

TRANSFORMING TOGETHER



A Guide to
Governance
of Boards by
the Manitoba
Association
of Women's
Shelters



MANITOBA ASSOCIATION
OF WOMEN'S SHELTERS

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The Manitoba Association of Women's Shelters (MAWS) is the registered not-for-profit charitable association for agencies working in the domestic violence sector.

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Introduction

This guide by the Manitoba Association of Women’s Shelters Inc. is part of “Transforming Together – A Project to Re-envision Family Violence” to build the capacity of the domestic violence shelter system in Manitoba. Funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada, a department succeeding Status of Women Canada, it is intended to create opportunities for safe conversations by board members to enhance the security they feel in their governance role.

A board may choose to work through the topics in order as part of a regular board meeting, or discuss topics of particular interest and concern in a series of board meetings. Each section of the guide includes reflective questions to prompt conversation and sharing of the wisdom in the room. Tips and tools are included where appropriate. An extensive list of references is attached to enable a deeper dive.

With strong governance, shelters will be better equipped to meet the challenges of change necessary to meet the increasingly complex needs of the women and children who access their services to escape violence.



Governance

What is governance?

Governance refers to the direction and control of an organization. According to the Manitoba Office of the Auditor General (OAG), governance requires clarity of roles, responsibilities and relationships. The four pillars of good governance are: leadership, stewardship, responsibility and accountability.¹

The *Manitoba Standards Manual for Women's Shelters (Standards Manual)* defines the board of an organization as the community volunteers elected to govern the organization.² The board is responsible for overseeing the operations and management of the shelter under the terms of the Service Purchase Agreement (SPA) with the Government of Manitoba. The board provides leadership to the organization and stewardship of its resources and is accountable for the overall performance of the shelter. Effective governance is essential to ensuring the shelter is well run, operates within its mandate and provides services that are efficient and effective.

What are the processes of governance?

Board meetings are the main process of governance. How often a board meets, its agenda, how elections are held, other issues covered in its by-laws and policy-making are examples of processes of governance.

Models of Governance

No one model of governance is best, and no one model fits all types of boards. The board chooses the best governance model for its current environment and development. Models may evolve over time.

Three governance models

- 1 Working board:** When organizations are starting up or are small with few staff, board members may need to be involved in the day-to-day work of the organization as active volunteers. They may help with administration and even assist with efforts to achieve the organization's mission. Manitoba shelters are sufficiently mature organizations, with staffing to cover all day-to-day operations, that shelter boards will not fall into this category.

The four pillars of good governance are: leadership, stewardship, responsibility and accountability.

- 2 Policy-making board (synonymous with a governing board):** This is the type of board framework implicit in the *Manitoba Standards for Women’s Shelters (the Standards)*, which state that the board is the governing body of the organization and responsible for implementing provincially prescribed policies for the organization. The Standards and the Service Purchase Agreement prescribe wide-ranging organizational policies that are necessary for compliance and require board accountability over operational issues. Generally, the board approves the policies that staff implement to operate the organization. Management of the shelter is delegated to the executive director, supervised by the board. This is also consistent with the provincial *Corporations Act*, which states, “directors shall manage or supervise management of, the business and affairs of a corporation”.³
- 3 Policy governance board:** This is the governance model created by John Carver, often known as the Carver model. Like a policy-making board, the board establishes policies and monitors the executive director’s compliance with policies, but the policies are of a specific kind. Policies set limits on the executive director’s ability to pursue the “means” of the organization. The board primarily focuses on the “ends” or the purpose of the organization and “executive limitations”, leaving the means to achieving the ends to the executive director. The types of board policies and accountabilities required by Manitoba’s Standards and SPA are inconsistent with the Carver model. For example, under the Carver model the board would not be involved in budgeting and would not approve the budget or the organization’s financial statements. These are required by Manitoba’s Family Violence Prevention Program.⁴



Reflective discussion

- Does your board fit any of these models?
- Are models helpful in understanding the governance role?
- What are the implications of funders requiring board accountability over operations of a shelter?

One implication of requiring accountability over operations is that board policies become operational in nature, as ensuring adherence to them is the responsibility of the board. Second, the line between the board and executive director can become blurred. Third, strategic issues can be lost as focus is more on day-to-day operations accountability. Fourth, information from management is crucial to board monitoring of operations.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Board of Directors

What are the roles of the board?

- strategic planning and monitoring implementation of the plan
- program oversight
- financial oversight, including ensuring the organization has the resources it needs
- board recruitment and sustainability
- hiring, managing and evaluating the executive director
- risk management
- approving the organization's vision, mission and values
- advocating for the organization
- setting policy
- fundraising

How does the board fulfill its roles?

Direction and control is through development of board policies. Day-to-day operations are delegated to the executive director, who is accountable to the board.

What are the roles of corporate officers?

The articles of incorporation and by-laws of an organization may specify that the corporation have officers. The usual officers are chair, vice chair, secretary, and treasurer. The roles of the officers should be set out in the by-laws. Job descriptions can also be created.

What role do board committees play?

Work can be delegated to committees, but decision-making cannot. The roles of committees should be clearly defined. Forming *ad hoc* committees as needed may be an alternative to standing committees.

What is the role of individual directors?

The role of individual board members is to be on the governance team. They bring their individual skills, commitment and experience to the board.

The role of individual board members is to be on the governance team.



Tips for effective board members

- Attend all board meetings to participate in making policy, monitoring operations via the executive director, and monitoring progress compared with operational plans. In order to participate to the best of their abilities, board members should:
 - be punctual
 - be informed on the agenda items
 - contribute in a concise, clear and carefully thought-out manner
 - carefully consider the positions of colleagues, assist in constructive decision-making and strive to achieve consensus

CONTINUED →

- Attend committee meetings.
- Contribute financially to the agency.
- Assume leadership when requested or required.
- Represent the agency at community events, and promote understanding of its purpose and programs.
- Stay informed about the agency's programs, policies and services.
- Be informed about the needs and trends within the shelter clientele and the community.⁵

The minimum qualifications of a board member are set out in the *Corporations Act*. Board members must be aged 18 or over and must not have bankrupt status. Board members should reflect the diversity of the community and/or the clientele served, and bring a variety of skills to the board.

Understanding unique needs

According to the *More Than a Bed* report published by Women's Shelters Canada, women's shelters are increasingly serving a broader group of women fleeing violence.⁶ Women fleeing different forms of violence, women with disabilities, racialized women, 2SLGBTQIA people, newcomers to Canada, older women and children are all accessing shelter services. However, the diversity of the clientele may not be reflected in board composition.

In a small-sized 2020 survey of organizations that was part of the Transforming Together project, only 44% of respondent organizations reflected the diversity of the community and clientele on their boards. None of the organizations responding included diversity and cultural competence in their board orientations, and only one included it in annual training. Yet, all organizations that responded are committed to delivering culturally safe services, and all intend their organizations to be culturally safe for Indigenous Peoples.

As they strive to be inclusive and barrier-free, boards need to understand the unique needs of the different groups and individuals who access shelter services. There is no doubt that limited capacity and funding makes this challenging.



Reflective discussion

- How does your board reflect the diversity of the community and clients?
- What skills and experience do board members bring to your board?
- Who is missing from the table?
- What skill sets are missing?
- Who do you need on our board, and how do you find them?



