



# CONNECTING THE CIRCLE

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A GENDER-BASED STRATEGY TO END  
HOMELESSNESS IN WINNIPEG

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**GENEROUSLY FUNDED BY:**

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA  
STATUS OF WOMEN / WOMEN AND  
GENDER EQUALITY

MANITOBA RESEARCH ALLIANCE  
END HOMELESSNESS WINNIPEG



## BACKGROUND

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# WHY ARE WE HOMELESS IN OUR OWN HOMELAND?

### — PARTICIPANT QUOTE

It's time to end homelessness, and it's time to recognize the unique experiences of women, transgender (trans), Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people in these efforts. Homelessness for these populations can look very different than for men, usually in ways that makes their experiences less visible and understood. Our strategy offers recommendations for action designed to enhance collaboration and cooperation across key stakeholders to close system gaps that create gender-based paths into homelessness and barriers to exiting homelessness. Other local efforts are underway including *The Plan to End Homelessness in Winnipeg* and *Here and Now: Winnipeg's Plan to End Youth Homelessness*. Our intention is to complement these efforts by providing an intersectional gender-based analysis (IGBA) to homelessness in Winnipeg. This analysis is the first of its kind to be done in Manitoba and, we believe, in Canada. It is essential to ensuring no one is left out of our collective work to end homelessness. We have no time to lose. It's time to end homelessness for all.

In 2016, community-based women's organizations in Winnipeg recognized that an IGBA in local homelessness research and initiatives was lacking. West Central Women's Resource Centre obtained a grant from the federal government's Department for Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) to lead the development of a gender-based strategy to end homelessness by addressing the unique needs of diverse women, trans,

Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people who experience homelessness in Winnipeg.

The project was guided by a First Voice Advisory Committee of diverse women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming individuals who have lived experience of homelessness or housing insecurity as well as a Steering Committee of 34 leaders from the non-profit and government sectors. We compiled research through literature and policy review, focus groups, and consultations including people with experiences of gender-based homelessness and non-profit and government representatives.

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was conducted on Treaty 1 territory, the original lands of Anishinaabeg (Ojibwe), Iniwé (Cree), Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene Peoples, and homeland of the Métis Nation. This land sustains Indigenous Peoples and cultures, and now the majority of homeless people on this land are Indigenous.<sup>1</sup> The roots of this tragic reality lie in historic and ongoing colonization of Turtle Island.<sup>2</sup> It's time to decolonize, and share this land and its resources as the treaties intended.

# WHY WE NEED A STRATEGY TO END GENDER-BASED HOMELESSNESS

A person's gender has a significant impact on how they experience homelessness. A woman is more likely to stay with her abusive partner because she has nowhere else to go. A single mother who can no longer afford her apartment when her income changes after her children are apprehended is more likely to end up couch surfing at friends' houses. A trans person is rejected by their family because of their gender identity and ends up living on the street. A Two-Spirit person feels unsafe in shelters, so sleeps outside in the cold. A gender non-conforming person experiences barriers in accessing a gender-based violence shelter because they don't identify as a woman.

We must also consider how other dimensions of identity intersect with gender in order to create better policies and programs for all. If a woman is living in poverty and is looking to quickly exit her housing due to domestic violence, her housing options will be limited by her access to financial resources, the potential for sexism or sexual harassment, her need for safe housing, and the urgency of her need. However, if that woman is also Indigenous, she may face racism in her search for housing. If she is trans, she faces the risk of transphobia and may have no family supports. If she is living with a physical disability, her housing search may be further limited by accessibility needs. If she is experiencing all of these barriers at the same time, her ability to secure the housing she needs will be exponentially complicated.

To further complicate these barriers, it is difficult for society to recognize people with intersecting marginalized identities as part of our community,

as they don't fit in to our dominant cultural narrative. This is called intersectional invisibility<sup>3</sup>. We must consciously choose to center and value the experiences and perspectives of multiply marginalized individuals in order to create social structures where they have equitable access to resources, choices and opportunities.

