



Family Violence Shelter Standards

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Government of
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Overview of the Standards:

The standards outline the minimum requirements for all Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) funded family violence shelters in the Northwest Territories.

The goal of the standards is to promote consistent, high quality shelter services to women and their dependents across the Territory. The standards will provide guidance on:

- The development of required shelter policies and procedures to guide program planning, management, and operations.
- Training and orientation of family violence shelter staff; and
- Clarification of authority, responsibility, and accountability within and between family violence shelters and the DHSS and Health and Social Services Authorities (HSSA) including monitoring measures.

A **standard** is a minimum level of performance expressed in precise measurable terms; a mandatory requirement used as a basis for review or audit; a concise statement of expectations requiring adherence to clearly defined practices or procedures, and resulting in measurable outcomes

Program Purpose, Description, and Intention

Purpose: The purpose of family violence shelters is to offer protection and a range of support services for women and their dependents that are fleeing violent and/or abusive situations. Shelters provide women with opportunities to learn of available resources and alternatives to facilitate informed self-directed choices and decisions.

Description: NWT family violence shelters provide safe, temporary accommodation for women that are fleeing violence and/or abuse on a 24 hour basis, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Access to shelter is universal for all women and their dependents who meet established criteria.

Intention: The Family Violence Shelter Standards are intended for Territorial family violence shelters funded by the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS). The standards outline the expectations of the Department of Health and Social Services and the Health and Social Services Authorities. Shelter standards are intended to support family violence shelters in providing consistent, high-quality, seamless access to services to those who identify as female (herein referred to as woman, women, client and/ or clients) and their dependents across the NWT.

Program Objectives

- To provide emergency, safe shelter for women and their dependents who have experienced family violence and/or abuse;
- To support safety planning for women and their dependents, who are experiencing violence and/or abuse and address their immediate safety concerns;
- To provide information, support and referrals to women and their dependents to help address their unique needs accessing services.

Guiding Principles

- All women, with or without dependents, who experience violence and/or abuse will be provided access to emergency shelter services, regardless of their ability, race, sexual orientation, political or religious beliefs, ethno-cultural background, Indigenous identity, or whether they identify as two-spirited, cisgender or transgender women.
- All women and their dependents are provided access to emergency shelter services, including but not limited to women with mental health needs, disability needs, or who use substances.
- Shelters will acknowledge that perpetrators are responsible for their own actions.
- Shelters are committed to reducing barriers that may impact women and their dependents accessing shelter services.
- Shelter services are respectful to the diversity of women and their dependents, and are provided in an inclusive environment, free of discrimination and harassment.
- Women's lived experiences are valued and taken into consideration in the delivery of shelter services.
- Shelter services are responsive to the cultural, spiritual, and religious needs of women and their dependents.
- Shelters will provide services that recognize the unique needs of children, which could include providing referrals to community services.
- Shelters will consult and collaborate with other community and/or territorial services in an effort to provide a holistic response for women and their dependents accessing services.
- Training and shelter policies and procedures encourage, improve, and maintain the wellbeing and safety of all individuals residing, contributing, and working in the shelter.

Supports and Services

- Temporary safe shelter residence & emergency transportation
- Basic needs (e.g. food and hygiene products)
- Development of safety plans for women and their dependents
- Advocacy, support and active referrals

Effects of Non-Adherence to Standards

Where there is evidence of non-adherence to the NWT Family Violence Shelter Standards, the Department may undertake one or more of the following steps:

- Negotiate terms and conditions with service providers to re-establish adherence;
- Request in writing that the service provider initiates negotiated remedial measures within a specified period of time;
- Initiate a service review and /or funding audit and evaluation;
- Suspend or terminate an existing contribution agreement and enter into a time-limited agreement determined by DHSS; or
- Suspend or terminate an existing contribution agreement and decline to enter into a new one.

Legislative Requirements

All shelters must comply with any and all applicable federal, territorial and, municipal laws, statutes, regulations and orders. For example, but not limited to:

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES ACT

<https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/child-family-services/child-family-services.a.pdf>

The Child and Family Services Act promote the best interests, protection and well-being of children. Shelters must comply as the Act impacts services provided for women and children including duty to report.

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

<https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/human-rights/human-rights.a.pdf>

The NWT *Human Rights Act* applies to businesses, industries, organizations, and government agencies which are regulated by the NWT. These include:

- Government services like health care and hospitals, and education and schools
- Stores, service centres, and businesses
- Tenancy for residence or business

PUBLIC HEALTH ACT

<https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/public-health/public-health.a.pdf>

The Public Health Act supports current and emerging public health issues including, food establishment and safety regulations, immunization regulations, communicable disease prevention and control, health protection, chronic disease and injury prevention, poisonings and bioterrorism threats.