Tools

- “Board Matrix Worksheet”: <http://www.buildabetterboard.com/board-matrix-worksheet/>
- “20 questions directors of not-for-profit organizations should ask about board recruitment, development and assessment”: <https://bit.ly/2wrN4wF7>

Board Liability

Under the Standards for Women’s Shelters, shelters must be incorporated under the Manitoba *Corporations Act*. This makes the shelter, as a corporation, a legal entity or ‘person’ separate from its board members, staff and volunteers. The shelter has the capacity, rights, powers and privileges of a natural person.⁸ This means it can enter into contracts such as the Service Purchase Agreement and leases, and employment contracts with staff.

The articles of incorporation set out the basic framework for the corporation, including its name, address, status as a non-share corporation, the number of directors and the purpose and type of business the corporation may carry on.⁹ A copy of the original articles of incorporation is filed with the Family Violence Prevention Program.¹⁰

The by-laws of the corporation fill in details such as the fiscal year, membership, voting rights for members, meetings and officers. Every board member should have a copy of the by-laws. The by-laws should be reviewed regularly to ensure they are current and relevant.

Can a board member be held personally liable for the organization’s actions?

Because the shelter is incorporated and is a separate legal entity responsible for its own acts and omissions, directors are not usually liable for the conduct of the corporation. Board members who fulfill their duties diligently and take responsibilities seriously are unlikely to be found personally liable for misconduct of the corporation.¹¹



Tips for board members

- Attend as many meetings of the board or any committees as possible.
- Read the material sent to directors before meetings.
- Take accurate notes at board meetings and review minutes for accuracy.
- Make sure your concerns, if any, are set out in the minutes of the meeting.
- Consult independent experts when necessary.
- Be thoroughly familiar with the operations of the corporation.
- Be familiar with the financial status of the corporation.
- Determine from management if there are systems to monitor financial variations that should be drawn to the attention of management and the board.¹²

Even when taking all these steps, directors may still face claims against them. Claims may be based on breaches of contract, such as wrongful dismissal; breaches of obligations under the common law, like a breach of a fiduciary duty; or based on legislation such as the *Corporations Act* for payment of wages.¹³

What other legislation imposes responsibility or liability on board members?

Examples are:

- *Income Tax Act* – responsibility for withholding employee income tax under limited conditions
- *Employment Insurance Act* – responsibility for premiums if no due diligence
- *Canada Pension Plan* – responsibility for contributions under limited conditions
- *Workplace Safety and Health Act* (Manitoba) – liability for offences



Tools

- Legal checklist: https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/centres_homeproviders/centrebased_childcare/pubs/legal_checklist.pdf
- “Responsibilities and Liabilities of Directors in Manitoba”: <https://tmlawyers.com/?resources=responsibilities-and-liabilities-of-directors-in-manitoba>¹⁴

Fiduciary Duties

The relationship of the board members to the shelter is fiduciary. In carrying out their roles board members have fiduciary responsibilities or duties.

What is a fiduciary? What are fiduciary duties?

“A fiduciary is a person having a legal duty to act primarily for another person’s benefit and is a person who (a) owes another person the duties of good faith, trust, confidence, and candor; and (b) must exercise a high standard of care in managing another’s property.”¹⁵

The Governance Centre of Excellence sets out fiduciary duties as follows:¹⁶

- to act in the best interests of the corporation
- to act in good faith
- to act honestly
- to maintain loyalty
- to respect confidentiality

- to be obedient
- to avoid conflict of interest

Fiduciary duties are often codified in legislation and policies.

Conflicts of interest

The duty to avoid conflicts of interest is set out in the Service Purchase Agreement (SPA) with the Family Violence Prevention Program, in section 20 and Appendix 3. Appendix 3 is a conflict-of-interest policy setting out minimum standards required of board members and employees. The SPA also refers to the *Corporations Act*, of which section 115 covers conflicts of interest in material contracts with the organization, and requires disclosure in writing and recording of conflicts in the minutes.

The duty to avoid conflicts of interest covers actual, potential and perceived conflicts of interest.

A conflict of interest has a broad definition in Section III of Appendix 3 of the SPA: “any situation in which a Board member or employee of an external service provider has an employment, business or personal interest which results or appears to result in: (i) an improper material interest or an advantage by virtue of the person’s position; or (ii) an interference with the objective exercise of the person’s duties. A material interest includes any matter or situation where a Board member or employee has a direct or indirect financial or other interest beyond the interest of an ordinary citizen”.

The leading practice is to have board members sign conflict-of-interest declaration forms when they join the board, and to have annual reviews. The SPA requires annual signing of declarations. Declarations must be updated immediately when a conflict arises.

The duty to avoid conflicts of interest covers actual, potential and perceived conflicts of interest.



Tip

- Every meeting should have a regular agenda item at the start to identify conflicts, with responses recorded in the minutes.

The process to disclose a conflict under the SPA is to declare it in writing or have it recorded in the minutes. The nature and extent of the conflict also needs to be disclosed and recorded. A board member in conflict cannot be present for discussions or vote on issues related to the conflict. The absence of the board member is also recorded in the minutes. The board member must not attempt to influence the decision in any way. If there is uncertainty about whether or not a conflict exists, a vote by the directors decides the issue.



Reflective discussion

Scenarios:

- A board member owns a car dealership and the organization has a grant to purchase a van. Is there a conflict of interest? If so, when did the conflict arise?
- A shelter is beneficiary of a hockey fundraiser and a board member has a daughter on the team. Is there a conflict of interest? What if there are multiple beneficiaries and a board member's son receives services through the other beneficiary?
- A board member volunteers for an organization competing for funding with the shelter. Is there a conflict? What if the board member was asked for advice on the grant by the other organization?

Strict adherence to the conflict-of-interest policy is a way to protect the public interest in how public funds are spent. Service providers in receipt of tax dollars are seen as an extension of government delivering services on behalf of the government, and are accountable to taxpayers for how the money is spent. As a funder, the Province of Manitoba expects standards of conduct that maintain integrity, impartiality and ethical conduct.



Tips

- Remind yourself why you wanted to join the organization as a director.
- Ask yourself who you want to benefit: the organization or yourself, a family member or friend?
- Your primary duty is to the organization. If you are going to benefit in some way (directly or indirectly), then you will likely be in a conflict.
- If the organization has a conflict-of-interest policy, review it regularly, understand it, and apply it to the situations you face as they come up.¹⁷

Duty of confidentiality

The duty of confidentiality is extremely important for both individual board members and the organization. The duty to respect confidentiality covers keeping confidential information that is discussed at board meetings.

Given the importance of the protection of personal information, the SPA imposes additional duties of confidentiality on the board relating to the privacy of service users. The Province of Manitoba recognizes that agencies collect personal information in delivering services. Under privacy legislation, Manitoba is responsible for ensuring that personal information is handled appropriately.

According to the SPA, Appendix 2, "It is the responsibility of the governing Board of directors of the Service Provider to ensure that the Service Provider takes all reasonable steps to protect the privacy

of individuals receiving Services from the Service Provider and to establish policy and procedures for ensuring compliance with these requirements.”

Additionally, the *Standards Manual* requires a confidentiality policy:

2.2.1 Confidentiality and Safety of Admitted Clients

The shelter has a written policy intended to protect client confidentiality and ensure client safety upon admission. The policy includes that shelter staff do not confirm admission or disclose the whereabouts of a woman and her children admitted to the shelter to any person except when required to disclose due to legislation, judicial order or medical crisis. The policy also articulates the procedure for cooperating with police inquiries.