I LEFT AN ABUSIVE  
RELATIONSHIP. I CHOSE  
HOMELESSNESS INSTEAD  
OF MY RELATIONSHIP

— FOCUS GROUP  
PARTICIPANT

An IGBA, referred to by WAGE as Gender-based Analysis Plus or GBA+, is an analytical tool used to consider how multiple identity factors (including sex, gender, race, cultural background, sexual orientation, age, and ability) impact people's experiences.<sup>4</sup> It is used to consider the experience of diverse groups of men, women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people. Failure to use an IGBA increases the risk that policies and initiatives will inadvertently further increase inequalities.<sup>5</sup>



[Y]OU KNOW, THAT'S  
WHY OUR WOMEN AREN'T  
GETTING BETTER AND AREN'T  
ADVANCING IS BECAUSE OF  
WE'RE NOT USING OUR GIFTS  
AND OUR STRENGTHS AND  
OUR TEACHING THAT WERE  
ACTUALLY INHERITED FROM  
OUR ANCESTORS...  
IT'S ALL COLONIAL, IN  
A COLONIAL SETTING.

— FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

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HOMELESSNESS IS NOT  
RESOLVED FOR WOMEN BY  
HAVING A ROOF OVER HER  
HEAD UNLESS THIS ROOF IS  
ACCOMPANIED BY A SENSE OF  
SAFETY AND SECURITY. UNLESS  
THE UNIQUE WAY WOMEN  
EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS IS  
EXPLICITLY ACKNOWLEDGED AND  
INCLUDED, WOMEN EXPERIENCING  
HOMELESSNESS WILL CONTINUE  
TO BE SYSTEMATICALLY  
UNDERSERVED BY HOMELESSNESS  
PARTNERING STRATEGY FUNDING.

—EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CANADA,  
“FINAL REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON  
HOMELESSNESS.” GOVERNMENT OF CANADA, 2018.



# A MORE INCLUSIVE DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

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How we define homelessness shapes our understanding of homelessness, which in turn shapes what are offered as solutions. It is important that definitions of homelessness explicitly capture diverse experiences of homelessness, especially when those definitions are used to determine who is eligible for services and who is not.

For example, targeting homelessness intervention initiatives at people experiencing chronic homelessness will leave many women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people behind.<sup>6</sup> They are more likely to experience hidden homelessness, which can describe situations of homelessness that tend to be less visible to the public and, in turn, within homelessness data.

Hidden homelessness can take many forms and can be just as – and sometimes more – dangerous than other types of homelessness. For women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people it can more likely take the form of staying with someone in exchange for services like babysitting, cleaning, or sex. Or it can take the form of staying with an abusive partner out of fear of being in a homeless shelter or because there are not enough affordable and accessible housing options.

Caregivers<sup>7</sup> of children are at greater risk of hidden homelessness that takes the form of staying with a stranger or abuser to avoid accessing a shelter out of fear that Child and Family Services (CFS) will apprehend their child(ren).<sup>8</sup> “Homelessness is not resolved for women by having a roof over her head unless this

## INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS INCLUDES:

- Historic displacement homelessness
- Contemporary geographic separation homelessness
- Spiritual disconnection homelessness
- Mental disruption and imbalance homelessness
- Cultural disintegration and loss homelessness
- Overcrowding homelessness
- Relocation and mobility homelessness
- Going home homelessness
- Nowhere to go homelessness
- Escaping or evading harm homelessness
- Emergency crisis homelessness
- Climatic refugee homelessness

[Jesse Thistle, Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, 2018.]

roof is accompanied by a sense of safety and security.”<sup>9</sup> Definitions of homelessness must explicitly include these experiences of hidden homelessness, to ensure that women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people are included in solutions.

## DEFINING INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS

In Winnipeg, the vast majority of women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people experiencing homelessness are Indigenous.<sup>10</sup> The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) outlines 12 dimensions of Indigenous homelessness

(see textbox) based on consultations with Indigenous Peoples across Canada.

Indigenous homelessness has its roots in the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous Peoples “from their traditional governance systems and laws, territories, histories, worldviews, ancestors and stories.”<sup>11</sup> These dimensions of homelessness were evident in the stories we heard from Indigenous women, trans, Two-Spirit and gender non-conforming people in our focus groups. They are fighting for the opportunity to reclaim their role as leaders in their communities, able to speak and be heard.

