



Accessing Stable and Safe Housing Guidebook

For Homeless Outreach and Homeless Prevention Program providers working with women and children who have experienced violence or are at risk of violence.

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ACCESSING STABLE AND SAFE HOUSING GUIDEBOOK

This guide is designed to assist service providers in helping women and children who have experienced violence or are at risk of violence access secure and appropriate housing in the private rental market. The goal of this guide is to provide you with women-centred, practical suggestions that recognize the varied needs women may have as they move on from transition housing or other temporary shelters/housing to permanent housing free of family violence. For some of you, information in this guide may be part of your daily work, while for others the information will be new. Feel free to select the information that is the most relevant to your work, your agency, and the women and children you serve. We acknowledge that there is no “one-size-fits-all” answer as every woman’s situation is unique and the availability of local services varies from place to place.



The information in this guide comes from front-line workers in the sector and research in the area of violence against women and homelessness. The guide has been adapted from the current *Maintaining Housing Guidebook* that supports individuals in staying housed under the *Homeless Outreach Program*.



This symbol indicates that online resources are available on the subject and link can be found in the resource section.



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AGENCY PREPARATIONS


DEVELOPING POLICIES AND BEST PRACTICES FROM THE START WILL HELP YOU GUIDE FUTURE DECISIONS AND MITIGATE POSSIBLE IMPACTS.

- When preparing to work with rental supplements, develop clear policies and procedures around the selection, allocation, management, disbursement, and monitoring of the rental supplement program. For more information, consult the “Working with Rental Supplement” section.
- As the housing search process and follow-up with women may take place offsite, develop a transportation policy in your agency that includes policies and procedures on the use of employee vehicles for work purposes and to transport clients. This may include obtaining and reviewing employees’ driver’s abstracts, reviewing vehicle insurance annually and reimbursing employees for mileage.
- Have a plan for checking in when employees are working offsite (e.g. when providing transportation service, conducting home visits, etc). Frequency of check-ins should be predetermined according to the safety risk. If working in areas with limited phone coverage, consider obtaining a satellite phone for offsite work. Alternatively, a wireless portable panic button can be worn that alerts by phone a co-worker who knows your location in advance.

Confidentiality and Records Management

- Confidentiality refers to the non-disclosure of information in print documentation as well as information shared in conversation. When meeting with a woman, inform her that knowledge about her situation will not be shared with others unless she specifies her consent in writing. Written consent should be for a time limited period, typically one year at the most.



-  Ensure your agency has an up-to-date policy and guidelines about records management and confidentiality. This should include the limits to confidentiality (e.g. if someone is at risk to themselves or others and/or if there are child protection concerns you are required to report these concerns to the appropriate authorities). For more information consult BC Housing Recordkeeping Standards and Principles, the Non-Profit Records Management Tool Kit, and MCFD reporting guidelines.
- Ensure that all personal and financial information you collect on women is securely locked in a file cabinet or password protected. Information should be accessible only by authorized staff. Avoid putting personal and financial information on a USB stick.




- Remember that emails are also records. You need to classify, retain and dispose of electronic records that are not transitory emails. The same applies for voice mails and text messages.
- Destroy/Dispose of records in accordance with laws and your agency policies.
- Inform women about the Protection Privacy Act and their rights to review their personal information that you have on file http://www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/ID/freeside/96165_00
- Develop a privacy and confidentiality agreement for when you share information with other agencies (e.g. in the case where you refer a woman to another Transition House or are working with other agencies around safety planning).
- Have clearly defined information access levels in your agency (e.g. access to filing cabinets, offices, client records, etc.) based on the staff's job descriptions.



DEVELOPING A RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST

FOSTERING TRUST AND RESPECT IS INSTRUMENTAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THE HOUSING SUPPORT YOU WILL PROVIDE TO WOMEN. WHEN YOU FIRST MEET WITH WOMEN:



- Meet women where they are at. The priority is to help them find safe and stable housing, while they may or may not be ready to pursue employability and other long-term goals. Together, identify and prioritize needs as well as possible challenges to meeting needs. Brainstorm possible solutions, resources and strategies to meet their identified needs and their short term goals.
- Demonstrate willingness to help them through this process, and maintain an understanding and non-judgmental relationship (e.g. analyze your own biases, practice active listening, acknowledge their feelings, etc.). Be supportive and let them know that they are not alone.
- Set up meetings according to their schedule, location, situation, and transportation capacity (e.g. work schedule, safety concerns, children, etc.). You can set up a meeting over the phone or Internet, or pick a location that is the most convenient for them. Whenever possible, organize your weekly hours so that you can offer a flexible schedule.
- If possible, a single staff member and woman can work together in developing and following a case plan, rather than involving many different staff from the start.
- One of the top complaints women who have experienced violence have about the support services they access is that they have to tell their story to multiple people. Focus on information that is only relevant to the housing search, they will share details about their story if they feel like it, and as you build trust.
- Ensure the support you provide is women-centred. Women-centred refers to practices where advocates treat women as experts of their own lives. Allow women to make their own decisions and to take the lead in the programs they are accessing.
- Provide positive support and show that options are available. However, remember that ‘support’ will look different for every woman, and that your role will change depending on the needs that each unique woman identifies.
-  Make sure that you have appropriate resources in case of language or/and cultural barriers that exist in your community. Collaborate with a local organization that will give you tools and information that are culturally sensitive.
- Provide them your contact information and be available for emotional and housing support. Be consistent in the services and information that you will provide every time you meet with a woman.



