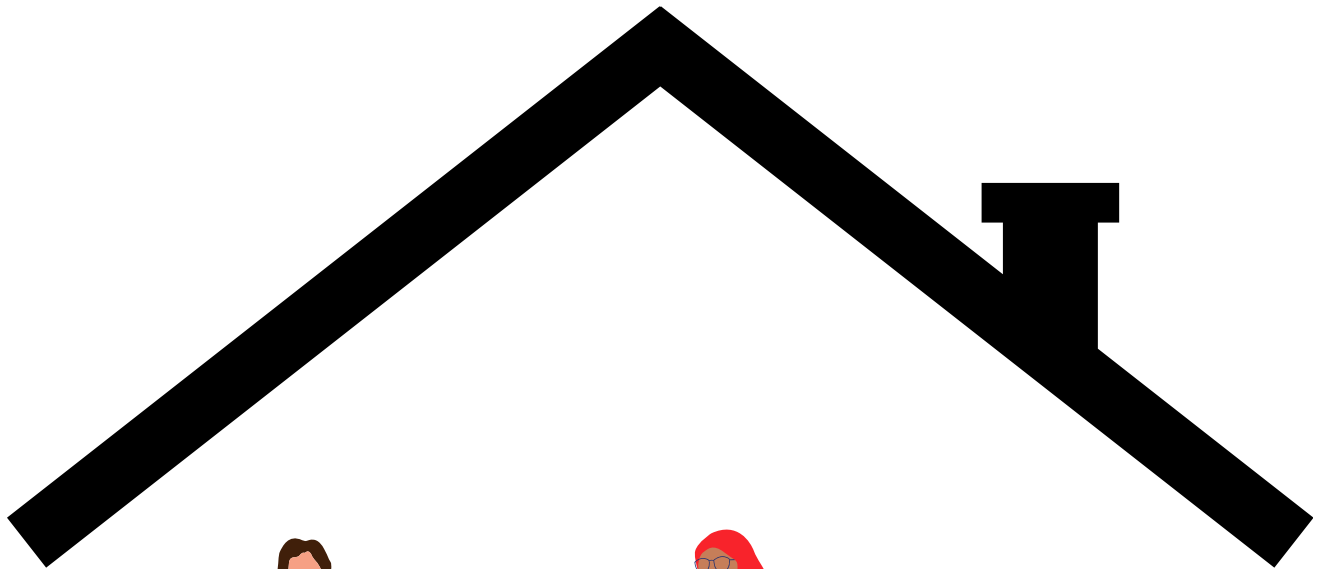




2022 ELECTIONS: KEY ISSUE THE HOUSING CRISIS

intersectional feminist housing demands



The Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW) and the City for All Women Initiative (CAWI) are calling attention to the ongoing housing crisis in Ottawa from an intersectional feminist lens.

When we think about homelessness we don't think about how oppression and discrimination contribute. For example, gender-based violence and violence against women can lead to homelessness. Just like, homelessness can lead to gender-based violence and violence against women. The housing crisis is a failure of society, not the individual. No individual is to blame for being homeless and everyone has a right to housing.

Women and gender diverse people are at significant risk of being houseless or living in precarious housing. OCTEVAW and CAWI join a chorus of activists and organizations calling for swift action from all levels of government to ensure that deeply affordable housing is available to all. In particular, we are signatories to the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa's (ATEHO) *Starts With Home* campaign that calls for:

- Stopping the loss of affordable housing;
- Creating more affordable housing; and
- Preserving the quality of existing affordable housing.

6 intersectional feminist housing demands

Over and above ensuring access to deeply affordable housing, we need to make sure that the housing available is truly able to meet the needs of its residents. Below are 6 intersectional feminist demands of all levels of governments. This is not an exhaustive list of intersectional feminist demands, but they would go along way in supporting housing needs. These demands are required to ensure that those whose needs are continually ignored and whose rights are violated have secure, safe and appropriate housing.

We call on all levels of government to:



01. Address gendered hidden homelessness



02. Prioritize space & safety for women & gender diverse people in emergency housing



03. Strengthen physical accessibility of new & existing housing



04. Improve housing system navigation



05. Provide diverse and specialized supports



06. Eliminate transit fare & ensure close proximity to affordable housing & essential services

Human right to housing: an intersectional feminist issue

The UN Declaration of Human Rights asserts that the right to housing involves “the right to live in peace, security, and dignity”. The below recommendations complement ATEHO’s calls regarding deeply affordable housing and bring a feminist lens to advocating for full implementation of the universal right to housing in Ottawa.

an election issue

With both a provincial and municipal election on the horizon, we urge residents to engage with candidates on this critical issue - and challenge them to answer how they will incorporate these demands into their work if they are elected.