Reflective discussion

- Does your shelter have a policy and procedure that apply in the event of an information breach?
- When would board members need a client's personal information?
- Under the SPA, when can personal information be disclosed without consent?

Personal information needs to be released to the board when a client appeals a complaint decision.

The SPA in Appendix 2 section 1.10 (g) permits disclosure without consent when it is required or authorized by legislation; when production of the personal information or disclosure is required to comply with a rule of court that relates to production of the personal information; or when disclosure is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and immediate threat to the health or safety of the individual or any other individuals.

An example of disclosure authorized by legislation is Child and Family Services (CFS) reporting. The *Standards Manual* requires the shelter to have a written policy and procedures requiring staff to report suspected cases of children who need protection to a CFS agency, notwithstanding that the information on which the belief is founded is confidential.



Reflective discussion

What constitutes a serious and immediate threat to health or safety? To the individual? To a third party?

Scenarios:

- A crisis line caller threatens to harm herself, and the connection is lost.
- A client fails to return to the shelter for curfew, staff cannot reach her by cellphone, and the emergency contact is unaware of where she is.
- A client causes a disturbance and is removed from the shelter.

Duties to act honestly, to act in good faith and in the best interests of the organization

The duties to act honestly and in good faith and to act in the best interests of the organization are enshrined in Manitoba's *Corporations Act*. Paragraph 117 (1) (a) states: "Every director and officer of a corporation in exercising his powers and discharging his duties shall act honestly and in good faith with a view to the best interests of the corporation".

Duty of care

Paragraph 117 (2) of the *Act* states that in fulfilling their roles, directors must "exercise the care, diligence and skill that a reasonably prudent person would exercise in comparable circumstances."¹⁸



Tip

- Exercising due diligence is the most effective way for directors to protect themselves from liability. Due diligence includes utilizing the rights and powers of the director and seeking professional advice when necessary.¹⁹ See tips on page 6.

If you have special skills or experience, will you be held to a higher standard than that of a reasonably prudent person?

Individuals with special skills such as accountants or lawyers may be held to a higher standard of care.²⁰ The standard is what is reasonable in the circumstances, taking into consideration skills, knowledge and expertise.

Duty to comply

Subsection 117(2) of the *Corporations Act* provides that "every director and officer of a corporation shall comply with this Act and the regulations, the articles and by-laws, and any unanimous shareholder agreement".

Status as a charity

In addition to being incorporated under the laws of Manitoba, shelters may be registered under the federal *Income Tax Act* as charities. Board members of charities need to be aware of the shelter's charitable objects or purposes, in addition to other governing documents such as the articles of incorporation and the by-laws and policies. Activities of the shelter must fall within the charity's objects or purposes. If the objects are outdated or too narrow, boards should carefully consider changing them.

A higher standard of care may apply to directors of charities as compared to other not-for-profits.²¹



Tips

- Board members need to ensure that their organization devotes the majority of its resources to approved charitable activities related to their defined objects.
- Board members should be aware of reporting expectations of the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) with respect to the T3010B tax package, and oversee its accurate and timely completion
- Board members need to ensure that the organization has adequate resources and time to complete the T3010B tax package as required.
- The board, as the official governance entity of the charity, needs to sign off and approve all materials that are forwarded to the CRA with respect to these reporting documents.²²
- Directors need to ask what level of care would a reasonable and prudent person managing his or her own affairs exercise.²³

Accountabilities



Reflective discussion

To whom...	for what...	...and how is the board accountable?
clients	SPA s 4.03 (b) to provide services in accordance with good business practices and standards	mission, complaints policies
community	SPA appendix 4 says the organization is seen as an extension of government, therefore accountable to the public and a subset of taxpayers	efficient and effective governance of the organization
government	overall operation and management of the shelter	reporting requirements
donors	stewardship of the donations	legislation governing charities
staff and volunteers	safe workplace	policies and legislation
members of the corporation	governance of the organization and overall operations and management	annual report, voting on whether to remove a board member, bylaws, audited financial statement
funders	operations and management	funding agreement responsibilities

Board Policies

Only the board, at properly convened meetings, can approve an organization's policies. Policies are an important way of delegating to the executive director.

What are policies? Are there different kinds?

A policy can be:

- a governing principle
- a guideline or framework for carrying out work and actions
- a way for the board to delegate authority and still maintain control
- an explanation of the values and philosophies, even the goals of the program or organization
- a boundary within which an agency operates towards a specific end
- a clearly stated direction for implementing policies and procedures
- an expectation to guide program operations.²⁴

According to the *Standards Manual* a policy is a general plan of action adopted by an agency in relation to operations or service goals; a formalized statement describing the guiding principle or philosophy adopted by a service provider in relation to a specific standard.²⁵

What is the difference between a policy and a procedure?

According to the *Standards Manual*, “procedure is a mode of performing a task or way of carrying out an activity; in the context of ‘policy and procedures’, the method and manner by which the policy will be implemented; preferred or required practices.”²⁶

When is a policy needed?

- A policy may be based on a need identified by the board, a committee, staff person or member.
- A policy may be based on a response to external factors, such as changes in the community or environment.
- A policy may be based on an assessment of how the agency is operating that points out the need for a new policy or revision of existing policy.
- A written policy may be required to formalize a current practice that has evolved within the agency.

Funders may request specific policies be adopted or that a policy be developed in a particular area. (Government funders may want to ensure that policies are in line with taxpayers' expectations of government itself—such as employment equity, freedom of information, abuse reporting, and community involvement.)²⁷

Policies are an important way of delegating to the executive director.

How does the board develop policies?

While only the board can approve policy, proposals for policies may come from other sources such as the staff, executive director and committees. Written policy proposals should be put before the board in the form of a motion and voted on by the board. Approved policies are recorded in the minutes.



Tips

- Policies should be collected into a policy manual and distributed to the board and staff.
- Policies should be reviewed regularly and updated as needed by the board.
- Time should be set aside at each meeting to review two or three policies.
- Changes need to be voted on and recorded in the minutes.

Board Evaluation

A board should periodically evaluate its own governance performance. The Office of the Auditor General identifies different reasons for conducting evaluations, including to demonstrate fulfilment of fiduciary duties to funders, to enhance board processes, to improve board dynamics and culture, to develop and train directors, and to assess the overall impact of the board on the organization.²⁸

The areas that a board should evaluate are:

- board management (meetings, roles of individual directors, committees, etc.)
- board development (recruitment and orientation process, governance structure)
- board goals
- board culture

Different forms of evaluation are possible. Self-assessment is one of the simplest and straightforward. Peer evaluation is another option for assessing individual board members, but requires training and may be intimidating at first.



Tips

- Agree on roles, responsibilities and expectations before conducting an evaluation.
- Decide on the purpose and parameters of the evaluation.
- Assign a leader to oversee the process.
- Modify tools to suit your context.
- Use different kinds of surveys, such as with scales and open-ended questions.
- Share the results.



The Board and the Executive Director

The most important relationship in an organization is between the board and the executive director. Some of the most important responsibilities of the board relate to managing that relationship.

The board is responsible for hiring the executive director, managing the executive director and evaluating the executive director. The board has the authority to replace the executive director.