IT'S IMPORTANT TO:

- Strengthen partnerships with community agencies and individuals locally, regionally and provincially in order to reduce barriers and increase access to housing and other support services for women.
- Provide ongoing awareness and education about violence against women and housing in your community and with key partners.
- Remember that you too are not alone. Working with survivors of violence can be challenging at times, and working closely with your director, co-workers, and experienced support workers for advice and important decision-making will help you better support women.

SAFETY TIPS

- ✓  Work with women to develop and maintain their safety plan as their situation changes.
- ✓ During your first meeting, obtain information to ensure mutual safety (e.g. the woman's current relationship with her abuser). Ask indirect questions and use a positive tone e.g. would it be possible to know the status of your relationship, any recent contact or safety concerns?
- ✓  When you accompany women, touch base with your agency when you arrive at and leave your destination. In the event that you are working outside of office hours to accommodate a woman's schedule, arrange to call a colleague before and after you meet.
- ✓ If possible, provide women with a cell phone that they can use in case of emergency. You may consider setting up a donation box for used cell phones. Calling cards or pay-as-you-go plans offer inexpensive alternatives.
- ✓ Delete confidential text messages from your phone and keep your work phone locked in your office or with you at all times.



PREPARING FOR THE HOUSING SEARCH

PROVIDING SUPPORT THROUGH THE HOUSING SEARCH WILL HELP REDUCE THE STRESS ASSOCIATED WITH FINDING HOUSING AND WILL HELP BUILD TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS.

- Allow women to decide what support they need. Some women might only require financial support while some others might require support at every level of the housing search: preparing for the housing search, locating housing, preparing to move, settling at home, and maintaining housing.
- Be available and be sure you have a consistent way of communicating with women that works safely for them (email, cell phone, text message).
- Depending on identified needs, connect women with support services available in their community (employment centre, mental health and addiction services, daycares, pet-sitters, public transit, care practitioners, thrift shops, food centres, library, schools, community centres, etc.) that will help facilitate the housing search and their well-being.
- If needed, help women renew their personal identification documents. They will need them to apply for income assistance, housing, and more. Developing a relationship with the local driver's licensing office may help speed up the process.
- Encourage women to open their own bank account and offer to assist with the paperwork. Accompany women to the bank if they require assistance.
- If possible, set up a common room with computers and phones accessible at any time. Use this space to connect with and reach out to women. This space can be a good opportunity to help women look for housing, open a bank account, pay bills, look for employment, and follow up with their housing situation.
- If you are assisting women to apply for income assistance, explain the process involved. Consider building relationships with the income assistance office and offering to do a presentation annually to the staff about your program and services.
- Remind women that you are available to accompany them to appointments (medical, legal, etc.) and to visit housing. If possible, provide transportation and carry an approved child seat in the back seat of your car/agency car:
<http://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/acts-regulations/regulations-sor2010-90.htm>.



IT'S IMPORTANT TO:

- Recognize and acknowledge that for many women, available support sources overlap and depend on each other (e.g. a woman may need to access Income Assistance in order to obtain market housing; a woman may require market housing to obtain custody of her children).

FINDING AND PLACING HOUSING ADVERTISEMENTS:




- Become aware of local places where people list housing vacancies, such as the local laundromat. Visit these locations regularly to get updates on vacancies.
- Place and collect ads from Craigslist, Kijiji or local Internet sites. Print and put the ads on a housing board in your agency. Also, provide access to local newspapers that may contain rental listings.
- Advertise your program on your organization's website with your contact information. By learning more about the program through the Internet some landlords might be interested in developing partnerships.

SAFETY TIPS

- ✓ If the woman is leaving transition housing, work with her to ensure that she has a safe place to stay until she finds permanent housing. Use resources present in her community and connect her with local shelters. If possible, develop partnerships with hotel managers that can offer safe shelter at reasonable rates in case of emergency.
- ✓ If the woman decides to relocate, connect her with support services in the new location. If possible, provide taxi and bus vouchers for transportation. If you believe that staying in the community will compromise the woman's safety, strongly advocate for relocation, while remaining supportive of her in her decisions.