# DATA ON WOMEN, TRANS, TWO-SPIRIT, AND GENDER NON-CONFORMING PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN WINNIPEG

Due to the typically hidden nature of homelessness experienced by women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people, there is very little data on it. Women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people in Winnipeg are less likely than men to be staying in a homeless shelter and non-binary<sup>12</sup> people were most likely to be staying at someone’s place. The *Winnipeg Street Census 2018* notes that the hidden homeless are still significantly undercounted: “for every person experiencing absolute homelessness, another three people are in hidden homelessness. If this ratio held true in Winnipeg, we have undercounted the hidden homeless population by at least 3,000 people.”<sup>13</sup>

I FELT I HAD TO  
STAY WITH SOMEBODY  
IN ORDER TO GET  
OFF THE STREETS.  
I STAYED IN A HOTEL  
WHERE I WAS TAKEN  
ADVANTAGE OF  
SEXUALLY.

— FOCUS GROUP  
PARTICIPANT



The *Winnipeg Street Census 2018* notes that 32.5 percent of people experiencing homelessness surveyed were women. Of these women, 81 percent were also Indigenous, compared to 66 percent of all those experiencing homelessness.<sup>14</sup> This confirms the importance of considering how being an Indigenous woman shapes people's experience of homelessness, and suggests that women who are homeless are also vulnerable to being victims of racism.

Three percent of men and eight percent of women surveyed in the Census identified as 2SLGBTQ+ (Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual orientations and gender identities). This suggests that more women than men experiencing homelessness are at risk of also experiencing homophobia and transphobia, indicating a need to consider how these forms of oppression impact people's experiences of homelessness.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, 2 percent (31 people) identified as non-binary.<sup>16</sup>

The *2018 Winnipeg Street Health Survey Report* noted that 49.1 percent of 474 women surveyed had been physically assaulted in the year prior to the census (compared to 46.7 percent of men), 43.6 percent of women had been sexually harassed (compared to 12.5 percent of men), and 16.7 percent of women had been sexually assaulted or raped (compared to 3.1 percent of men).<sup>17</sup> These numbers demonstrate the increased risk of sexual violence experienced by women when homeless, which we found is also the case for trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people.

It is important to note the major gap in homelessness research and data regarding trans, Two-Spirit and gender non-conforming people not only in Winnipeg but across Canada. *Here and Now* found that 23 percent of youth experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg were 2SLGBTQ+,<sup>18</sup> but there is reason to believe that the percentages are actually much larger. Some Canadian studies found that closer to 40 percent of youth experiencing homelessness are 2SLGBTQ+.<sup>19</sup>

## GENDER-BASED HOMELESSNESS



## A DECOLONIZING AND ANTI-OPPRESSIVE APPROACH

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Our work is situated within historical and institutional discrimination and oppression of some groups of people based on identity factors such as gender, race, culture, sexual orientation, citizenship, and ability. Oppression creates and perpetuates beliefs and rules in society which privilege certain groups and individuals and disadvantages others. Anti-oppression seeks to equalize the power imbalance in our communities.<sup>20</sup> One of the major systems of oppression framing the reality of homelessness in Winnipeg is historical and ongoing colonialism.

It was critical for us to apply a decolonization lens throughout our work together. This meant true sharing of influence and power. The voices of people who have experienced homelessness are often not valued.

Through our focus groups and First Voice Advisory Committee, people who have experienced homelessness had power over the direction and content of the plan. We listened to what those with lived experience had to say, in whatever way they chose to say it. We understood that First Voice leaders and their families are still living with the traumatic effects of colonialism. We partnered to create safety because working as a First Voice leader is spiritual and emotional work – people are talking about their life and the lives of their loved ones.

All of us working to end homelessness must continually learn how to decolonize our processes and systems. We will continue to apply a decolonization and anti-oppression lens as we move forward in the implementation of our recommendations.

