



**City of Montreal Submission on the System of Shelters and Transition  
Houses Serving Women and Children Affected by Violence Against Women  
and Intimate Partner Violence**

**PRESENTED TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

**November 19, 2018**



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## **INTRODUCTION**

With this submission, the City of Montreal wishes to provide its comments and recommendations as part of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women's study on the system of shelters and transition houses serving women and children affected by violence against women and intimate partner violence.

### **Status of the situation in Montreal**

Women make up nearly 52% of Montreal's population, and some of them live in a context of great vulnerability (poverty, precarious employment, domestic violence, isolation, etc.). In order to promote women's participation, in 2008 Montreal adopted the *For Equal Participation of Women and Men in the Life of Montreal* policy with an action plan to make Montreal an egalitarian city. This value is enshrined in the *Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities*. In addition, the City adopted the Declaration Against Sexual Violence in May 2018.

Montreal is an inclusive city. Nearly 70% of immigrants who arrive in Quebec will settle in the city. In 2016, 34,745 people claimed Indigenous identity in the greater Montreal area, and this population is growing. Montreal has affirmed its desire to become the metropolis of reconciliation, notably by promoting the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. It also unanimously endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on August 21, 2017.

Therefore, it is important to note that many women residing in or transiting the metropolitan area may be vulnerable for various reasons (difficult living conditions in the home community, victims of violence or abuse, poverty, homelessness, etc.).

As a local government, Montreal plays a leading role in ensuring the cohesion of its social fabric. Given its areas of jurisdiction, Montreal does not directly assist women who are victims of violence (other than through the Service de police de la Ville de Montréal [SPVM]), but it still reaches a portion of this clientele through its activities to address homelessness and those directed at Indigenous peoples and immigrants.

### **Number of beds required versus number of beds available**

Although one needs to distinguish between housing resources for women who are victims of violence and those for women who are homeless, it is important to know that the lack of spaces in these two types of resources means that women who are victims of violence will sometimes end up in shelters for homeless women, for example. The reverse can also happen. These two resource networks are therefore necessary and complementary, although they serve clienteles with their own unique characteristics. In addition, the needs referred to in this document are the result of requests and observations from the field, including partners involved with women victims of violence, such as shelter resources, organizations, and the SPVM.

In addition, we draw your attention to the fact that, in an effort to improve its knowledge of the environment and its practices, the City of Montreal will begin to establish a more comprehensive inventory of emergency shelter resources in January 2019. This research will include data on clients, services offered and occupancy of shelter resources, taking into account GBA+. It will be carried out in collaboration with the Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux de Montréal, with the assistance of the boroughs and organizations concerned. The joint

efforts of these organizations will provide a more accurate picture of vulnerable groups and issues, in addition to supplementing data from other initiatives such as the major enumeration of visibly homeless persons in Montreal, the second edition of which took place last April.

Women who are homeless have also sometimes been victims of violence. They are vulnerable and have even greater needs if they are among the most disconnected, namely, those with substance abuse or mental health issues and those from visible minority groups. Winter is also critical time for women looking for a shelter. In fact, the City provides financial support to emergency shelters during the winter season, which is included in its *2018-2020 Montreal Homelessness Action Plan*.

Moreover, thanks to its work in the field and its collaborations with various partners working with women who have been victims of violence, the City of Montreal can see that there are several reasons why resources for women are scarce if not overwhelmed. Examples include increases in the length of stay; difficulty in finding housing after a stay; longer and more complex support processes; diversification of clients (refugees, asylum seekers, etc.); and the increase in the number of women experiencing difficulties (poverty, substance abuse, etc.).

**Recommendation 1:** Support the increase in the number of places in shelters and transition houses for women victims of violence and for homeless women through enhanced federal and provincial funding, so that new places can be opened in existing centres or measures can be implemented to support the increase or deployment of new resources in the city.

**Recommendation 2:** Promote and support the availability of culturally appropriate services for women experiencing violence in urban areas, including with the support of the Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

The City and the SPVM have noted specific challenges facing immigrant women, namely, the need for information in several languages about the reporting and support process, should a victim wish to file a complaint and take legal action. The SPVM has produced an informative video translated into 17 languages on the reporting process for victims of spousal violence housed in shelters and transition houses.

**Recommendation 3:** Support and fund measures to make interpretation and support services available, particularly for victims from cultural communities who are less proficient in French.

In addition, we would like to point out that the proposed measures are consistent with the mandate letter of the Minister of Status of Women, whose objective is to “support the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs in ensuring that no one fleeing domestic violence is left without a place to turn by growing and maintaining Canada’s network of shelters and transition houses.”

## **Existing programs and their challenges**

Montreal also wishes to draw your attention to the fact that, in order to implement relevant services, it is important to take into account and understand the full experience of women who have been victims of violence. This makes it possible to take action in advance (prevention, awareness, implementation and planning of relevant services and of a sufficient number of beds in shelters and transition

houses), during a crisis situation (intervention by trained police officers, specific issues during the winter, referrals for psychosocial assistance and taking care of the person and her children, if need be) and afterward (housing assistance, measures aimed at social participation and labour market integration, etc.) – in short, a complete service continuum. This requires increased collaboration among all stakeholders, as well as consistency and flexibility in individual planning, strategies and programs in order to adapt and respond to real-life needs.<sup>1</sup>

**Recommendation 4:** Promote the implementation of a continuum of services for women and their families in vulnerable situations, particularly when violence and homelessness are involved.

**Recommendation 5:** Increase funding and its sustainability, and increase transparency in the dissemination of information on calls for projects for federal funding.

**Recommendation 6:** Enable eligibility and funding for low-threshold services in the Canadian Homelessness Strategy, such as shelters for clients with specific challenges.

**Recommendation 7:** Participate, support and promote measures to ensure greater collaboration among partners, and complementarity and consistency in the programs and measures for women victims of violence in the metropolitan area.

## **CONCLUSION**

The City of Montreal is committed to working with all partners, including the Standing Committee and the federal government, to promote an adequate response to the needs of women who are victims of violence in the metropolitan area. It is important to take into account the entire continuum and the needs of these women so that we can plan appropriate responses. In this case, the City of Montreal wishes not only to continue its efforts to ensure a better understanding of the environment, but also to continue and increase its partnerships with governments and obtain the necessary resources to adequately meet the needs of women in vulnerable situations in the city, particularly in terms of shelters and transition houses.

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<sup>1</sup> Several examples of approaches related to the topic of this study: Gender-based violence program; Grants and contributions in support of urban programs for Aboriginal peoples; National Housing Strategy: A place to call home; Canada's Homelessness Strategy: Reaching Home – Objective to reduce chronic homelessness by 50% over the next 10 years in Canada; National Poverty Reduction Strategy, etc.

## APPENDIX

### Summary of recommendations

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