SAFETY ACT

<https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/safety/safety.a.pdf?t1552667972739>

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REGULATIONS

<https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/safety/safety.r8.pdf?t1552667752891>

FIRE PREVENTION ACT

<https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/fire-prevention/fire-prevention.r1.pdf>

MENTAL HEALTH ACT

<https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/mental-health/mental-health.a.pdf>

Glossary of Terms

Abused Woman: An abused woman is a person who identifies herself as having been physically, psychologically, emotionally, financially or sexually abused by an intimate partner or other family member.

Access to Services: Any woman and/ or her dependents who receive services in the shelter, referrals to services in the community, or information and safety planning support over the phone through the crisis line.

Board: A group of volunteers duly elected as the governing body of the society and/or non-profit agency of the family violence shelter.

Client: A person who identifies as female and receiving or has accessed services from the shelter.

DHSS: Department of Health and Social Services.

Dependents: Children and/or family members affected by violence and/or abuse, who are currently residing in the home of the woman seeking services.

Shelter: Temporary residence that is available 24/7 for women and dependents that have experienced violence and/or abuse.

Family Violence: The intentional and systematic use of tactics (or attempts) to cause harm and/or establish and maintain power and control over a person's thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and behaviours within a relationship. This may include physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, financial and/or sexual abuse of the person and/or their children.

Indigenous: Peoples inhabiting or existing in a land from the earliest times or from before the arrival of colonists.

Intake Information: Information obtained from the client upon intake such as name and date of birth of women and their children, and information related to safety concerns and risks.

Policy: A general plan of action adopted by the Department or Shelter in relation to operations or service goals; a formalized statement describing the guiding principal or philosophy adopted by a service provider in relation to a specific standard.

Procedure: 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 practice.

Remote and Isolated Communities: Communities that have limited local services, situated far from urban centres and/or without year-round road access.

Shelter at Capacity: When a shelter can no longer admit women and their children due to lack of available rooms and/or beds.

Transition: Services and supports provided by the shelter in an effort to support women and their children to move on from their stay at the shelter.

Transgender: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Individuals under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms.

Violence Against Women: The intentional and systematic use of tactics to establish and maintain power and control over women's thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and behaviours.

Access to Shelter Services

Access Criteria

Shelters will admit women and their dependents 24/7, and must have a policy that articulates the access criteria, which should include the following:

Shelter services are for all those who identify as women, aged 19 years and older, and their dependents, that are experiencing, threatened by, and/or affected by violence and/or abuse.

Dependents may include children and/or family members who are in the care of women seeking shelter services. Shelters will have a policy and procedure on how staff will support women and their dependents that access shelter services. This policy will include the age of children that can access the shelter, specifically those who identify as male and those who identify as female without a caregiver.

Priority Admission

Shelters will have a policy that outlines a set priority for admittance into the shelter. If the shelter is at capacity, alternate arrangements will be made with the client. Priority follows:

- 1) Women with children fleeing violence and/or abuse
- 2) Women without children fleeing violence and/or abuse
- 3) Women in crisis

Assessment

Shelters will have a policy that outlines the need to complete an assessment with each woman who is requesting shelter service. Based on the assessment, shelters will provide services to women and their children and/or dependents, if available, or provide referrals to more appropriate services in the community. This includes women with mental health, disability, and/or culturally specific needs.

Women Who Do Not Meet Access Criteria

The shelter will have a policy that outlines steps the shelter will take to refer women and dependents who do not meet the eligibility criteria to appropriate services. Shelters will maintain up-to-date information on local services in order to facilitate referrals for women and dependents.

Intake

Shelters will have a policy that outlines the intake procedure, which includes the completion of an initial assessment of the woman and dependents' experience of violence and/or abuse and level of risk, an intake form and safety planning.

The policy will also require the shelter to inform each woman upon intake that staff may be required to make a report in accordance with requirements under the Child and Family Services Act. Shelters will obtain women and dependents' preliminary information within 24 hours of being admitted to the shelter. Preliminary information includes name and date of birth of women and dependents, and information related to safety concerns and risks. In addition to preliminary information, shelters will determine the appropriate length of time to complete the full intake and assessment procedure. Shelter policies and procedures may acknowledge that women may choose not to participate in the intake and assessment process. If this is the case, the policy and procedure will include appropriate documentation in the woman's file and make every effort to gain this information from other reliable sources i.e. the RCMP, Health Care Centre etc.