LOCATING HOUSING

- Allow women to direct their housing selection to ensure that any housing they obtain is able to meet their needs while working together to assure that the selection is appropriate and safe.
-  Encourage women to negotiate the price of rent and be realistic in terms of what they can afford and sustain. Consider National Occupancy Standards and encourage where possible.
- Encourage women to consider location carefully in terms of safety, transportation costs, and proximity of supports and services that will help them and their children to maintain housing and build a sense of community (employment, daycare, school, playgrounds, library, community centers, medical centers, access to transit, etc.).
-  Review basic tenancy rights together so that women are better informed about both theirs and the landlord's rights and responsibilities. You can prepare booklets that summarize the information found on the website as a quick reference guide for women. For more information, consult the Residential Tenancy Branch website. There are a number of relevant factsheets available on the website that discuss appropriate tenants expectations.
- If it is in your agency's mandate, encourage women to report any discriminatory housing postings under the Canadian Human Rights Act (e.g. no children, no income assistance, etc.).
- Remind women that they are under no obligation to disclose information about their personal situation to the landlord. Discuss and make a list of the pros and cons of informing a landlord that the woman has experienced or is at risk of violence. Together, determine boundaries that she is comfortable with.
- Review with women their rental history and identify possible challenges, resources and strategies that will improve their chances of obtaining housing.
- Pets often are a key issue in finding housing and you may have to advise women to consider giving their pet away temporarily or in some cases permanently in order to move forward. Make a list of resources in your community that can help you address this (e.g. you can collect ads on Craigslist or liaise with your local SPCA for possible pet placement options). Keep in mind that pets are often considered as members of the family and this could be a challenging and emotional decision for a women and their children.
-  Consider organizing a rental training session in your agency: an informative session on how to be a successful tenant with a certificate of completion that can be used as a housing reference.
- If the woman smokes, recommend looking for housing with smoking policies, or to consider alternative solutions (e.g. housing with balconies, smoking areas, etc.)
- If the woman expresses concerns about her capacity to pay utilities, look for housing where utilities are included in the rental price.





SAFETY TIPS

- ✓  Recommend that women consider the following safety and security features when looking for housing: alarm system, security camera, deadbolt lock, locks and bars on windows, peephole, blinds, exterior lighting, housing with a callbox or with a separate key to enter the building, elevator with access control, clear from large trees and shrubs, etc. Such features are not always listed in the rental ads, but can be discussed with the landlord.
- ✓ Recommend against buildings with enclosed side staircases or entries accessible from the outside, and/or located in areas where women feel unsafe.
- ✓ For women living in remote and rural communities, consider housing with neighbours in close proximity.
- ✓ Assist women in making a fully informed decision about the neighborhood that they are considering. If a woman is trying to stay away from her abuser's environment or break with past lifestyle and habits, consider whether the location may represent a risk for the woman and children. Support women in thinking this through and determining their own conclusions.
- ✓ Encourage women to be very selective if they decide to take a roommate. E.g. discuss the pros and cons of living with someone they may have met at a transition house, someone from the opposite gender, or someone with a lifestyle not aligned with their own.




SECURING HOUSING AND PREPARING TO MOVE

FOR WOMEN LEAVING A VIOLENT RELATIONSHIP, HOUSING IS A KEY ELEMENT FOR REBUILDING THEIR LIVES AND HEALTH, AND THOSE OF THEIR CHILDREN.

- If required, assist women to be ready for any appointments for housing (e.g. brainstorm possible scenarios with questions and answers that can be expected during the first meeting with a landlord). This is a good time to consider the information they want to disclose to the landlord.
- Prepare and review questions to ask the landlord during the first meeting. This might include questions about utility coverage, rules, pets, smoking, security devices, type of agreement, and the landlord's expectations.
-  Take the time to discuss the different types of tenancy agreements (periodic versus fixed term tenancies). Make a list of items that they would like to discuss with the landlord and include in the tenancy agreement. If they require, assist them in reading and understanding the tenancy agreement.
- If possible, have women gather letters of reference from positive supports in their lives (employer, family member, service provider, etc.) Have a template ready for a letter of reference that you can individually address for each woman.
- Ensure that women have a way to receive messages from potential landlords by offering access to computers, phones, or the use of a cell phone.
- If rent supplements are available, consider using them toward things such as pet or damage deposits. Rent supplements can also be used towards moving or housing costs.
- If you have room available for storage, advocate in the community for household donations. Otherwise, you can collect housing readiness goods (e.g. linens, kitchen items, hygiene products, cleaning products, etc.) and prepare start-up kits. If space is not available, support women in connecting with organizations that can arrange for the provision of donated household goods.
- Before women move in, allow them to determine what type of follow-up they would like, based on what you can offer. Ensure that you have any updated contact information in order to reach them.
-  Encourage women to create a budget that accounts for their monthly expenses. You can assist by providing a template or referring them to financial literacy programs offered through libraries, banks, etc. If a woman is on Income Assistance, you can suggest setting up direct payment deposit for the rent to the landlord as a tool to support her in maintaining her housing and financial commitments. Direct payment deposit can also be organized directly through their bank.