If there is a demand you think is important to make that isn't here - go for it! Let candidates' hear about your needs and concerns!

// OCTEVAW & CAWI



01. Address gendered hidden homelessness

- The way homelessness statistics are captured invisibilizes many women and gender diverse people who are houseless.
- Traditional statistics collection methods typically include surveying mainstream shelters, public spaces, or other homeless-specific services.
- Many women and gender diverse people often do not feel safe accessing these spaces, and instead rely on other types of shelter, such as couch surfing, meaning they are simply not counted.
- The lack of emergency and long-term housing for women and gender diverse people frequently forces them to practice high-risk strategies for survival, such as remaining in exploitative and unsafe relationships, or exchanging sex for shelter - which are also invisibilized by traditional statistics collection methods.



02. Prioritize space & safety for women & gender diverse people in emergency housing

- Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters for those fleeing abuse in Ottawa are almost always at capacity; over 2000 women were turned away because of a shortage of spots in the 2017/2018 fiscal year alone.
- When a VAW shelter is full, the City often sends survivors and their families to hotels or motels, many of which have been known to pose risks for further victimization or human trafficking; or to emergency shelters which present their own safety risks for women and gender diverse people.
- If VAW shelters are full the City may also direct women and gender diverse people needing shelter to mixed gender emergency shelters. Women and gender diverse residents often do not feel safe when accessing mixed gender emergency shelters.
- The shortage of VAW shelter spaces are perpetuated by the limited choices and lack of affordable housing for women to move into upon leaving shelters, which causes them to require emergency spaces for longer. This creates a bottleneck and prevents other survivors from accessing emergency VAW shelter space.
- There are no specific emergency shelter services for 2SLGBTQIA+ survivors - a gap that leaves many in danger.
- Creating more VAW emergency shelter and transitional housing spaces and creating emergency shelters for 2SLGBTIAQ+ survivors of violence must be prioritized.



03. Strengthen accessibility of new & existing housing

- Affordable housing must meet women and gender diverse people's needs over the course of their lifetimes by catering to residents within a range of ages, abilities, family sizes and differences, in keeping with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.
- This also involves thinking outside of the box to consider interconnected infrastructure such as community supports, transit, and ramps or sidewalks.
- For example, it is imperative that public sidewalks are kept clear throughout winter months to allow people with strollers, wheel chairs, walkers, and limited mobility to access their housing.



04. Improve housing system navigation

- There is a lack of transparency, information, guidance, and direction regarding how to navigate the city's housing services system. This creates unnecessary difficulty for women and gender diverse people in Ottawa.
- During community consultations, women described being bounced around to different bureaucrats and contacts, making the system difficult and frustrating to navigate. They also expressed a desire to be served by more inclusive and diverse staff.
- VAW emergency shelters employ Transitional Housing Support Workers that support survivors in navigating their move from the shelter into the community in a multitude of ways, and could provide expertise for developing a system navigation framework.



05. Provide diverse & specialized supports

- A feminist approach recognizes that women and gender diverse people all have different needs based on their intersecting identities. The provision of diverse, specialized and culturally appropriate community supports ensures that housing is accessible, supportive, and able to effectively meet the needs of its residents. Below are some examples of specialized supports that would meet women and gender diverse people's needs:
 - Additional housing supports for Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTIAQ+ people: Due to colonial legacies, ongoing racism and discrimination, Indigenous cultural supports including supportive housing, land based healing, and other culturally appropriate supports are necessary.
 - Culturally appropriate services: Proximity to places of worship, culturally specific grocery stores, community hubs and other supportive cultural and community centres.
 - Accessible community supports: Access to violence against women services, trauma support, mental health and addictions counseling, and other culturally specific community programming should be available on-site or nearby.
 - 2SLGBTIAQ+ centred senior housing: Older women and gender-diverse adults in the LGBTQ2S+ community frequently describe facing barriers to securing housing that is appropriate for their needs. They require safe, affordable housing in the geographic communities where they feel welcome, supported, comfortable and do not fear for their safety because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
 - Supportive housing for women and gender diverse people who use substances: Given the opioid crisis and overdoses across our country there is a need for support for people who use substances to relocate to other housing options to escape unsafe situations.



06. Eliminate transit fares & ensure close proximity to affordable housing & essential services

- Women and girls shoulder disproportionate responsibility for domestic care tasks and rely more heavily on public transportation to complete them, which requires more frequent transit trips and increases the time and cost burden of transit.
- People on low-income, which includes many women and gender diverse people, struggle to pay for fares and often have to choose between paying for transit or other vital necessities like groceries or rent. Transit needs to be free, accessible for all, and within close proximity to affordable housing.
- It is also paramount that ParaTranspo service is accessible to all and offers the same quality of service in terms of accessibility, availability and affordability as is offered to customers of OC Transpo.