Shelter at Capacity

The shelter will have a policy and procedure to refer women and dependents to alternative shelter or community services when the shelter is full. These procedures will include completing an assessment of safety concerns, safety planning, as appropriate, and working with the woman in an effort to find the most appropriate solution to support her safety. Shelter policies will acknowledge that women may choose not to access alternative shelters or services.

Length of Stay

Shelters will have a policy that outlines an appropriate length of stay for women and dependents. The length of stay policy will be flexible to support the unique situation of each woman and the local community realities, including the availability of affordable housing and/or second stage housing, and the demand for shelter services in the community.

Referrals to Other Services

The shelter will have a policy and procedure that outlines how the shelter will work collaboratively with women and dependents to make referrals to other services such as housing and legal supports, counselling, and mental health and addictions services.

Shelter-to-Shelter Transfer

The shelter will have a policy that outlines the reasons women and dependents might be required to be transferred to another shelter as well as a procedure outlining the steps for this to take place.

Not Returning to the Shelter

The shelter will have a policy and procedure regarding how the shelter will respond to and work with women and dependents who are residing in the shelter and do not return to the shelter at the time they had specified.

Transitioning from the Shelter

The shelter will have a procedure that documents the reason(s) for women and dependents transitioning from the shelter, which could include but is not limited to:

- The woman has found alternative housing;
- The woman has chosen to return to her partner;
- The woman has voluntarily decided to leave the shelter;
- The woman poses a safety risk to other residents;
- The woman breaches the safety policies of the shelter;
- The woman has been transferred to another shelter due to safety concerns;
- The woman's current needs would be more effectively served by other agencies and resources.

The procedure should include notification to women and dependents that continued services (i.e. referrals, information, emotional support, safety planning) can be provided after transition as requested.

Client Rights and Shelter Responsibilities

Right to Receive Service

As articulated in the guiding principles, the shelter will have a policy that outlines that all women and dependents at risk of or experiencing violence and/or abuse have the right to access shelter services, when available and appropriate, including women with mental health, disability, and/or culturally specific needs.

Supporting the Safety and Security of Shelter Clients

Shelters will have a policy and procedure that outlines how they will work with women and dependents to assess behavior that may impact the safety and security of other shelter clients, while balancing the safety concerns of all women and dependents in the shelter.

Resident Rights and Responsibilities

The shelter will have a policy that outlines the rights of women and dependents accessing shelter services, which will include:

- The right to be treated with respect and to be free from discrimination
- The right to self-determination and self-directed decision-making
- The right to a fair and clear complaint process without fear of reprisal
- The right to provide input and feedback into shelter programs
- The right to receive support from staff and identify short-term and long-term priorities
- The right to information about services and resources in order to make informed decisions
- The right to confidentiality of personal information and identity

Right to Privacy and Confidentiality

The shelter will have a policy and procedure to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all women and dependents who receive services including current and former clients in the shelter as well as any circumstances, where legally, confidentiality has to be broken.

The policy will include the following:

- Board members, management, staff, volunteers, students, visitors, women and dependents will sign a confidentiality agreement developed by the shelter to maintain the confidentiality of all current and former shelter clients even after they are no longer with the Shelter;
- The shelter will not confirm admission; disclose the whereabouts, or any information about women or dependents, unless there is an imminent risk to the woman and her dependents or as required by law.

Informed Consent from Women and Dependents

The shelter will have a policy stating that information recorded or known about women and dependents will not be shared with outside agencies without consent, unless required by law. Written consent should be obtained from all clients 18 years of age and older and indicate the type of information, how, and with whom personal information may be shared. The policy will indicate that women and dependents may withdraw written consent at any time.

- Shelter staff will obtain consent from women and dependents, prior to consulting with or providing referrals to other service providers.

Women and Dependents' Records

The shelter will have a policy and procedure to protect the records of all current and former residents, in paper and/or electronic form, from destruction, theft, or damage. The policy and procedure will guide the management of client records, which includes how records are to be:

- Maintained and secured
- Removed and/or transferred
- File Retention and destruction schedule

The policy will include a statement on the right of women and dependents to access their records, unless prohibited by law, and how they will be informed of this right. It must be made clear that in all situations, the file remains the property of the shelter, and is only reviewed in the presence of shelter staff.

Food and Nutrition

Shelters will have a policy, outlining how they will make every effort to provide food that is responsive to the religious, cultural, nutritional, and dietary needs of women and dependents.