## GENDERED PATHWAYS TO HOMELESSNESS

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The systemic pathways to homelessness described by our research participants became the themes of our report. Due to the nature of intersectionality, it was an enormous challenge to organize these themes as each theme connects to multiple pathways in various ways. We found, however, that program design, delivery, and system exits are the common threads woven throughout the research. Regardless of what or how many intersectional dimensions of system involvement an individual may experience in their gendered homelessness, they all experience

barriers along those threads. Following this finding, we intentionally organized the themes by starting with Program/Policy Design and Delivery and ending with Preventing System Exits to Homelessness to provide context and connection around the middle eight themes, which specifically address the major issues and systems involved in the lives of women, trans, Two-Spirit and gender non-conforming people experiencing homelessness.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF STORIES

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Each story we heard through our focus groups with women, trans, Two-Spirit and gender non-conforming people was unique, and yet they had clear common threads that connected them to others with experiences of homelessness. Overwhelmingly, they related that while they were constantly telling their stories to government workers, authority figures, or community workers in order to find resources or access supports, they rarely felt like people were listening to what was most important to them. Workers are taught to listen for criteria, to see if individuals have met requirements or followed policy that would create eligibility for services. This is due to a fundamental flaw in our system design; we have created programs and policies by isolating factors in people's lives rather than connecting them.

For example, programs may only be available for people depending on a specific combination of various factors such as their length of time experiencing homelessness, whether they have children in their care or not, whether they have a mental health diagnosis or not, what type of violence they have been affected by, or their level of sobriety. Women, trans, Two-Spirit and gender non-conforming people are asking us to listen – understand their strengths, motivations and frustrations – and only then identify details together that will help to create a specific and personalized solution.

An effective way to listen respectfully is to use a trauma-informed approach, rooted in the three principles of safety and trust, choice and voice, and strengths and resilience.<sup>21</sup> This requires that community supports, government or systems workers stay open and accepting, paying attention to how the story makes sense in the context of the person's life history. The helper must let people choose what happens to them, or choose their own pacing for how to move

forward. They must also validate them and be curious about acknowledging the strengths inherent in the person's story.<sup>22</sup>

First Voice leaders taught us that we need to frame our understanding of people's stories using the Medicine Wheel. The Medicine Wheel guides us with teachings of the four directions, elements of existence and stages of life. We place each individual at the centre of their story in all their complexity and wholeness. Systems and services must move to the outside of that circle, no longer dictating the storyline; they must coordinate to offer necessary resources and opportunities based on the unique identity and goals of the individual.

### MEDICINE WHEEL



## SUMMARY OF THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS <sup>24</sup>

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### 1. PROGRAM/POLICY DESIGN AND DELIVERY

Government and community organizations can prevent women, trans, Two-Spirit and gender non-conforming individuals from falling through the cracks into homelessness by using an IGBA, considering how services impact people differently based on multiple identity factors including gender, sex, race, cultural background, sexual orientation, age, ability, and parental status. Organizations need to intentionally design and deliver their services paying attention to issues such as hours of operation, eligibility criteria, accessibility, and availability of childcare. The delivery of these services must be rooted in values and approaches that support relationship-based work, such as trauma-informed care, harm reduction, cultural safety, and housing as a human right.

We must work together across sectors to build a well-rounded spectrum of low-barrier, housing-related services with options for wrap-around supports. Intensive models such as Housing First programming need to be easily accessible to those who need it most, with transitional and permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, and eviction prevention supports completing the spectrum.

It is critical to meaningfully engage women, trans, Two-Spirit and gender non-conforming individuals with lived experience of housing insecurity and homelessness in service design and delivery in true partnership, using a decolonizing, anti-oppressive, and trauma-informed approach.