Central to managing the relationship with the executive director is having clearly defined roles for both sides. Those roles are complementary. As set out in *The Roles, Responsibilities and Functions of a Board*,

- “The board is a corporation and acts only as a group. The executive director is an individual and acts individually, within the bounds of policy.
- “The board is a continuous entity; although board members come and go, the board endures. The executive director is temporary. Even if the executive director is with the agency for a long time, he or she holds this position at the will of the board.
- “The board has the ultimate authority for the agency. The executive director has more limited authority—that which the board assigns.
- “The board is typically made up of people who are not experts in the agency’s programs or services. The executive director is usually a professional, with expertise in the agency’s programs and services.”²⁹

The issues of delegation and accountability must be clearly understood by both the board and executive director. Generally, the responsibility of the organization’s day-to-day operations should be delegated to the executive director, while the board views issues strategically.

The *Manitoba Standard’s Manual for Women’s Shelters* sets it out this way: “The board delegates authority for specific matters related to the daily operation of the program and the implementation of policies to the director, consistent with the director’s position description.”³⁰

So that roles are not blurry and accountability is well defined, a comprehensive and clear job description for the executive director is required, as well as clear and comprehensive board policies for the executive director to follow.

The issues of delegation and accountability must be clearly understood by both the board and executive director.



Tips

- The annual performance review should include a review of the executive director's job description.
- Ensure that the job description deals with reporting to the board.

Executive Director Reporting

In a 2009 survey, the Office of the Auditor General assessed the quality of information received by boards. To be useful for governance, the information reported to the board by the executive director should:

- have an appropriate level of detail;
- be a complete and fair representation of all facts;
- be received in a timely manner for effective decision-making;
- provide historical context to the issues being discussed;
- give future-oriented perspectives to the issues being discussed;
- explain significant issues, changes or problems that affect the organization;
- monitor performance and progress against planning;
- allow the board to use resources effectively and efficiently; and
- be balanced, presenting both positive and negative impacts of a particular decision.³¹

Executive Director Evaluation

The board should have a policy on performance management and on evaluation of the executive director. The OAG identifies annual performance evaluation as a leading practice. A board that does not properly evaluate the executive director could be seen as failing to exercise its responsibility to oversee management.

The process starts with establishing criteria to evaluate performance, which are usually set out in the job description. All board members should have an opportunity to provide input, although the board chair or a committee may lead the process.



Reflective discussion

- What are challenges to evaluating an executive director?
- Who should conduct the evaluation?
- What are the sources of information for the evaluation? From whom do you seek input, and how?
- Is there a link between evaluation and compensation?

In a 360-degree evaluation, input is sought from all board members, staff and the executive director herself. It may also include feedback from clients and key community stakeholders. All input is treated confidentially. This type of appraisal may be time-consuming, but can effectively identify areas of strong performance and of needed improvement.³² It also requires significant training of all participants to conduct properly.³³

The evaluation process should also identify performance and professional development goals for the next evaluation cycle.



Tips

- Establish the evaluation process.
- Collect input.
- Complete an evaluation form.
- Have the ED complete a separate copy of the form as self-evaluation.
- Meet to review feedback and evaluation forms.
- Amend the content as agreed.
- Sign off

Informal monitoring of the executive director's performance between formal evaluations is also important, but is not a substitute for formal evaluation. One way of informal monitoring is through regular in-camera sessions without the executive director. This allows board members to identify early on any issues they see. The board chair is responsible for following up with the executive director as needed.³⁴



Tools

- *Evaluating the Executive Director: Your Role as a Board Member*: http://www.firstnonprofit.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Evaluating-the-Executive-Director_Your-Role-as-a-Board-Member.pdf



Strategic and Operational Planning

The board is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the organization, done through strategic planning. Under the *Standards Manual* the board is responsible for both strategic and operational planning in conjunction with staff.

What is the difference between a strategic plan and an operational plan?

Strategic planning results in a written plan setting out the direction of the agency for three to five years. The operational plan converts the strategic plan into a one-year plan that focuses on day-to-day operations of the organization.

Both types of planning are led by the board, carried out in collaboration with staff.

Strategic planning usually involves an environmental scan of both the internal and external circumstances; a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis; review of vision and mission statements; identification of goals and strategies and their priority. It analyzes the current state of the organization to develop a view of its future state in three to five years, and how to get there.

According to the *Standards Manual* the operational plan should include:

- a ranked list of program and operational objectives for the current fiscal period
- a description of desired outcomes for each objective, their measurement criteria, and performance indicators as the basis for consistent reporting
- a list of all activities and tasks necessary to achieve operational objectives and produce the desired outcomes
- identification of the resources assigned to the activities and tasks, and of the individuals responsible and accountable for successfully completing them
- costing of associated staff and other resources needed to accomplish each activity or task (a detailed budget)
- the time frames or completion dates for developmental tasks or projects³⁵

To facilitate reporting, operational plans may include a column that reports on the progress of each objective and is updated throughout the year.

The operational plan is submitted to the Family Violence Prevention Program as part of the annual funding process.³⁶ Monitoring progress on the plans should occur regularly at board meetings.



Reflective discussion

- How and why are stakeholders involved in the planning process?



Tips

- **Make time for planning.** Managers and board members often complain that they have no time for planning. Setting aside specific meetings to plan or hold planning workshops are examples of how you can commit time.
- **Review plans regularly.** Planning must be an ongoing process, which allows the agency to respond to internal and external changes.
- **Gather information** from all possible relevant sources when planning: the community, staff, volunteers, clients and funders. Ensure that anyone affected by a plan has input into it.
- **Specify what is to happen when, and who is to do it.** Allowing people latitude in accomplishing tasks will contribute to their sense of responsibility and satisfaction.³⁷



Tools

- Plan checklist: https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/centres_homeproviders/centrebased_childcare/pubs/plan_checklist.pdf
- "20 Questions Directors of Not-for-Profit Organizations Should Ask About Strategy and Planning": <http://sectorsource.ca/resource/file/20-questions-directors-not-profit-organizations-should-ask-about-strategy-and-planning>
- Ron Robinson, "How to Conduct a SWOT Analysis": https://charityvillage.com/how_to_conduct_a_swot_analysis/



Financial Oversight

The fundamental role of stewarding resources requires the board to monitor and approve the organization's financial situation. This includes

- establishing the budget process and the financial reporting system;
- planning and reviewing the budget;
- establishing contracting procedures and policies;
- monitoring revenues and approving expenditures;
- participating in and overseeing fundraising activities;
- managing the physical and financial assets of the agency.³⁸

The tools used to do this are the financial policies of the organization, its budget, audited financial statements and in-year financial statements that compare actual expenditures to the budget. The budget and in-year statements are usually prepared by management. The audited financial statement is prepared by the organization's auditor, reporting to the board of directors. The auditor is appointed at the annual general meeting by the organization's members.

The board may also be required to review and approve specialized financial reports prepared for funders, donors, members of the organization and/or the government. Funders usually require that financial statements be in a specific format. For women's shelters, the Family Violence Prevention Program specifies financial reporting requirements. A breach of the reporting requirements could lead to termination of the Service Purchase Agreement (i.e., the government grant).

What is the role of individual board members in the organization's financial affairs?

Individual board member financial responsibilities include: reading and understanding financial reports; understanding the board's financial policies; and participating in approving the annual budget, audit, annual financial report and financial statements.³⁹ If board members do not understand what they are reviewing, they must ask questions for clarification.

If board members do not understand what they are reviewing, they must ask questions for clarification.