-  Discuss the importance of the Condition Inspection Reports and the women's engagement in the inspection. You can provide them with an example from the Residential Tenancy Branch website and offer to be there during the inspection. Suggest taking pictures during the inspection and keeping them on file.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO:


- Remember that safety is increased by a combination of material and emotional support services that will allow women to rebuild healthy lives for themselves and their children after leaving violence.

SAFETY TIPS

- ✓ Often, women will need to keep their new location confidential to increase their safety. Discuss ways of doing this and suggest to women that they only share their address with people they trust.
- ✓ If women move into apartment buildings, recommend that they only use their first initial (not their full first name) or "occupied" on the lobby directory, doorbell, mailbox and phone directory. Also, whenever possible ensure that the intercom code is not the same number as the women's unit number.
- ✓ Encourage women to put 9-1-1 on speed dial and teach their children how and when to use it.
- ✓ Make sure women are aware that they can request the landlord to change the lock of their new home after the last tenant(s) moved out. The landlord is not allowed to charge fees for this service under the Residential Tenancy Act.




SETTLING AT HOME

- Print out a personalized list of appropriate community resources available in the neighborhood where women have found housing (health center, library, employment centers, etc.). Offer to accompany them to visit these resources.
- Connect women to food resources to ensure there is food in the fridge from the outset of her tenancy. Refer them to community kitchens and food banks. Rent supplements may be used for start-up costs and household supplies (e.g. food, dishes, pots, pans, etc.). For more information, refer to the rental supplement guidelines.
- Assist women with changing their address with all proper authorities (e.g. bank, doctor, BC Services Card, driver's license, etc.). If possible, you can facilitate this task by giving them access to a computer and/or a fax machine.
-  If utilities are not included in the rent, explore together the different payment options. Provide them with information about BC Hydro Equal Payment Plan and the BC Energy Conservation program. Together you can make a list of various methods and tools to save on energy (e.g. turning out the light, using water-saving showerheads, etc.).
- “Feeling at home” following a traumatic experience can take time. You can suggest relaxation exercises to do at home (e.g. breathing exercises, meditation, listening to music, keeping a personal journal, aromatherapy, etc.). Encourage women to decorate their new housing according to their taste.
- Discuss the importance of being a proactive tenant and neighbour. Encourage women to abide by local by-laws such as noise, street parking, pets, etc. and to be aware of their impact on neighbours.






SAFETY TIPS

- ✓ Make sure that they have a safety plan adapted to their new housing situation. For example, suggest identifying all the safety exits and places where trips and falls could cause serious injuries, such as loose rugs, wires, and staircases. Work together to improve the safety of these areas.
- ✓ Encourage women to develop relationships with their neighbours. Over time and as the relationship develops, they may feel comfortable sharing their experience and asking neighbours to check in if they hear or see anything suspicious.
- ✓  Give women a list of numbers they can call 24 hours a day.
- ✓ As women settle, work with the landlords to increase safety around the property, such as a camera in stairwells and elevators, peephole, lighting sensors and extensive outdoor lighting, and by pruning the trees and shrubs to improve the visibility from the outside. If you do not have a relationship with the landlord, consider building one or you can make an anonymous call requesting better safety in the building.
- ✓ Remind women to keep the doors locked at all times. If necessary, suggest the idea of adding secondary locks or bars on patio doors and windows. Recommend that they discuss with their children the importance of asking who is at the door, before opening the door.
- ✓ Make sure there are blinds or curtains on their windows from the beginning of their tenancy. Suggest that they keep them drawn during evening hours.
- ✓ If there is a restraining order in place, remind them to keep it near at all times. If they have children, the school, day care, and the local police should have a copy of the order along with a picture of the abusive partner.
- ✓ If women live in an apartment building with a balcony, they can consider getting landlords' approval to put wire or protective net to close the balcony in for added safety.