### 2. GENDER BASED VIOLENCE:

Women, trans, Two-Spirit and gender non-conforming individuals are more likely to experience violence because of misogynist, transphobic and homophobic beliefs that result in their bodies being devalued, sexualized, commodified, and exploited.<sup>24</sup> Gender-based violence is also rooted in patriarchal and colonial power imbalances that result in gender inequality, systemic oppression and marginalization of identities, and culture-related gender norms based in control and violence. While men can experience gender-based violence, it is almost exclusively committed by men against people of a different gender.<sup>25</sup>

Women, trans, Two-Spirit and gender non-conforming individuals we spoke to in our focus groups overwhelmingly described experiences of violence while living in homelessness, caught between ineligibility for family violence shelters while facing additional gendered safety issues in the homeless shelter system. They are calling for low barrier access to dedicated gendered safe spaces that offer gender-based violence supports, regardless of who perpetrated the violence or where the violence took place.

### 3. SHELTER SYSTEM

Preventing homelessness requires ensuring everyone can be connected to housing that meets their unique needs. Until this can be achieved, the emergency shelter system will continue to play an important role within the broader system of organizations that work with people experiencing homelessness. We must ensure the shelter system feels and is inclusive for everyone who needs to access it, including men, women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people. This will help prevent them from being forced into vulnerable situations, such as couch surfing with strangers, staying with an abusive partner, or being on the street.

The women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people we consulted told us they had safety concerns about sharing shelter spaces with men due to the perceived and actual risk of gender-based violence. They identified a need for shelters to offer separate and secure spaces for women as well as separate and secure spaces for trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people. They also identified wanting greater choice between spaces that require sobriety and those taking a harm-reduction approach.

### 4. SOCIAL AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN COMPLETE COMMUNITIES

A critical barrier to ending homelessness in Winnipeg is the lack of social and affordable housing across the city. Affordable housing is based on median market rents, while social housing is the most affordable to people experiencing homelessness because rents are geared to household income. As a result of long wait lists for social housing, people often have no choice but to rent in the much more expensive private market. The Province of Manitoba provides the Rent Assist benefit to help cover the cost of rent in the private market. However, the maximum benefit is often too low to afford quality housing in safe locations, which can make women, trans, Two-Spirit and gender non-conforming people even more vulnerable to being exposed to unsafe situations. Housing challenges are exacerbated for people living with disabilities whose choice is further limited by the need to find accessible units or housing with caregiver supports.

More publicly owned social housing units are needed across all bedroom sizes in neighbourhoods located near essential services including childcare, schools, laundry and transportation services, and grocery stores. There is also a need to prioritize units for larger families. Indigenous and newcomer families tend to be larger and require larger housing. Caregivers of children with physical disabilities are at greater risk of homelessness due to the need for both accessible and affordable family housing. The built environment should be constructed in a way that supports the decolonization of our communities, providing opportunities for families to gather in flexible ways and participate in cultural traditions and ceremonies in their own homes.

### 5. INCOME SECURITY

Poverty is a significant pathway to homelessness, and women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people are disproportionately at risk of poverty. Ending poverty, through government-led comprehensive poverty reduction plans developed using an IGBA with targets and timelines, should be at the forefront of efforts to eliminate gender-based homelessness. The Rent Assist benefit needs to be enhanced so that caregivers of children aren't forced to use other budgets such as the Canada Child Benefit to pay their rent. Our research identified a major risk of losing funds to sustain housing when household size changes due to experiences such as children going into care or incarceration.<sup>26</sup>

AND BECAUSE YOU ONLY  
HAVE A CERTAIN LEVEL  
OF INCOME... IT DOESN'T  
MAKE A PERSON ANY  
LESS... ANY LESS SMART

— FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Our income security system can play a key role in exacerbating or mitigating that risk. The provincial government must ensure their policies have a reunification focus by extending family shelter benefits and granting emergency rent funds when necessary.

We call for Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) and Child and Family Services (CFS) to come together with community-based organizations to align policy and work in collaboration to ensure no caregiver loses their housing when children are placed in care, or other family size changes that impact income security. Our goal is to see the provincial government create and implement a province-wide plan to align all departments and portfolios with the current Manitoba Housing policy which ensures secure housing for 2 years after an apprehension or unanticipated family size change.