Tools

- “A Guide to Financial Statements of Not-for-Profit Organizations, Questions for Directors to Ask”: <https://www.cpacanada.ca/en/business-and-accounting-resources/strategy-risk-and-governance/not-for-profit-governance/publications/nfp-financial-statements-guide-directors-questions>
- *Financial Responsibilities of Not-for-Profit Boards*, ch. 4, “Reading a Financial Statement”: <https://www.muttart.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Financial-Responsibilities-2008.pdf>⁴⁰
- The Manitoba Government website: https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/centres_homeproviders/centrebased_childcare/financial_management.html

What is the role of the treasurer?

The role of the treasurer may be set out in an organization’s by-laws. A job description should be created. At minimum, the treasurer should present the financial statements and budget to the board, moving for approval. Day-to-day financial management is delegated to senior management.

What is the role of a finance committee?

If the organization has a finance committee, it should have clear terms of reference. Its focus should be on developing policies that ensure the roles, responsibilities and limits of authority of those responsible for financial management are clearly set out and monitored for compliance.

What is the role of an audit committee?

If the organization has an audit committee, again, clear terms of reference are required. Duties should include recommending appointment of the auditor, liaison with the auditor as required, and recommendation to the board to approve the audited financial statements.



Reflective discussion

- How often should the board review in-year financial statements?

Fundraising



The shelter must acquire resources, allocate them to support the operational plan, and use them to serve the community. The board needs to have a strategy and a plan to acquire these resources. Part of that strategy may include fundraising for gifts and grants in addition to the Family Violence Prevention Program's annual funding.

Expectations of individual board members' role in fundraising should be set out in their job descriptions and made known to candidates before they join the board. For example, are all board members expected to make a personally significant donation?

Other expectations may include that board members

- identify and evaluate prospects, and cultivate and solicit gifts;
- support fundraising programs by their presence;
- offer personal acknowledgments to donors and volunteers;
- advocate the organization's priorities and the necessity of its fundraising efforts.



Reflective discussion

- Will the board play a role in fundraising?
- What role will that be?
- What is the role in relationship to government funders?
- What other strategies can meet the organization's financial needs?

Fundraising and Corporate Partnership Strategies

Credibility in the community is essential for fundraising and corporate support. According to the *More Than a Bed* report, the majority (55%) of violence-against-women (VAW) shelters could not meet their operating expenses without fundraising.⁴² Corporate partnerships with businesses and organizations that value social responsibility and support an end to domestic violence for their employees, customers, family, friends and the public are potential sources for fundraising through cause-related marketing, in-kind donations, corporate giving and sponsorships.

According to the Canada Revenue Agency, cause-related marketing is “a fundraising activity where a registered charity (or other qualified donee) works with a for-profit partner to promote the sale of the for-profit partner’s items or services on the basis that part of the revenues will go to the registered charity.”⁴³

Accreditation

Boards should consider whether to have their shelter accredited. An accreditation process involves peer review by an independent third party to determine if an organization meets or exceeds pre-set quality standards and demonstrates excellence in areas such as board governance, client programs and services, employee and volunteer engagement, internal business processes, financial responsibility and fund development. The concept is similar to the private sector’s ISO (International Organization for Standardization) certification process.⁴⁴

For example, an accreditation program is run by Imagine Canada, a national charitable organization dedicated to providing charities and nonprofit organizations with programs, assistance and resources. The program is intended to protect the public, particularly donors, by evaluating a charity’s performance in five key areas: governance, financial accountability, fundraising standards, human resources, and volunteer management.⁴⁵

Another accreditation program is run by the Canadian Accreditation Council.⁴⁶

Accreditation carries costs: fees and the time to prepare for and be involved in the process.



Reflective discussion

- What are some ways a shelter can attract patrons and donors?
- How do organizations expand their reach into the community and differentiate their message?
- What risks are associated with corporate sponsorship and cause-related marketing for the shelter? What advantages are there?
- Are there potential partnership and sponsorship opportunities in your community? What are they?
- What would you see as the benefit of accreditation?



Tools

- Fundraising: <https://charityvillage.com/cms/knowledge-centre/fundraising>
- *Fundraising, A Partnership between Board and Staff*: http://www.firstnonprofit.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Fundraising_A-Partnership-Between-Board-and-Staff.pdf
- “Accreditation: Is it Right for Your Organization?” https://charityvillage.com/accreditation_is_it_right_for_your_organization/



Gender-Based Analysis Plus

Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) is a process for decision-making. The federal government uses it to ensure it is taking into consideration how diverse groups of women, men and non-binary individuals experience policies, programs and initiatives. 'Plus' refers to identity factors like race, ethnicity, religion, age, and mental or physical disability.⁴⁷

The GBA+ process may be relevant to board decisions on allocation of resources to different types of shelter programming and service areas. A GBA+ analysis could help identify and understand how shelter policies and practices affect not only women but also men, the 2SLGBTQQIA community, Indigenous peoples, racialized individuals and persons with disabilities—and find ways to address their needs.

The Family Violence Prevention Program has a mandate to provide policy and program direction to services for women, their children and men. Yet currently the Standards and Service Purchase Agreements are silent on service to male victims of gender-based violence. Services to men are an emergent issue. For example, the *Shelter 2.0 Discussion Paper* explores shelters through a gendered lens, not simply violence against women.⁴⁸ A gendered approach to services for male victims could follow these steps:

- 1 Identify the issue, such as a lack of shelter services for men.
- 2 Challenge assumptions, such as that men are abusers, not victims.
- 3 Gather facts, research and consult, such as on the incidence of gender-based violence against men, and identify gaps in data.
- 4 Develop options and recommendations, such as providing hotel space to male victims.
- 5 Implement solutions, such as pilot shelter services for men.
- 6 Communicate, such as with a press release on new services.
- 7 Monitor and evaluate. For example, is the pilot program operating effectively and appropriately for male victims of gender-based violence?

An emergent issue involving other identity factors in the GBA+ process is providing culturally appropriate services to shelter users. In a recent national survey of shelters, 34% reported that providing culturally appropriate supports and services was a “major challenge.”⁴⁹ And while 80% of Violence Against Women shelters reported serving Indigenous women, only 19% were able to “often” offer culturally appropriate programs.⁵⁰

A GBA+ approach to look at the issue of culturally appropriate programs for Indigenous clients could lead to asking questions like these:

- Who is the target population for the program?
- Will the program have consequences for individuals outside the target population?
- Have stakeholders been consulted? Which ones?
- Have the targeted population(s) been consulted?
- Are the administrative processes used to access a program appropriate for the target audience?
- Have potential unintended impacts been identified?
- What strategies could mitigate these unintended impacts?
- Has diversity been adequately considered? Distinguish the experiences of diverse Indigenous women (including Inuit, Métis and First Nations, on and off reserve).



Reflective discussion

- Can this approach help you consider diversity in decision-making and planning?



Tools

- GBA+ Course: <https://cfc-swc.gc.ca/gba-acsc/course-cours-en.html>
- “Gender Based Analysis +: What is it and Why?”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6w-d1mmjFU>

A photograph showing three women in a professional setting, likely a meeting or workshop. They are seated around a table, looking towards each other and engaged in conversation. The woman on the left is wearing a dark jacket, the woman in the middle is wearing a light-colored top, and the woman on the right is wearing a green sleeveless top. The background shows a window and a brick wall.

Integrated Anti-Oppression Framework and Practice

Key to advancing equality between women and men in the economic, social and democratic life of Canada is challenging and changing the trajectory of violence against women. One approach to doing this is anti-oppression practice, a social work practice broader than Gender-Based Analysis+. Under an integrated anti-oppression framework, violence against women is oppression at the individual level, while at the systemic level women experience disproportionate rates of violence because of sexism.

