantly reduce criminalization rates and improve the outcomes for those exiting prison. Action is needed to create upstream solutions to reduces housing need among women and gender-diverse people prior to involvement with the criminal justice system, and downstream solutions to support those

already impacted by housing insecurity and criminalization. We recommend a recommitment of the federal government to the progressive realization of the right to housing and allocation of available resources to prioritizing those in greatest need.

#### 6.4.2 Federal Government, Ministry of Public Safety

##### **Review of release planning practices and release (parole) conditions related to**

**housing:** We recommend implement policies that recognize the importance of meeting housing needs as part of the stated preventative and reintegration goals of the criminal justice system. Residential options including community-based residential facilities and bail beds should adhere to the definition of adequate housing as defined by the NHSA. We further recommend a rights-based evaluation of release Correctional Service Canada imposed (parole) restrictions that violate the right to housing and/or unnecessarily restrict the access to and retention of adequate housing as defined by the NHSA.

**Support for non-carceral alternatives:** Implement policies and funding streams that enable women, trans, non-binary, and Two Spirit people exiting prisons and jails to be housed in community.

#### 6.4.3 Provincial and Municipal Governments

**Removal of exclusionary zoning on transitional housing:** We recommend a rights-based evaluation of exclusionary zoning bylaws and official planning policy that prohibit the location of transitional housing, community residential facilities, correctional community residential facilities, halfway houses, boarding houses, or other supportive housing within zones designated residential. This includes the removal of any exclusionary zoning bylaw or planning policy that violates the right to housing, including the rights of people with criminal records.

**Improved tenant protections and eviction prevention:** We recommend the implementation of tenant protections for residents in transitional housing and improved tenant protections against discrimination on the basis of involvement with the criminal justice system. Additionally, there is a need for sound eviction prevention strategies are necessary to eliminate forced evictions and support positive housing outcomes. We recommend a rights-based evaluation and consultation with Elizabeth Fry Societies on tenant protection regulations and exemptions for residents in transitional housing, with attention paid to the potential for further criminalization or other rights violations.



## Appendix A

### CAEFS and member societies housing-related reports

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The following reports and studies include those produced by or in collaboration with CAEFS and/or member societies. Reports were collected through Internet searches and/or shared by member societies during the National Housing Portrait interviews.

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- Rochelle, Safiyah. *Beyond Bricks and Mortar: Collaboration, Community, and Critical Responses to (Re)Conceptualizing Housing for Women and Gender-Diverse People during COVID-19*. Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, 2021.
- SN Management. *Housing Needs Assessment: Facilitating Access to Housing for Criminalized Women in Toronto*. Elizabeth Fry Society Toronto, Apr. 2014.
- Williams, Nicole, et al. *Literature Review of Indigenous Case Management and Housing Models*. Elizabeth Fry Society of Calgary, Jan. 2018, <https://elizabethfrycalgary.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Indigenous-housing-and-case-management-literature-review-FINAL-2018022.pdf>.

## Appendix B

### Select bibliography of housing sector research and reports

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## Appendix C

### List of housing sector and advocacy groups engaged with and/or researched by CAEFS Housing Team

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A few key organizations the CAEFS Housing Team engaged with are highlighted below followed by a list of other relevant organizations researched and/or engaged.

#### **National Right to Housing Network**

A national network dedicated to the progressive realization of the right to housing in Canada, and its meaningful implementation. The National Right to Housing Network (NRHN) is a group of over 350 key leaders, organizations, subject matter experts, and people with lived experience of housing precarity and homelessness with a shared mission to fully realize the right to housing for all, and ultimately eliminate homelessness in Canada.

#### **National Indigenous Housing Network**

The National Indigenous Housing Network (NIHN) is a movement of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples who are dedicated to improving the living situations of Indigenous women and girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse persons across Turtle Island and ending incidents of becoming unsheltered. All members have the lived experience of needing adequate shelter and a place to call home.

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

The Pan-Canadian Voice for Women's Housing (PCVWH) is a national project focused on ensuring housing policies across Canada include and prioritize women and children. PCVWH host an annual symposium to give women a space to discuss changes they'd like to see to housing policies at the local, regional and national level.