## 6. SUBSTANCE USE

Substance use and homelessness are often intertwined. Homelessness can increase the likelihood of using substances to cope, and if substance use progresses into addiction it can be very difficult to escape homelessness. For example, we heard through our focus groups that certain drugs, like crystal methamphetamine, may be used by women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people to help them stay up all night when they have nowhere to go and are afraid to stay in shelters or sleep on the street.<sup>27</sup> They may also use drugs as a way to numb themselves from the trauma and intergenerational trauma associated with increased exposure to homophobia, transphobia, sexual exploitation, being forced into sex work to survive, violence, and having children apprehended by CFS. The risk of substance use further increases for those who are also Indigenous, because of the added ongoing trauma of colonization, residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care.<sup>28</sup>

Our consultations identified a need for free facilities and services based in harm reduction specifically for trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people that are developed in partnership with the community.<sup>29</sup> These individuals may not feel welcome in men- or women-only facilities, especially faith-based facilities. They have also reported commonly experiencing issues related to their physical and emotional safety within existing addictions facilities.<sup>30</sup> We recommend the development of a continuum of detox and treatment options which centre Indige-

nous-led healing practices and trauma-informed services and supports, designed in consultation to meet the unique needs of women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people.

## 7. JUSTICE

Involvement in the justice system can become a pathway into homelessness for all genders in Canada, as approximately 30 percent of all individuals incarcerated are released into homelessness.<sup>31</sup> The women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people we spoke with highlighted unique gendered pressures due to poverty, childcare, or other caregiving complications, and the intersection of gender-based violence that lead to homelessness specifically during remand, bail and post-sentence release phases of this journey. Women (especially those involved in sex work, trafficking, or exploitation), Indigenous people, trans people, youth who have been in foster care, racialized groups, and refugees are disproportionately vulnerable to post-incarceration homelessness.<sup>32</sup> A recent Canadian study found that almost twice as many men reported being housed compared with women and trans people two years after incarceration (66 percent as compared to 34 percent).<sup>33</sup> In order to close these systemic gaps, we call for increased supports to avoid housing loss while on bail or in remand, as well as reintegration supports which prioritize housing and income security prior to release.

## 8. CHILD WELFARE

Involvement with CFS is a common pathway into homelessness, both for those who have been in care and for caregivers whose children have been taken into care.<sup>34</sup> We heard that many caregivers who experience challenges such as poverty, gender-based violence, addictions, mental health issues, and housing insecurity avoid accessing support out of fear that it will result in child welfare involvement and ultimately having their children apprehended.<sup>35</sup> When unaddressed, these challenges can place families at increased risk of homelessness. The fear of CFS involvement and apprehension is a major contributor to the hidden nature of homelessness for caregivers.<sup>36</sup>

Caregivers should feel they have the option to access detox and addictions treatment services, mental health services, as well as housing and income security supports without fear that their children will be apprehended. Caregivers should be confident that they will be supported to meet their parenting needs while addressing other challenges, and not fear being penalized for seeking help. Governments and community organizations need to partner to ensure caregivers have access to a culturally-responsive support team when involved with CFS, assisting the caregiver to meet their individual needs and keeping children at home wherever possible while they work to address challenges that increase their risk of experiencing homelessness.

In cases where children do end up in care, young women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people who have access to supportive and representative care are more likely to have better outcomes when exiting care, and therefore less likely to exit into homelessness.<sup>37</sup> We call on the Province to develop and implement an intersectional strategy in the CFS system to better support and nurture children and youth in care, with careful attention to the unique experiences of Two-Spirit, trans, and gender nonconforming youth.

## 9. CONTINUUM OF HEALTH

As we were researching the unique pathways into homelessness for women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people, it became clear that trauma and mental health concerns are at the root of a gendered experience of the health system as it relates to homelessness. Trauma is when someone has experienced “an out of control, frightening experience that has disconnected us from all sense of resourcefulness or safety or coping or love.”<sup>38</sup> Jolene Wilson, our First Voice Advisory Chair, describes how the Medicine Wheel teachings allow us to recognize how trauma is an injury to the spiritual health dimension, which is where we experience connection with self, others, land, and Creator. Each of the four parts of the self must be cared for and nurtured, but is also inextricably connected to the whole. Focus group respondents described the difficulty of living in homelessness while navigating a modern health system

that treats each part as completely separate; waiting years or finding themselves at dead ends for referrals to clinics and programs treating various health needs. Most of those with experiences of homelessness had also experienced unaddressed trauma connected to poverty, mental health, addiction, incarceration, child apprehension, and/or gender-based violence. We need a full range of healthcare responses that take a trauma-informed approach, connecting disparate parts of the system to better serve the whole person.