While the women with whom shelters work have all been affected by sexism and violence, their experiences of the broad impact of violence differ depending on their experiences with other forms of oppression such as racism, ableism, heterosexism, classism and ageism. Applying an anti-oppression lens leads to recognition that individual contexts differ, and that people's lived realities are complex. Even when women share a group identity, they may not have similar characteristics and lived experiences.

It is important to recognize these characteristics given the increasing diversity of clients and their needs, and to recognize that

regardless of what other forms of oppression women may experience, it is important not to 'rank' oppression. We must avoid separating different forms of oppression into a hierarchy of importance. No experience of oppression is better or worse than another, rather they will create different experiences for different people. A woman who faces ableism does not experience oppression more than a woman living in poverty. A woman who faces racism does not experience oppression more than an Aboriginal woman. The important thing to note is that all of these women are experiencing oppression and comparing the severity of their oppression only serves to minimize their experiences. An anti-oppression framework guides us to see all forms of oppression as interconnected and all warranting elimination.⁵¹

Anti-oppression also implies that all those dealing with gender-based violence need to engage in self-reflection about their own attitudes, assumptions and standards. "Integrated anti-oppression requires that people examine their own experiences and actions, and critically analyze social structures of power and privilege. It insists that the dominant group recognize the power of its own social location(s) and how that power results in societal privilege and benefit to the exclusion of marginalized people."⁵²

The following principles guide the integrated anti-oppression model:

- “Society operates within a socially constructed hierarchy of difference where some people are valued and privileged and others are marginalized and exploited. For example, people living with a disability are devalued by society and their contribution to society is not recognized, solely because of their disability.
- “People do not belong to just one category or social location. Our identities are complex and multiple; fluid rather than fixed. As a result, we can be both victims and perpetrators of oppression. We often re-create the relations of social power and control that also oppress us. For example, one may experience oppression because of female gender but at the same time experience white skin privilege.
- “The ideas, thoughts and beliefs of people who ‘belong’ to groups that are highest on the social hierarchy create ‘dominant culture’. Dominant culture becomes the standard or norm by which everyone is compared. For example, in Canada the dominant culture norm of women’s clothing does not include wearing the hijab, as a result wearing the hijab is considered unusual and abnormal.
- “People who are members of privileged groups have the power to control access to resources and information. This perpetuates the cycle of power and oppression for people who are not members of these groups. People who are marginalized and exploited experience limited access to the power to shape their own past, present and future. For example, Canadian history has been written from the perspective of white skinned, European descent colonialists. This historical perspective is perpetuated through dominant education institutions as the only true view of history.
- “Not everyone from the same social group has the same experiences because people have many different lived experiences. When people have multiple marginalized identities, they do not merely face extra barriers; their lived experience is entirely different.
- “Integrated anti-oppression work requires that individuals accept responsibility for their role in perpetrating oppression both interpersonally and systemically. To bring about change, individuals and systems must be changed”.⁵³



Reflective discussion

- Which groups are over-represented on your board and as clients of your shelter?
- What does this over-representation say about power? About marginalization?
- How do shelters contribute to building equality and equity for women in society?
- Are shelter services more accessible to some groups than others?
- Could barriers prevent individuals from diverse communities from becoming board members?
- Is the board committed to the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the calls to justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls?



Trend to Low-Barrier Shelters

In 2015, the Canadian Network of Women’s Shelters and Transition Houses, now Women’s Shelters Canada, surveyed shelters about the increasingly complex needs of the women accessing their services. Fewer than 20% indicated they were well equipped to help women with mental health issues, and just 31% of shelter workers felt they were well equipped to help women with substance use concerns.⁵⁴ Given the strong relationship between violence against women and mental wellness and substance use, shelters must increase their capacity to support women dealing with mental wellness and addiction issues.

In May 2019, Women’s Shelters Canada hosted a national conversation on shelters of the future that considered how to increase access to shelter services for women with complex needs.⁵⁵ One of the calls for justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was for Indigenous-led low-barrier shelters with service appropriate to cultural needs.⁵⁶

Research and a literature review done in British Columbia documents that experiencing violence can lead to chronic health problems related to mental wellness and substance use. Evidence suggests that women dealing with varying levels of mental health and/or substance use have often experienced violence. One study found that as many as half the women surveyed who were diagnosed with a mental health concern had experienced violence.⁵⁷ Statistics Canada has reported that individuals with disabilities related to mental health “experience more repeat violence, more violence at the hands of someone they know” and that spousal violence is four times more common for these individuals than it is among the general population.⁵⁸ In another study, 86% of the women seeking assistance for substance abuse had experienced violence.⁵⁹

Yet all too often, women with intersecting experiences of violence, issues with mental wellness and substance use find it difficult to access shelter services.⁶⁰

The trend to low-barrier shelters is one that boards of directors cannot ignore.

The trend to low-barrier shelters is one that boards of directors cannot ignore.



Reflective discussion

- What makes a woman's needs complex?
- What is your shelter's experience of serving women with complex needs?
- Has this experience changed over time?
- How well equipped is your shelter to help women with mental health and/or substance use issues?
- What do you think of when you hear the term "low-barrier shelter"?

The *Reducing Barriers* toolkit defines "low barrier" as follows:

Term used to refer to programs that typically accept women or people accessing services that are often denied service at other organizations based on their levels of mental wellness or substance use. Often low barrier programs attempt to meet people where they are at rather than requiring the service recipient to abstain from substance use, for example, or to be stable on medications as long as they are respectful of others in the program. The goal is to have as few barriers to services as possible.⁶¹

The rationale for low-barrier shelters is simple:

"Despite the many challenges service providers experience, it is our responsibility to do the best we can with what we have, to support women fleeing violence. When women access Transitional Housing programs we work with them to decrease their risk of experiencing violence at the hands of their abuser, but we can provide other tools and information to reduce harm and increase women's safety as well. Rather than screening some women out of our services with the intention of keeping other women, youth and children safe from them, we need to find ways of keeping women safe no matter what their levels of mental wellness and/or substance use are."⁶²

The *Standards Manual* is clear that services are designed specifically for women (and their children) who have been abused by intimate partners or other family members. Accordingly, all women (and their children) seeking support for dealing with family violence should be admitted.

However, the services are not provided unconditionally. The *Standards Manual* provides for exceptions to admission, including "women assessed by shelter staff as being at imminent risk and needing alternative intervention services due to indicators such as serious mental disturbance or chronic chemical dependency; and women under the influence of alcohol or drugs who, in the opinion of shelter staff, present a risk to other women and children in residence."⁶³

The shelter should have a written policy on what to do in these situations. Additionally, the *Standards Manual* requires a policy on threats and concerns for safety:

2.2.2 Threats to Safety The shelter has written policies and procedures to be used when shelter staff or clients have received threats or there is concern for their safety.



Reflective discussion

- Does your organization's mission statement cover services to all women seeking help to escape violence?
- What is the board's role in interpreting or changing the mission statement?
- Do low-barrier shelters have implications for recruitment of board members?
- Are there implications for strategic planning?



Tools

- *Reducing Barriers to Support for Women Fleeing Violence: A Toolkit for Supporting Women with Varying Levels of Mental Wellness and Substance Use:* <https://bcsth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ReducingBarrierToolkit.pdf>

Harm Reduction Approaches

What is harm reduction?