SUPPORTING WOMEN BEYOND THE HOUSING SEARCH

THE OUTREACH WORKER CONTINUES TO HELP WOMEN MAKE A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION INTO HOUSING. ALTHOUGH THE FIRST STEP TO REACHING STABILITY IN WOMEN'S LIFE IS HOUSING, HOUSING IS NOT THE ONLY SUPPORT THAT WOMEN NEED AS THEY TRANSITION FROM A VIOLENT RELATIONSHIP TO A SAFER AND MORE STABLE PLACE.


- If you have the in-house capacity, continue to encourage women to contact you. Remind them that they can call you if they need to speak with someone or if they need support and assistance. Otherwise, refer women to appropriate programs and services.
- Once women are housed continue ongoing agreed upon check-ins. Depending on their needs and capacity to travel, schedule appointments on a weekly, bi-weekly or monthly basis, and connect via phone or Internet, visit their home or meet at your agency.
- Identify current sources of support and assist women to build on these. Continue to support them in their decisions, and to re-evaluate their needs and how they are being met. Once women indicate that they are ready, work with them to set and reach achievable goals and then monitor their success. Set short and long-term goals with them and help with referrals to support services in the community that may assist. Encourage their initiatives.
-  Over time, help women build a natural network of support that will assist them in sustaining housing and becoming less reliant on agency support. You can help them find information about low-cost entertainment, charitable support groups, volunteer opportunities, etc.
- In situation where a woman needs to break the lease (e.g. she found a better place, she is moving in with family, etc.), discuss with her the different options available and potential penalties for breaking a fixed-term tenancy (e.g. the landlord, assigning, subletting, etc.).
- If a woman decide to discontinue her involvement with the program, respect the decision and remind her that she can contact you at any time. Ask if you can contact them once or twice in the following months to follow up with them. If a woman wants to relocate, ask her if she would like to connect with a local outreach worker.
- In the situation where their abuser moves in with them, explain that you can provide only limited support outside of the home because of your safety, but remind them that they are welcome to contact you at any time. If they are receiving a rental supplement, you will need to review her eligibility. Should the family no longer qualify for the rental supplement, adequate notice and safety planning should be provided.



IT IS IMPORTANT TO:

- Trust your judgement and intuition. Working with a women-centred approach also means protecting yourself, having boundaries and allowing yourself the right to question and re-evaluate your support and decisions along the way.

SAFETY TIPS

- ✓ Recommend texting as an immediate method to contact you (e.g. you can develop codes and work along with the RCMP).
- ✓  Remind women to stay vigilant with social networks. Go over some of the security settings in their different social media platforms and phone.
- ✓ Continue the discussion about boundaries. Raise the importance of being able to say no! Discuss and evaluate how certain behaviours from friends and family members could potentially put their tenancy at risk (e.g. excessive noise from a loud party or stereo, damaging property, aggressive behaviours, etc.).
- ✓ In limited circumstances, women are allowed to end the tenancy early if they can show that the landlord has breached a material term in the tenancy agreement or displayed any signs of abusive behavior such as stalking, physical or sexual assault. If possible, agency support should be provided in these circumstances.



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH LANDLORDS

THE OUTREACH WORKER PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN MEDIATING BETWEEN WOMEN AND LANDLORDS. DEVELOPING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH LANDLORDS CAN HELP WOMEN ACCESS AND SUSTAIN HOUSING.

- Building successful relationships with landlords can take time. Be honest around the mandate of your organization and remain positive and persistent if an incident happens.
- Make sure that women are aware of your relationship with a landlord before showing housing. Some women may prefer housing where the landlord is not aware of the role of your agency. You should discuss and establish their preference when you are preparing for the housing search.
- Maintain a database with landlords' contact information and if possible with diverse types of housing (apartments, townhouses, basement units, wheelchair accessible, etc.). Work to keep a list of landlords that allow pets and smoking.
- Interact with landlords: introduce yourself, respond to ads, use your contacts, and promote the mission of your agency.
- You can meet with landlords individually (e.g. for a coffee) or as a group (e.g. host a lunch every 3 months). Take this opportunity to discuss recent successes and challenges. You can take this opportunity to address housing challenges that a woman is experiencing (e.g. the woman was evicted because of noise and complaints due to domestic violence), which could help reduce the risk of her being illegally blacklisted by a landlord. This is particularly true for small and remote areas where a few landlords may own most of the rental market.
- Offer ongoing education to landlords to help address stigma and discrimination, and improve awareness about housing challenges for women and children fleeing violence. Address challenges found in your community, and share the solutions that have been found.
- Provide the landlord with clear lines of communication and emergency contacts and encourage them to call or email you with any questions or concerns. Always respond to a landlord as promptly as possible.
- Put in place an agreed upon mediation plan to negotiate mutually agreeable solutions between landlords and tenants from the outset of the tenancy.