#### **Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network**

Women's homelessness is an urgent crisis in Canada, requiring immediate action. Housing insecurity and homelessness for women is largely invisible and women remain profoundly underserved across many systems and services. Women, especially those who are multiply marginalized, face systemic barriers to accessing safe, affordable, and adequate housing. The Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network (WNHHN) is trying to change that.

## Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness

The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) leads a national movement of individuals, organizations and communities working together to end homelessness in Canada. CAEH brings people together around a shared vision while supporting them to apply proven approaches to transform homelessness systems, programs and policies toward the goal of ending homelessness in our country. Since its inception in 2013, the CAEH National Conference on Ending Homelessness has been equipping policymakers, funders, researchers, advocates, community leaders and front-line workers with the inspiration, information, tools and training they need to end homelessness in Canada.

## Canadian Centre for Housing Rights

The Canadian Centre for Housing Rights (CCHR, formerly CERA) is Canada's leading non-profit organization working to advance the right to housing. CCHR advances the right to housing by serving renters to help them stay housed, providing education and training about housing rights, and advancing rights-based housing policy through research, policy development, advocacy and litigation.

## Canadian Network Community Land Trust

CNCLT provides a platform for cross-pollination and capacity-building between actors within Canada's CLT sector. Their mission is to support the growth of a healthy ecosystem of community-owned real estate assets, for the primary purpose of permanently affordable housing.

[Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now](#)

[Atira](#)

[Bâtir son quartier](#)

[Biblioterre](#)

[Cahdco](#)

[Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, National Housing Strategy](#)

[Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness](#)

[Canadian Centre for Housing Rights](#) (formerly CERA)

[Canadian Housing and Renewal Association](#)

[Canadian Housing Evidence Collaborative](#)

[Canadian Network Community Land Trust](#)

ACORN	Housing rights
	Women's housing
	Community housing
	Co-op
	Non-profit developer
CMHC	Housing sector
CAEH	Housing sector
CCHR	Housing rights
CHRA	Housing sector
CHEC	Housing research
CNCLT	Land trusts

[Canadian Observatory on Homelessness](#)  
[Centretown Citizen Ottawa Corporation](#)  
[CMHC Expert Community on Housing](#)  
[Collectev](#)  
[Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada](#)  
[Cornerstone](#)  
[Federation of Canadian Municipalities - Housing section](#)  
[Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain](#)  
[Home Space](#)  
[Housing Research Collaborative](#)  
[Indwell](#)  
[Keepers of the Circle](#)  
[Land Trust Alliance of British Columbia](#)  
[L'Avenue](#)  
[Multifaith Housing Initiative](#)  
[National Indigenous Housing Network](#)  
[National Right to Housing Network](#)  
[New Commons Development](#)  
[Office of the Federal Housing Advocate](#)  
[Ottawa Community Land Trust](#)  
[Pan-Canadian Voice for Women's Housing](#)  
[Shelter and Housing Justice Network](#)  
[Sistering](#)  
[St. Clare's](#)  
[Street level women at risk, London Homelessness Coalition](#)  
[Tawaak Housing Association](#)  
[The Shift](#)  
[United Property Resource Corporation](#)  
[Women's National Housing & Homelessness Network](#)  
[Women's Shelters Canada](#)

COH	Housing research
CCOC	Non-profit housing
ECOH	Housing sector
	Community developer
CHFC	Co-op
	Women's housing
FCM	Housing sector
FRAPRU	Housing rights
	Affordable housing
HRC	Housing research
	Non-profit housing
	Indigenous women
LTABC	Land trusts
	Community housing
MHI	Non-profit developer
NIHN	Housing rights
NRHN	Housing rights
	Non-profit developer
	Housing rights
OCLT	Land trusts
	Women's housing
SHJN	Housing rights
	Women's housing
	Affordable housing
SLWAR	Women's housing
	Non-profit housing
	Housing rights
UPRC	Community developer
WNHHN	Women's housing
	Women's housing

[Woodgreen - Housing and homelessness services](#)

[YWCA Hamilton](#)

[Zerin Development Corporation](#)

Affordable housing

YWCA Women's housing

Non-profit developer

## Appendix D

### List of discussion prompts from CAEFS Housing Summit

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The following discussion prompts and questions directed the table discussions during the CAEFS Housing Summit Day 1. See Section 4.4.