Complaints Process

The shelter will have a policy and procedure outlining how women and dependents can report complaints. The policy and procedure will outline how and when women and dependents accessing shelter services will be informed of the complaints process and how shelters will maintain written records of formal complaints and their attempted or actual resolution.

Use of Substances

The shelter will have a policy and procedure that outlines how they will provide support to women who use substances, which could include the assessment of immediate safety needs and relevant community supports. The policy and procedure will outline how the shelter will respond to women who are in possession of substances and or use substances on shelter premises.

Supports for Women and Dependents

The shelter will have a policy outlining that emergency shelter services will be provided to all women and dependents. The procedure will outline how staff will work to provide support regardless of individualized/specialized needs.

Program Standards

Crisis Line Services

The shelter will ensure that crisis line services are available by phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days each year.

Shelters will have a policy and procedure outlining a continuity of service plan should the phone line be down.

Residential Support

The shelter will have a policy that outlines how the shelter will meet women and dependents' basic needs including the provision of safe accommodation, meals, emergency clothing, personal hygiene supplies, laundry facilities, and baby supplies.

Safety Planning and Risk Assessment

The Department recognizes that safety planning is a fluid and ongoing process. Shelters will have policy and procedures outlining how each woman accessing shelter services will be provided risk assessment and safety planning.

Individual Support Planning

The shelter will have a policy and procedure for shelter staff to offer ongoing support for women and dependents during their stay at the shelter. Ongoing support could include crisis intervention, emotional support, risk assessment, safety planning, and/or supporting women and dependents to navigate or access a variety of systems, including but not limited to justice, employment, housing supports, health/mental health, education and child and family services.

Supports for Children

The shelter will have a policy and procedure that outlines the services and supports that will be provided to children, including how children will be a part of safety planning and risk assessment. The policy will include how shelter staff will work with women to determine the appropriate supports for children, and/or link with external service providers as needed.

Duty to Report

The shelter will have a policy and procedure, requiring staff to comply with the legal obligation to report any suspicion that a child is or may be in need of protection to the appropriate Health and Social Services Authority. The policy must also require staff to document that a report was made and the information on which the report was based. The policy will meet all requirements in the Child and Family Services Act, respecting reporting protection concerns.

For more information on Health and Social Services, Child and Family Services:

<https://www.yhssa.hss.gov.nt.ca/social-services/services-children-and-youth-0>

Cultural Supports

Shelters will have a policy and procedure that outlines the cultural supports that may be provided to women and dependents accessing shelter services. Supports may include:

- Any culturally relevant supports available locally or otherwise;
- Access to traditional knowledge holders;
- Access to Indigenous language interpreter;
- Access to ceremonies;
- Access to space for traditional practices;
- Access to traditional medicines;
- Information and referrals to culturally safe services.

Serving Women and/or Dependents with Disabilities

Shelters will have a policy and procedure that outlines how shelters will meet the needs and/or attempt to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. Shelters will make every attempt to provide persons with disabilities assistive aids and devices, equipment, materials, supplies, and support either in-house or through partnerships and referrals to other agencies. Supports might include attendants, ramps, amplification for the hard of hearing, and accessible facilities.

Staff, Board Members, Volunteers and Students

Staff, Board Members, Volunteers and Student Orientation

The shelter will have a policy that outlines the orientation procedure for all its new employees, board members, volunteers and student placements. Where applicable all employees, board members, volunteers, and students are required to be familiar with the shelter's policies and procedures, including the family violence shelter standards.

Safety for Staff, Students and Volunteers

The shelter will have a policy and procedure on how to support the safety and well-being of staff, students and volunteers in the shelter. In the case of a safety issue or concern with a client, the policy will outline the procedures that will be in place, such as the availability of on-call staff and local emergency services.

Conflict of Interest

The shelter will have a policy that outlines the procedure when a conflict of interest arises. The policy should include criteria to ensure shelter workers, board members, volunteers and students do not exploit any relationship to further personal, political or business interests at the expense of individuals served.

Ethical Service

The shelter will have a policy and procedure outlining the expectations for responsible care for those who work in or with Shelters. The policy will set the boundaries for staff relationships with clients served and their families, not only during work hours but after the client served has left or been discharged from the shelter. The policy will outline the procedure in the event of lack of compliance to this policy.

Board Member Roles and Relationships

The shelter/organization will have a policy outlining the function and responsibilities of the Shelter board.