- Where possible, establish an agreement with the landlord and the woman that stipulates that the landlord will contact the outreach worker prior to a potential eviction.
- If possible, create a relationship where your agency is the first point of contact for a landlord when they have vacancies because they would prefer to work with you than find an unknown tenant.
- Maintain consistent communication. Call the landlords regularly to check-up if there are any challenges with tenants in the program, and take this opportunity to monitor current availability.
- If a landlord is reluctant, ask them to accept women on a short-term lease and extend the lease after the agreed upon trial period.

SAFETY TIPS

- ✓ Work with landlords on making housing more secure (exterior lighting, peephole, security cameras, etc.). Discuss the advantages of having security measures for all of their tenants.
- ✓ If a woman reports inappropriate behavior from a landlord, remove the landlord from your database and if the woman agrees, engage in legal action. Help the woman find other housing alternatives.
- ✓ In small communities, verify beforehand with the woman if she is aware of any relationships between the landlord and her abuser.
- ✓ Inform landlords about Crime-Free Multi Housing program in your locality:
<http://bccpa.org/programs/crime-free-multi-housing-program/>



WORKING WITH RENTAL SUPPLEMENTS – BEST PRACTICES AND ADVICE

- Familiarize yourself with the different rent supplement programs (if several are available to you): criteria, acceptable uses, data entry requirements, etc.
- Before starting the housing search, discuss with women their commitment to accessing and maintaining housing in the private market. If a HPP/HOP rental supplement is available it is to supplement women's rental payments or to address their immediate housing concerns. Explain thoroughly what the programs are intended to do with the help of the BC Housing rental supplement guidelines.
- Because the supply of rental supplements is limited, first explore other possible sources of revenue and provincial subsidies (employment, income assistance, disability, rental subsidies for working families (RAP), etc.). Use rental supplements as the last available resource.
- The rental supplement guidelines have been developed to be flexible for both women and service providers. Due to the many barriers women face when finding and maintaining housing, usage of rental supplements can address many needs, please refer to the rental supplement guidelines in your agreement. If you are unsure if a certain expense is appropriate under the rental supplement program, contact your supervisor or BC Housing manager.
- Create a rental supplement application form for women. Include information about contact details including their address, emergency contact, safety/security risks that you may need to be aware of, proof of income, the landlord if housed already, and any other information you may require to assist women.
- Selecting women for the monthly available rent supplements can be challenging. To avoid bias and arbitrary selections, discuss and review applications with your supervisor and/or team of reviewers. Develop together a review process that will efficiently respond to women's immediate needs. Record how decisions were made.
- Along with other staff in your agency, develop a disbursement policy that best meets the needs of the women and children you serve. Remember that for a variety of reasons, such as privacy, security, location, etc. Some women will prefer to receive the rent supplement directly while others will prefer it to be issued directly to the landlord. You will need to determine how best to manage this process. Establish a process to issue receipts to the women to avoid any discrepancies about the rent supplement being paid to them.
- Payment of rental supplements is a good opportunity to check in with women. For women without access to transportation, offer to bring the rental supplement to them. You can also check in via phone, and mail rental supplements.






- Develop a procedure for conducting follow up/support work, once women are housed. Refer to your rent supplement contract for an outline of requirements. Be realistic about your agency's capacity while respecting the needs of the women and children you serve.
- If you suspect misuse of rental supplements, discuss with your supervisor and/or team to determine next steps. Trust your judgment and intuition.
- For women, rebuilding their lives after being in an abusive relationship can take time. Given that the HPP/HOP rent supplement is not meant to be utilized for longer than 12 months by any one woman, assist them in applying for social housing and to explore other long term safe, affordable housing options.



PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

- Refer women to events/workshops that relate to their goals and personal taste, and that are either provided by your agency or by another local agency. This provides women with the opportunity to access the support services they may require.
- Refer women and their children to other violence against women programs that they may require such as Stopping the Violence Counselling Programs, Outreach/Multicultural Outreach Programs, Children Who Witness Abuse Programs and Victim Service Programs.
<http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victimservices/directory/index.htm>
- Act as a housing advocate in your community. Organize outreach activities that address any areas of misinformation regarding issues related to gender, violence and housing, and homelessness.
- Stay informed about current housing practices and tenancy rights. Engage with the different stakeholders involved in housing development or advocacy in your community.
- Stay current about local resources and service providers by attending inter-agency meetings, or organize one if they aren't happening in your community.
- Make use of available resources that can help you fulfill your mandate (e.g. volunteers in your community that can help you with housing research, the landlord database, website, transportation, etc.).
- Gather information about legal aid and other financial support and benefits for victims of violence in the province. Liaise with professionals in your area that can offer services at an affordable rate or sliding scale fees for victims of violence (e.g. dentist, lawyer, etc.).
- Depending on their long-term goals, you can provide information about educational programs that can be completed in-person or online, from high school to university programs.
- Work in fostering a positive relationship with other systems that work with women who have experienced violence such as the police and MCFD.
- Work alongside Aboriginal and newcomer organizations to assist clients in accessing cultural programming and support when they wish.
-  Make sure that your agency has clear safety protocols and policies in place that provide clear guidance for the outreach worker. Safety protocols should be geared specifically to the context of the local community and reviewed periodically with all management and staff.