## 10. PREVENTING SYSTEM EXITS TO HOMELESSNESS

Women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people continue to be left behind because of a lack of coordination between government systems, between community organizations, and between government and community organizations. As identified in existing local plans to end homelessness, this collaboration is particularly important when people are going through significant periods of transition such as exiting corrections, shelters, the child welfare system, mental health facilities, as well as detox and addictions treatment facilities.<sup>39</sup> We must ensure that women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people can connect to sustainable and safe housing with wrap-around services at these crucial moments. This can be facilitated by providing them with an onsite worker who can use an IGBA to help secure housing and wrap-around supports prior to exiting and provide ongoing supports as needed after a transition to housing is made. They can also help identify and connect systems that can collaborate to efficiently support the individual.

Success will depend largely on an adequate supply of safe and affordable housing and adequate capacity within wrap-around service providers to meet the needs of women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people. This can include services related to cultural supports, parenting supports, pre- and post-natal care, detox and addictions, and professional therapy services. It must also include policy alignment between all systems that impact the individual, so that no policy or practice in one system becomes a barrier to accessing resources or supports in another system.

## IMPLEMENTATION

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ALL I WANNA SAY IS, DON'T  
GIVE UP ... SHARE YOUR STORIES,  
SHARE YOUR STORIES.

— FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

The recommendations in this report are broad in nature in order to create a path forward that is accountable to those with gendered experiences of homelessness, while allowing flexibility for us to adapt to changes in relevant sectors. The next phase of our work will move toward implementation. We have established a flexible and responsive governance structure to oversee the implementation of the recommendations and embed a gender-based approach in Winnipeg's collective efforts to end homelessness for all. Our implementation efforts will be focused on working with partners to create targets, timelines and indicators to measure progress. Good working relationships with community organizations