The policy should also clearly define relationships between board members and the Shelter director and/or manager as well as responsibilities for such key tasks as developing policies, managing operations, approving expenditures, making public statements, fundraising, staff recruitment and evaluating the Executive Director. The policy should include procedures for orientation of board members to the shelter and its mission, philosophy, goals, services, management and governance systems, code of ethics, quality improvement processes, policies and procedures, staff/board

relationships, grievance procedures, rights of persons served (including confidentiality), and disclosure of information and advocacy.

Financial Management

The shelter will have a policy and procedures for financial management in accordance with the contribution agreement and other accounting best practices. Expenditure of funds received from the Health and Social Services Authority, follows financial reporting timelines as detailed in Contract Schedule A and keeps a book of account as required in Contract Schedule B.

Health and Safety

Health and Safety

The shelter will develop, implement, and regularly review their health and safety policies and procedures to promote the health, safety, and wellness of women and dependents using the shelter, employees, students and/or volunteers. The following health considerations will be included in policies and procedures:

General Health and Safety

- Women and dependents are safe and secure within the facility and entrances are secured against unwanted entry.
- A pest management program is in place that includes prevention of pest infestation and working closely with a licensed pest control operator, if needed.

Infectious Diseases and Outbreaks

The shelter will have a policy outlining how and when they will report on increased rates of illness, when to contact the local public health unit, how they will support any public health unit investigation, and how they will support ill residents to receive care, when required.

Food Safety

The shelter will have a policy that outlines how employees, women and dependents, and volunteers adhere to food safety requirements as outlined in the Food Establishment Safety Regulations of the Public Health Act. This includes requirements related to food handling during food preparation, processing, packaging, service, storage, and transportation.

First Aid and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)

The shelter will have a policy stating that shelter staff will be certified in first aid and CPR. The policy will include provision of adequate first aid equipment.

Fire Safety and Emergency Preparedness

The shelter will have a policy and procedures outlining the shelter's emergency and/or fire evacuation plan. The policy will include explanation of how all employees, student placements, volunteers, women and dependents will be oriented to the plan. Diagrams of the evacuation plan will be posted in all sleeping and communal areas.

The shelter will comply with the Fire Prevention Regulations of the Fire Prevention Act. Fire extinguishers and smoke alarms are regularly serviced and available in areas where services are provided.

Safety for Children

The shelter will have a policy and procedures to monitor that children's equipment is age appropriate and well-maintained. Cribs, appropriate bedding, high chairs, toys, and playpens should conform to specifications approved by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA). Cribs must be provided for all children less than two years of age, as per appropriate safety standards in accordance with CSA.

Critical Incident

The shelter will have a policy and procedures for identification and reporting of critical incidents. This should include roles and responsibilities, timelines, notifications, and reporting requirements to the DHSS.

Resident Medication

The shelter will have a policy and procedures outlining the safe storage and administration of over-the-counter medications. Medications are kept in locked storage, appropriately marked and only assessable to staff. If medication needs to be kept on a client due to a life threatening illness (such as a heart condition, asthma, or severe allergies) the need to keep such medication stored safely must be discussed with the client.

Disruption in Service

The shelter will have a policy and procedures for addressing disruptions to service like unexpected closure or temporary relocation of the shelter. This will include appropriate notifications and communications with clients, community agencies and the general public and Health and Social Service Authority.

Service Monitoring and Evaluation

Client Satisfaction Survey

The shelter will have a policy and procedure outlining how to offer women an opportunity to complete a Client Satisfaction Survey in order to provide feedback on whether they were satisfied with the services and supports they received. Client Satisfaction Surveys should be unopened and provided to the DHSS for review and recommendations if applicable.

Program Review and Evaluation

The shelter will have a policy on ongoing program evaluation, with a specified time and schedule to reflect the changing needs of women and dependents. Program evaluations should look at the shelter's program performance, quality, efficiency, client outcomes, and the effectiveness of the services provided. The policy should note mechanisms to make changes to programs, according to program evaluation results, which could include sharing documentation with the DHSS and that the evaluation results were discussed with the Board of Directors. The program evaluation should include a review of compliance with internal policies.

Department Monitoring and Oversight

As part of each contribution agreement between the shelter and the Health and Social Services Authority, the Department can request the following information at any time to monitor the performance of any or all Family Violence Shelters: program evaluations, critical incident reporting results, governance and operational policies and procedures and minutes from the annual general meeting.

Upon review, the Department may make recommendations for follow-up. If required the Department may undertake a review of the shelter program to assess the situation and verify whether there is any misappropriation of Department funds or if there is a threat to the health, safety and well-being of persons receiving services and supports from the shelter.