WORKING WITH WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN REMOTE AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

WOMEN AND CHILDREN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE OR ARE AT RISK OF VIOLENCE FACE DIFFERENT AND/OR ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES WITH ACCESSING SERVICES AND SECURING HOUSING IN REMOTE AND RURAL COMMUNITIES.

- If you are assisting women to apply for income assistance, additional time may be required if you need to receive or mail documents. Explain the process thoroughly and develop a good working relationship with the closest income assistance agency.
- Issues of confidentiality and privacy can be more important in small communities. If your role is well known among the community and with the landlords, communicate this to women and let them decide what involvement they would prefer from you.
- Distance and transportation is one of the main barriers for accessing services and looking for housing. Discuss with your agency the importance of having a transportation budget and strategy such as issuing taxi vouchers.
- Collaborate with other agencies and advocate to improve housing awareness in your community. You can organize information sessions around tenancy rights and sensitive issues (e.g. “renoviction”), and work together at developing an action plan.
- Engage local industries around the subject of violence against women and children. If possible, offer your help in developing and/or delivering educational and awareness programs on violence against women.
- If the housing market in your area is being impacted by natural resource extraction activities, advocate with your municipality and major employers for the provision of short-stay/temporary housing. Take this opportunity to discuss the impacts of a large temporary workforce on the local housing market and on violence against women.
- Get involved in improving coordination among all the different stakeholders in your community and identify gaps in service provision. Work closely with everyone who has a shared interest in the prevention and response to violence against women (e.g. counseling programs, police, teachers and schools, women’s health services, local friendship center, etc.). This can help reduce the distance and isolation that often constitute a barrier for services in remote and rural areas.



SAFETY TIPS

- ✓ When looking for housing, consider units with neighbours in close proximity. In remote and rural areas, adopting a guard dog can offer a good alternative.
- ✓  Anti-violence workers can be more easily identifiable in small communities. Make sure your agency has clear safety policies and practices.
- ✓ Rural and farming areas may have a higher prevalence of firearms. When meeting with women for the first time, discuss the possibilities of the abuser having access to a firearm. Include this information in the safety plan and, if necessary, work collaboratively with the police.
- ✓ If you are concerned about meeting women in their homes, and finding a confidential place is a problem, use a visible meeting location or in close proximity to the police station.
- ✓ Once housing has been located, verify beforehand with women if they are aware of any relationship between the landlord and their abuser.




TECHNOLOGY SAFETY BEST PRACTICES

TECHNOLOGY CAN BE MISUSED BY PERPETRATORS TO ABUSE, MONITOR, STALK AND IMPERSONATE SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE. FOR BOTH SURVIVORS AND FRONT LINE WORKERS IT IS IMPORTANT TO USE TECHNOLOGY SAFELY WHILE LOOKING FOR AND MAINTAINING NEW HOUSING.

Technology Safety Tips for women who have experienced violence or are at risk of violence

- Suggest that women change the password and personal identifier (ID) of all of their social media and email accounts. Strongly encourage women to select ID and passwords that are non-identifying (unlike RealName@email.com). Strong passwords include a combination of upper and lower case letters, numbers and symbols.
- Brainstorm together about any other password protected accounts: online banking, voicemail, etc. Change these passwords as well.
- Inform women that it is good practice to change passwords frequently, delete emails automatically, and remove from all emails and social media accounts any information that could be misused by the abuser for their own purposes. However, suggest that women keep harassing and threatening texts and emails in a secure location if they wish to report the abuse to the police now or in the future.
- Discuss with women the possibility of deleting their social media accounts, or creating new accounts where they can invite only the people they trust. As an alternative, you can suggest that women delete from their account all of the common contacts that they and their abuser have in common (e.g. under “Mutual Friends” on Facebook).
- Recommend against women posting online and emailing pictures or information that could potentially reveal their new location.
- If women choose to install wireless internet in their new housing, promote the use of a strong wireless connection password and advise them to keep this password confidential.
- If possible, suggest that women use a donated or new cell/mobile phone. If they wish to keep their current phone, they should discontinue the delivery of a paper statement to their previous address as quickly as possible. It is recommended that they give their service provider an alternative billing location that is preferably not their new home address. Cell phone billing records and phone logs might reveal information about a woman’s new location to the abuser. An alternative will be to get a pay as you go phone.
- Recommend that women use a password on their cell phone and voicemail to prevent unauthorized access. For more security, they can also turn off Bluetooth to prevent call interception.