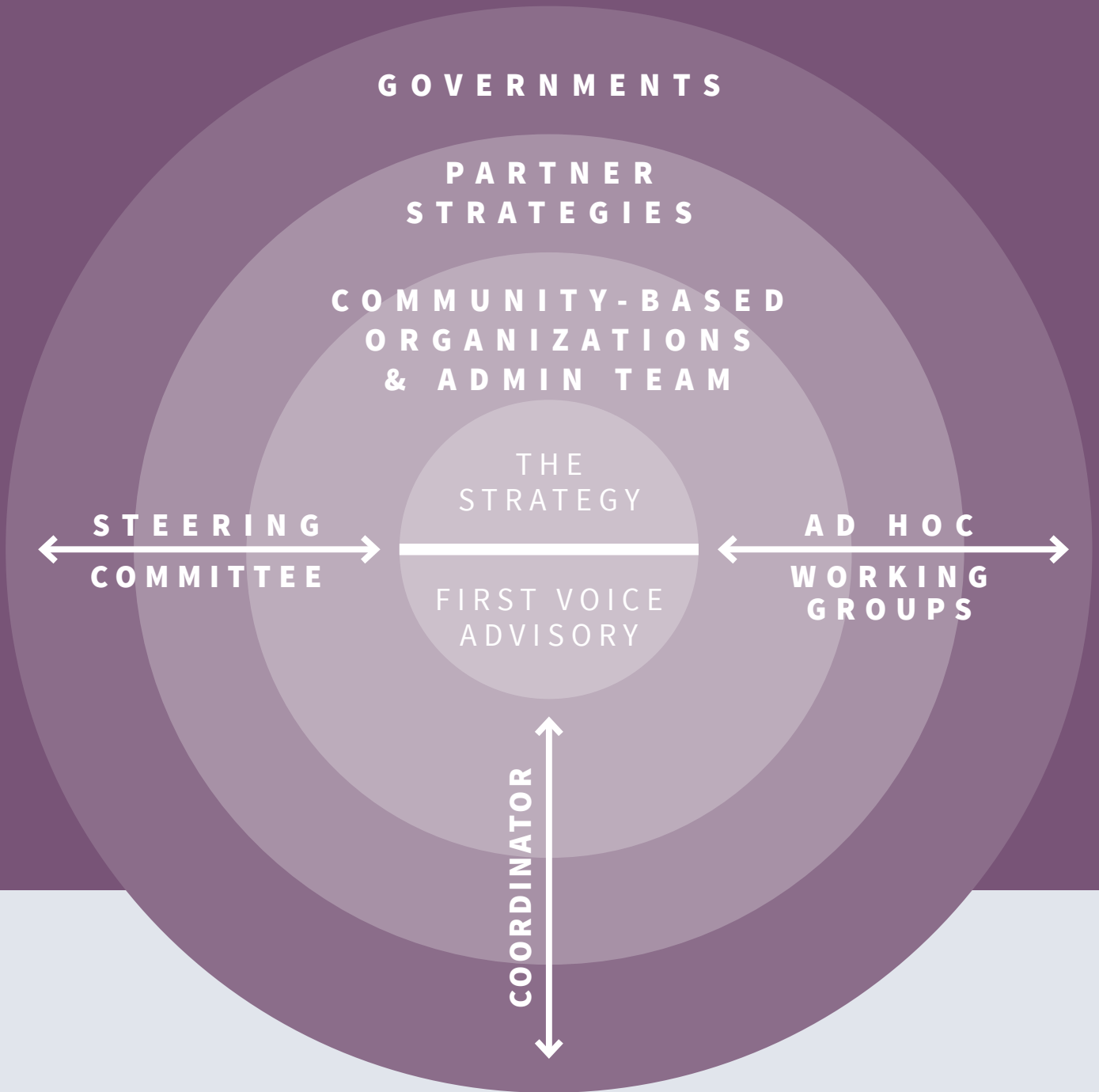
and government bodies will be critical to ensuring we can identify opportunities for change and work together to close gaps in policy and practice.

It's time for acceptance of all gender identities, a city-wide commitment to decolonized, trauma-informed services, and an investment in the programs and strategies that work. It's time to work together to ensure all people can be safe and permanently housed in complete communities with unified families. It's time to reach our goals so that homelessness is a thing of the past for future generations of women, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people.





CONNECTING THE CIRCLE  
GOVERNANCE MODEL:



# NOTES

- 1 Josh Brandon, Christina Maes-Nino, Brent Retzlaff, Jennifer Flett, Breanne Hepp, Ryan Shirliffe, and Al Wiebe, *The Winnipeg Street Census 2018: Final Report* (Winnipeg: Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2018).
- 2 Turtle Island is an Indigenous term for what is now commonly known as North America. Deborah Chansonneuve, *Reclaiming Connections: Understanding Residential School Trauma Among Aboriginal People* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005), 11.
- 3 Laboratory of Intergroup Relations and the Social Mind, "The Psychology of Invisibility" (Columbia University, 2015). <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/psychology/vpvaughns/invisibility.html>.
- 4 Status of Women Canada, "What is GBA+?" (Government of Canada, 2018). <https://cfc-swc.gc.ca/gba-ac/index-en.html>.
- 5 Status of Women Canada, "Gender-Based Analysis Plus" (Government of Canada, 2018). <https://cfc-swc.gc.ca/gba-ac/approach-aproche-en.html>.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 While most caregivers of children in care are women, we will use the term "caregivers" rather than "mothers" to be inclusive of trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming caregivers as well as other relatives caring for children such as aunts and grandmothers.
- 8 Jenna Drabble and Sadie McInnes, *Finding Her Home: A Gender-Based Analysis of the Homelessness Crisis in Winnipeg* (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2017), 3. It is important to note that Manitoba has the largest number of children in care in Canada and almost 90 percent of them are Indigenous.
- 9 Sylvia Novac, *Family Violence and Homelessness: Connections and Dynamics* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2007).
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# CONNECTING THE CIRCLE

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