#### **Icebreaker: Defining Housing**

Q1: What does “housing” mean to you?

Q2: What does “adequate housing” mean to you?

**Housing situations along the carceral system** (prior to criminalization; during detention/incarceration; and after release).

Q1: What are existing:

- Housing options
- Living conditions
- Barriers to accessing or retaining housing
- Risks related to housing insecurity

Q2: What housing options & support do member societies offer?

#### **Thinking through Housing and CAEFS Statement of Purpose**

*The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) works to address the persistent ways in which women and gender-diverse people impacted by criminalization are denied humanity and excluded from community.*

Q1: What are persistent ways in which women and gender-diverse people impacted by criminalization are:

- denied humanity as a result of housing insecurity?
- excluded from community as a result of housing insecurity?

Q2: How would access to safe and stable housing:

- assert the humanity of women and gender-diverse people impacted by criminalization?
- welcome and include women and gender-diverse people impacted by criminalization in community?

### **Thinking through Housing & CAEFS Vision**

*A world without prisons with strong and well-resourced communities for everyone.*

Q1: How does housing that is not safe and stable contribute to involvement with the criminal justice system?

Q2: How would access to safe and stable housing contribute to **a world without prisons**?

Q3: How does criminalization and incarceration impact the safety and stability of housing?

Q4: How would access to safe and stable housing contribute to **strong and well-resourced communities for everyone**?

### **Improving housing options and supports**

Q1: What barriers and challenges do criminalized women and gender-diverse people face in trying to access safe and stable housing?

Q2: What barriers and challenges do member society face in offering safe and stable housing options and supports:

- that respond to diverse needs?
- in operations?
- in funding?
- in establishing new or alternative options?

### **Mobilizing our network around the right to housing moment**

Key issues:

- i. Advocacy & community organizing
- ii. Rethinking the housing model: innovative care-based solutions



- iii. Responding to and respecting specific needs (e.g. gender-diversity, cultural, family)
- iv. Funding opportunities for housing projects
- v. Funding opportunities for direct support
- vi. Addressing operational challenges

Q1: How can we work together to mobilize across our network on this key issue? What knowledge, supports, and resources do you need? What knowledge, supports, and resources can you offer?

Q2: How can we mobilize the current social, political, and financial moment around housing to collectively improve the housing opportunities and conditions for criminalized women and gender-diverse people across Canada to address this key issue?

The following table questions regarding residential options and community residential options are included below FOR REFERENCE ONLY. As discussed in Section 4.4, the agenda for day 2 was revised and these table discussions were no longer included.

### **Making decisions within available residential options**

Q1: What impacts the decision of which residential option folks are released into? How do these factors contribute to:

- meeting the resident's present housing-related needs?
- meeting the resident's longterm housing goals?
- feeling at home and part of community?

Q2: Who is involved in making decisions about (a) which residential option folks are released into? (b) how residential facilities operate? What decision-making authority do different participants have?

### **CBRFs as (transitioning towards) safe and stable housing**

Q1: What alternative options and/or improvements to existing residential options could support criminalized women and gender-diverse people to better:

- meet their present housing-related needs?
- meet their longterm housing goals?
- feel at home and part of community?

Q2: What systems and structures limit our capacity to offer and/or access services and supports that would improve the safety and stability of CBRFs? Eg)

- CSC oversight
- Legislative requirements
- Release conditions
- Funding structures

- Operational challenges

### **Mobilizing our collective position to improve available residential options**

*Thinking creatively and collaboratively, how can we work together to mobilize our collective position to:*

- improve transitions into safe and stable long-term housing?
- improve access to and quality of residential options that are available upon release?
- assert humanity and reduce harm?

What knowledge, supports, and resources do you need? What knowledge, supports, and resources can you offer?

### **Mobilizing our collective position for transformative change**

*Thinking creatively and collaboratively, how can we work together to mobilize our collective position to:*

- transform available community residential options into **care-based places of individual and community healing**?
- dismantle **restrictive release conditions** that limit the availability and appropriateness of community residential facilities?
- transform available community residential options into **spaces for building community connection**?
- dismantle the **legislative requirements** that limit our ability to provide more care-based, community-led options?

What knowledge, supports, and resources do you need? What knowledge, supports, and resources can you offer?