Harm reduction refers to a framework for working with people who use substances such as drugs and/or alcohol that attempts to reduce the harmful consequences of associated risky behaviour.

Historically, shelters have had zero tolerance for substance use, prioritizing the safety of other women and children and staff. A simplistic risk assessment excludes women who are currently using or have used substances within a prescribed period of time before coming to a shelter where abstinence is a condition of stay.

While easy to apply, such approaches are largely based on stereotypes and assumptions about drug users rather than individualized assessments of the actual risks such women may pose to themselves and/or others. Harm reduction approaches do not require abstinence or reduction in use by women seeking shelter services, but focus on behaviours and attempts to accommodate women with substance use issues.

Harm reduction approaches can be challenging to implement. The 2019 report *More Than a Bed* noted that 79% of shelters that had served women with substance use concerns reported that it was a “major challenge” for their shelter.⁶⁴

Building staff capacity is an important step in adopting harm reduction approaches. The Canadian network's 2015 *Shelter Voices* survey found that only 31% of workers felt well equipped to deal with women with substance use concerns.⁶⁵

The strategies to build capacity that workers identified were:

- specialized mental health and addictions training for staff
- an onsite addictions worker
- more community-based programs available to women (such as detox or addiction centres)
- shorter wait times for detox and substance use programs
- safe harm reduction options for women fleeing abuse

As employers, boards need to be aware of the difficulties associated with harm reduction work and to understand the context experienced by staff. Support for workers and training need to be available, including on how to deal with vicarious trauma. The wellness and safety of staff need to be top of mind.

Harm reduction strategies may require additional funding for training to provide workers with adequate knowledge and tools to work with populations who have substance use problems. Specific funding for addictions positions within shelters has also been recommended.⁶⁶ The Manitoba Association of Women’s Shelters has received funding to create training tools for shelter staff in harm reduction, trauma-informed practices, addictions and mental health.

This is consistent with an increasing number of shelters that are making efforts to accommodate women with alcohol- and substance-use issues. In the *More Than a Bed* survey, of 213 responding VAW shelters serving women with substance use concerns, 60% indicated that they could “always” accommodate them and 39% indicated they could “sometimes” accommodate them.⁶⁷

A risk of not adopting harm reduction approaches is to contravene Manitoba’s *Human Rights Code*, which prohibits discrimination based on disability and imposes a duty to accommodate. Addiction or substance dependence is a disability within the meaning of the *Code*. Failure to reasonably accommodate the needs of a person with an addiction or substance dependence may constitute discrimination.⁶⁸

The wellness and safety of staff need to be top of mind.



Reflective discussion

- What are some assumptions made about drugs and women who use them?
- Why would a shelter engage in harm reduction?
- Why would a shelter not engage in harm reduction?
- What is your organization’s position on harm reduction?

When an Ontario study asked why organizations practiced harm reduction, the responses generally were: to provide inclusive service, commitment to working with women where they are at, belief in the rights of all women to access supports, recognition of the increased vulnerability to violence and oppression that using women face, commitment to feminist anti-oppression ways of working, to increase women’s safety, and belief that women who use deserve respect and choice and should be treated with integrity.⁶⁹

In the same study, reasons given for not implementing harm reduction included: the values and beliefs of the staff team, fear, lack of training, needs beyond what they are able to provide, and uncertainty about what to do regarding solvent use and community perception.⁷⁰

More commonly provided harm reduction practices included providing condoms, sharps disposal containers, safe methadone storage, harm reduction counselling and generally continuing to offer services while women are using. Less common services were providing new needles and pipes (kits) and storing medicinal marijuana; the least common was providing a safe space for women to use alcohol.⁷¹

In Manitoba, one shelter reported that clients often arrive with drug paraphernalia and weapons. The shelter locks up any hazardous items during the client's stay. Clients are not asked to leave if they are using drugs, but are not allowed to use drugs on site. If clients are asked to leave due to behavioural issues, they go through a fresh intake if or when they request to return.

Another Manitoba shelter is working on harm reduction policies. Currently, the shelter advises clients upon intake of the need for abstinence from alcohol. On occasion, a client who does not return to the shelter at night subsequently asks for readmission. The on-duty staff person considers readmission case by case to determine the safety level for admission and their own comfort level. Some clients have been admitted to 'just sleep it off' with intermittent inspections. In other cases, when behavior may be disruptive, admission is denied but the shelter will pay for a cab to a safe friend or relative. Disruptive behaviors have made it necessary to call the RCMP for removal. Medical marijuana is stored in locked medicine boxes, as are prescription opioids and other pharma with street value. Other drugs are not allowed on the premises.

A small rural shelter with only one staff member on duty most of the time reports that it is hard to apply harm reduction, but does so in a small way. If women are using off site and do not cause a disturbance, they are often allowed to stay as long as they are able to participate in programming.



Tools

- *Safe for All Discussion Guide:* <http://www.oaith.ca/assets/library/SafeForAllmanualManual.pdf>

Trauma- and Violence-Informed Practices

Trauma- and violence-informed practices are complementary to harm reduction practices, as both focus on safety and engagement. Trauma- and violence-informed practices are intended to reduce harm that may be inadvertently caused to people accessing support systems, including shelters. Trauma may result from retelling their story or experiencing marginalization, discrimination, stigma or a loss of power or control.

Regarding the connection between trauma and violence, the Public Health Agency of Canada says:

- Trauma is both the experience of, and response to, an overwhelmingly negative event or series of events, including violence.
- Violence can take many forms, and can occur once or many times during someone's life.
- Violence can have traumatic long-term effects, whether the violence is ongoing or in the past.⁷²

To emphasize the connections between trauma and violence, the agency states, "Embedding trauma and violence-informed approaches into all aspects of policy and practice create universal trauma precautions that reduce harm and provide positive supports for all people."⁷³

Domestic violence is a form of trauma. Trauma is a component of homelessness. Intergenerational trauma due to residential school attendance and other consequences of colonization is widespread.

Shelter services must deliver trauma- and violence-informed services. The Public Health Agency identifies four principles for implementing them:⁷⁴

- Understand trauma and violence, and their impacts on peoples' lives and behaviours.
- Create emotionally and physically safe environments.
- Foster opportunities for choice, collaboration and connection.
- Take a strengths-based and capacity-building approach to support coping and resilience.

One shelter has incorporated trauma-informed practices into its clinical framework. During counselling, disclosure of trauma is not required. Rather, services are universally provided to clients in ways that recognize their need for physical and emotional safety, as well as individual choice and control in decisions about services and treatment they receive.

For a board, an important consequence of trauma- and violence-informed practices is to recognize vicarious or secondary trauma among staff, and the importance of self-care and staff well-being.



Reflective discussion

- What trauma- and violence-informed practices does your shelter use?
- How is staff well-being reflected in personnel policies and practices?
- What trauma-informed practices could be incorporated into board functioning?



Tips for trauma-informed meetings

- Make sure everyone in the room has a chance to be heard, and that the discussion is not dominated by one or two members.
- Spend enough time to process different views and perspectives.
- Openly discuss issues of safety and power; have a plan to make this process as safe as possible for all.
- Make space for participants to “check in” so that you are hearing what is most immediately on their minds.
- Create norms for dealing with differences of opinion, and follow them.
- Thank people for attending.