-  Suggest that women remove location-tagging apps and services from their technology devices. Location-tagging /“geotagging” apps can reveal their locations when they post a picture or a comment on certain social media platforms (e.g. when they post a picture on Facebook from their phone and it indicates where this picture was taken). In the setting area of devices, disable any location sharing settings.
- If necessary, suggest that women obtain a private mailbox. When asked by businesses, doctors, and others for their address, they can give this private address, or the address of someone they trust. It is recommended that a women’s true residential addresses be kept out of databases.
- Advise women to have their car checked by a trusted mechanic for hidden cameras if they notice a pattern where the abuser knows where they are when they travel by car.
- If necessary, suggest that women contact their phone company and have their phone number blocked to protect privacy. Blocking the number would prevent caller ID from being displayed.

Technology Safety Tips for front line workers

- To help keeps women’s contact information confidential, use a cell that is protected with a password, and is set up so that instant text messaging does not appear on the screen.
- Think about women’s safety first. Removing all communication access from the abuser might escalate violence. Consider this when safety planning.
- If you provide access to computers in your agency, remind women to logout from their social media, email and banking accounts after each login.
- Make sure that all the computers used in your agency are equipped with an anti-virus/anti-spyware protection and protected with a password.
- Make sure the wireless Internet in your agency is protected with a strong password.



RESOURCE SECTION

CULTURAL COMPETENCY

Working with Aboriginal Women:

- <http://www.culturalcompetency.ca/>
- <http://cfc-swc.gc.ca/violence/strategy-strategie/index-en.html>
- <http://www.nacafv.ca/>

**For more information contact your local Aboriginal service providers*

Working with Refugee and Immigrant Women:

- <http://www.bwss.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/NSRIW-MANUAL.pdf>
- <https://bcsth.ca/resources/>
- <http://www.amssa.org/>

SAFETY PLANNING

- <https://www.bchousing.org/partner-services/program-provider-information/womens-transition-housing-supports-program-provider>

WORK SAFETY FOR ANTI-VIOLENCE WORKERS

- http://endingviolence.org/files/uploads/WorkerSafetyManual_vF_January_2013_lowres.pdf
- <http://www.worksafebc.com>

RESIDENT RIGHTS AND INFORMATION

Residential Tenancy Branch:

- <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/housing-tenancy/residential-tenancies>



Legal Information for BC Tenants:

- <http://tenants.bc.ca/>
- <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en>

Condition Inspection Reports:

- <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/DownloadAsset?assetId=49D61654DE974CAF93E29F853FECA93B>

National Occupancy Standards:

- <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/concepts/occupation>
- <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en>

Housing and Safety:

- <http://www.victoria.ca/assets/Departments/Planning~Development/Development~Services/Documents/regulations-crime-prevention-environmental-design.pdf>
- <https://canadasafetycouncil.org/home-safety>

 RENTAL TRAINING

- <http://www.readytorentbc.net/>

 FINANCE AND BUDGETING

- http://www.nomoredebts.org/Library/docs/CC_MMB_WEB2.pdf

 UTILITIES AND ENERGY CONSERVATION

- https://www.bchydro.com/powersmart/residential/ps_low_income/energy_conservation.html
- <http://bcpiac.com/category/bc-hydro/>
- <https://www.bchydro.com/accounts-billing/bill-payment/ways-to-pay.html>

 RESOURCES ACCESSIBLE 24 HOURS

- <http://www.victimlinkbc.ca/vlbc/contact/index.page>
- <https://www.wavaw.ca/24-hour-crisis-and-information-line/>
- <http://www.domesticviolencebc.ca/>



RESOURCES FOR WOMEN LIVING IN RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

- <https://www.nrwc.com.au/resources-policy/what-do-rural-women-want>

REPORTING AND CONFIDENTIALITY

BC Housing:

- <https://www.bchousing.org/partner-services>
- <https://www.bchousing.org/partner-services/non-profit-training-resources/financial-operational-reviews>
- <https://www.bchousing.org/partner-services/non-profit-training-resources/privacy-toolkit>

Ministry of Children and Family Department:

- <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/protecting-children>
- <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/protecting-children/reporting-child-abuse>

TECHNOLOGY SAFETY RESOURCES

Facebook and Twitter Safety Tips:

- <https://www.facebook.com/safety/tools/>
- <https://support.twitter.com/groups/57-safety-security>

Technology Safety:

- <http://nnedv.org/resources/safetynetdocs.html>
- <http://bcsth.ca/snc-resources>