Tools

- *Hosting a Meeting Using Principles of Trauma Informed Care*: <https://traumainformedoregon.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Hosting-a-Meeting-Using-Principles-of-Trauma-Informed-Care-1.pdf>
- Klinik Community Health Centre, *Trauma Informed, The Toolkit*, 2nd edition: http://trauma-informed.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Trauma-informed_Toolkit.pdf

Domestic Violence Housing First

Housing First is an approach to ending homelessness that recognizes housing as a human right available to everyone. No criteria connected to abstinence or recovery are preconditions to being housed. Housing First models are low barrier and trauma-informed, utilizing harm reduction approaches.

In Manitoba, as in many other places, the homelessness and domestic violence (DV) service sectors have been quite separate. This needs to change, to create a seamless continuum of housing services that provide safety and stability for women whether they connect first with homelessness services or domestic violence shelter services.

Domestic Violence Housing First approaches, which recognize violence as a leading cause of homelessness for women and children, can help do this. These approaches focus on quickly getting survivors of domestic violence into stable housing and then providing the necessary support to help rebuild their lives. This requires that systems dealing with homelessness and violence against women must integrate and/or coordinate their structures and service delivery.

A program in Oregon was identified by the American National Alliance to End Homelessness as a best practice in Domestic Violence Housing First approaches. Volunteers of America's Home Free program emphasizes rapid return to potentially permanent, neighborhood-based housing involving intensive advocacy, beginning with overcoming the family's barriers to housing. Once such a safe home is

established, the survivor and her advocate address other needs of the family to help them sustain their housing and maintain self-sufficiency.⁷⁵

An evaluation of the program suggests that domestic violence shelters can increase access to housing by

- training staff on housing resources, and assisting survivors to access and fully utilize existing housing resources;
- developing or improving relationships and communication with housing programs and apartment managers/owners to reduce the housing barriers identified by survivors;
- providing cross-training for housing programs and advocates for people experiencing violence or at risk of experiencing it to increase understanding of the needs of survivors and children and the barriers they face.⁷⁶



Reflective discussion

- How could relationships between a homeless-serving system and the shelter be strengthened?
- What barriers are there to finding safe and affordable housing in your community?
- If DV Housing First approaches are adopted, is there concern about the lack of need for emergency shelters for survivors?
- What role do shelters play in the housing continuum for survivors?
- Who is not using shelter services? Can the shelter help those people?



Tools

- *What we are learning: Domestic Violence Housing First:* <https://wscadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/What-We-Are-Learning-Domestic-Violence-Housing-First.pdf>



Emerging Practices

Coordinated Access

All communities that receive federal Reaching Home funds under Canada’s Homelessness Strategy are required to have a coordinated access system by March 31, 2022. Coordinated access differs from program-oriented approaches: it puts the client at the centre. The goals of coordinated access are to connect individuals to services in a more streamlined way and to ensure equity of access, prioritizing those in most need of assistance. Shelters need to be a part of community conversations about coordinated access.

A coordinated access system is the process or journey by which individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness are

- directed to community-level access points;
- supported to address housing challenges through triage/screening and, if needed, further assessment;
- prioritized for housing resources;
- matched and referred to housing resources when a vacancy occurs.⁷⁷

Key to coordinated access is creation of chronological and by name waiting lists through an information management system: Homeless Individual and Families Information System (HIFIS). Shelters will start to use HIFIS in 2020. Local priorities for service can take precedence over the chronological wait list.

Coordinated access systems are being created in Winnipeg, Brandon and Thompson.

Oregon has coordinated access for families fleeing domestic violence that coordinates access to emergency shelters, motel vouchers, rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing. The main point of access is the domestic violence crisis line. When a household experiencing homelessness is identified as needing domestic violence (DV) services, they are immediately referred to the access point for survivors of domestic violence. If the household does not wish to seek DV services, it has full access to coordinated access processes for youth, families with minor children, and adults unaccompanied by minor children. If the access point determines that the household seeking DV services is either not eligible for or cannot be accommodated by the DV subsystem, participants are referred to appropriate access points for youth, families with minor children, or adults unaccompanied by minor children.⁷⁸

Shelters need to be a part of community conversations about coordinated access.



Reflective discussion

- What are the priorities for housing in your community?
- Should safety be a local priority for housing?
- Should women with children be a local priority?
- To protect identities, should people be able to be on the wait list anonymously?
- What other local concerns should shelters discuss regarding coordinated access?



Tools

- “Built for Zero Canada, Coordinated Access”: <https://bfzcanada.ca/coordinated-access/>

Deep Partnerships for Service Delivery

In the *More Than a Bed* report, over one-third (37%) of responding women’s shelters reported that they served women escaping forms of violence and abuse in addition to those from intimate partners.⁷⁹ Mandates were broadening out of concern that there were no other places to find help.

The Challenge for Change project, a three-year project led by Winnipeg’s Willow Place agency to integrate and coordinate supports needed by persons experiencing violence, advocated for a broad safety mandate for women seeking service from shelters, which is now supported by the Family Violence Prevention Program. This broader interpretation applies to women who are trafficked, sexually assaulted or whose safety is at risk because they are homeless.

As the lead in the project, Willow Place has used this broader mandate of safety to expand its service model in partnership with community. Using trauma-informed harm reduction practices, it is implementing

- STAR (short-term addiction recovery) beds in partnership with Klinik Community Health and Mobile Withdrawal Management Services. This program has been so successful that Willow Place has been asked to share why it engaged in this project, what it did and how it is working with the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba and the director of River Point Centre, a residential treatment centre. Klinik will continue to contract with Willow Place for STAR bed services.
- Onsite biweekly primary health care services (examinations, consultations and prescriptions) with an attending nurse practitioner or physician in a joint effort with Women’s Health Clinic (WHC). If evaluation of this project is favourable, WHC will continue to provide staff for the biweekly clinic and Willow Place will provide the examination room space and work station. The examination bed was purchased through an ancillary grant.

Centralized Services for Adults, part of the provincial Department of Families, is working with Willow Place to develop a coordinated case-planning and support model for women with disabilities whose living situation is not safe. Working out the wrinkles could lead to developing coordinated case planning with shelters across the province and providing effective service to this high-risk group.



Reflective discussion

- What are the advantages of service partnerships?
- What are the challenges?
- Which agencies is your shelter already in partnership with?
- Which are the potential partners in your community?

Outreach Services

New models are emerging that bring access to shelter services to potential clients. The *Shelter 2.0* discussion paper proposes a shift to “shelters without walls”. It calls on shelters to move from first-come, first-served models to serving those in highest need of support and protection from imminent danger, and to utilize outreach services to meet women with lower danger-assessment scores in safe community spaces.⁸⁰

Outreach/mobile domestic violence counselling services are currently available at Access Downtown (a Winnipeg integrated health care and social service site) and the Salvation Army’s homeless shelter, providing a model for further expansion. The Family Violence Prevention Program and the community will be asked to consider opportunities to make domestic violence counselling services across the province more accessible, discreet and cost-effective through this model. Existing shelter (and potentially resource centre) staff with strong therapeutic counselling skills may be re-deployed in this alternative model of delivering follow-up and outreach services. In Winnipeg, one additional full-time staffer would be required for expansion to the remaining six Access Centres in Winnipeg and other integrated health and social service centres.



Reflective discussion

- Would outreach services increase the number of women accessing counselling who do not currently do so through the shelter?
- What resources are needed to provide outreach?
- Which community spaces in your community could safely accommodate such services?

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