

Shelter *Pulse*

Policy Example

Policy Number: 004

Policy Name: Program Services – Shelter activities

Applies To: Shelter seekers and their dependents

Philosophy:

Agency X believes each shelter seekers' situation is unique and colored by their lived experience. They will always consider the best interests of shelter seekers and do all necessary to provide the best possible outcome for each individual. They recognize that service users are subjected to repressive structures that frequently reduce and marginalize VAW, poverty, and other oppressions. They realize that shelter seekers and children who have experienced domestic violence and/or homelessness are commonly separated and isolated from friends, family, and the community.

Agency X's harm reduction policies and program offerings have been created to guarantee that clients seeking treatment who have co-occurring substance use, mental health concerns, or other conditions that may harm a woman or others receive appropriate answers. A harm reduction strategy improves both the safety of shelter seekers and the efficacy of service delivery.

This project has been funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

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des genres Canada

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Rationale/Purpose:

This Policy assists the organization in assisting all self-identified women, including two-spirited, cisgender, and transgender client, with or without dependents, who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing violence and/or abuse.

Shelter seekers and their dependents will have access to emergency shelter services regardless of ability, age, class, immigrant status, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political or religious beliefs, ethnocultural background, First Nation, Métis, or Inuit identity, language, mental health needs, or substance use.

This Policy will defend the rights of all self-identified women and treat them with dignity and respect. This Policy aims to be a constructive factor for fairness and the abolition of transphobic oppression.

Policy Statement:

A harm reduction strategy for delivering services to shelter seekers experiencing abuse by Agency X entails establishing a wide range of practical coping methods and recommending various choices for victims. They also make sure that all citizens and their children receive the necessary medical attention.

Agency X is committed to a harm reduction approach to its work, bringing compassion, understanding, and knowledge to working with shelter seekers and their dependents while providing support and resources in a non-judgmental atmosphere. A shelter seeker's or dependent's level of mental wellness or substance use alone is not a reason to deny access to the shelter or ask them to leave.

Agency X is committed to ensuring that all self-identified women can access its shelter services and strives to remove barriers that interfere with trans-women's active participation in programs. The Agency works to create a respectful and inclusive environment for trans-women.

The Agency is committed to providing access to its services in a manner that recognizes the human right to equal and non-discriminatory treatment of all. Access to services consistently meets or exceeds the *[Province Name] Human Rights Code (_HRC)* requirements and the *Accessibility for [Province Name's Residence] with Disabilities Act (A_DA)*.

The Agency is committed to having Food available for shelter seekers to prepare that meets culturally appropriate nutritional standards, guidelines, or recommendations, in order to meet the unique nutritional needs of shelter seekers.

Agency X recognizes the strengths and unique issues facing First Nation, Métis, Inuit, Indigenous shelter seekers, and their dependents. The Agency is committed to providing complete accessibility to and support for shelter seekers and their dependents from these communities who wish to use its programs and services. The Agency acknowledges the history of colonialism, the residential school program, and the "60's scoop," as well as ongoing racism in the experience of violence by First Nation, Métis, Inuit, and Indigenous shelter seekers and their families and communities.

Definitions:

Harm Reduction: Harm reduction is a policy or program that reduces or contains the adverse health, social, and economic consequences of choices with potentially harmful consequences. It is also a set of non-judgmental and non-coercive strategies and approaches that aim to provide and/or enhance skills, knowledge, resources, and support that people need to live safer healthier lives. Harm reduction strategies are designed to reflect individual and community needs.

Transgendered Woman: For the purpose of service eligibility, a transgendered woman is a person who identifies and lives as a woman, though born biologically male or intersex.

Procedures:

Trauma-informed care approach is used to provide natural support and medical care to the shelter seekers and their dependents.

Regarding staff orientation:

Because each client has unique requirements and is at a different stage in their lives, the assistance provided will be tailored to each individual. In a private, one-on-one session, staff will explore what plans a shelter seeker wants to create and then work with them to build those plans and set objectives, which will include quantifiable short- and medium-term markers.

All support planning with clients will be woman-led, based on their lived circumstances and experiences. Safety for shelter seekers and their dependents will be a top priority in all individualized support plans.

Individual support could include any or all of the following:

- Crisis intervention
- Emotional support
- Risk assessment and safety planning, including working with the police
- Assistance with family and/or criminal court
- Employment
- Housing
- Child care
- Child protection services
- Health care
- Job training and/or education
- Income support
- Transition planning for her departure from the shelter
- Connecting shelter seeker with culturally specific supports, including connecting First Nation, Métis and Inuit shelter seeker with traditional knowledge holders

Safety planning will focus on the shelter seeker's safety needs in different situations, including but not limited to while staying at the shelter, after leaving the shelter, or if the victim returns to the abuser and for family court.

Regarding medical care:

- If a resident is apprehensive about medical care, staff may provide advocacy and will attend appointments with them if possible. If a resident requires immediate medical attention and refuses help, staff may call an ambulance.
- Staff may discourage the inappropriate use of hospital emergency rooms. Residents shall be encouraged to use clinics or family doctors for routine medical care.
- In case of known or suspected infectious disease, staff shall call the Health Unit for appropriate procedures.
- If a resident refuses to provide their children with adequate medical care, staff shall contact the Child Protection Agency following the Policy.

The harm reduction approach is used to provide support to shelter seekers using substances or to the shelter seekers and their dependents with a mental health concerns.

Regarding harm reduction:

- Agency X accepts that shelter seekers cope in a variety of ways, including those traditionally viewed as harmful or "unhealthy," and chooses to work with shelter seekers to minimize harmful effects rather than condemn or ignore the behavior.
- Agency X establishes quality of individual and community life and well-being – not necessarily cessation of activities deemed unhealthy or unsafe – as the criteria for successful approaches, interventions, and policies.
- Agency X is committed to the non-judgmental, non-coercive provision of services and resources to shelter seekers and their dependent children who cope with the impact of violence.
- Agency X affirms shelter seekers as the primary agents of reducing the harms of their individual choices and as authorities on their own experiences and seeks to empower them to share information and support each other in strategies that meet their conditions of survival and coping.
- Agency X recognizes that the realities of poverty, class, racism, social isolation, past trauma, discrimination, and other social inequalities affect shelter seeker's vulnerability to and capacity for coping with the impact of abuse.
- Agency X does not attempt to minimize or ignore the real harm and danger associated with certain coping methods survivors may employ and will proactively address situations where there is a real or perceived threat of imminent danger to a woman, her children, or other shelter seekers accessing services, or the community.

- Agency X provides shelter seekers with clear guidelines around substance use on the premises and potential consequences of non-compliance (Refer to substance use section of this policy template).

Staff may not automatically ask a client to leave the shelter for drug/alcohol use or for having paraphernalia in the shelter.

When addressing a client who has been found using substances in the shelter, staff should offer alternative solutions to the client, such as making sure the client knows where needle exchange programs are located.

When addressing paraphernalia that has been found, staff emphasize that clients must use the provided needle exchange to maintain a safe environment in the shelter and for their own health.

Where applicable:

When shelter seekers are inebriated or high (but able to take care of themselves) in the shelter's common areas, staff should ask them to stay in their rooms or the upstairs family room when in this state. Staff should check on the client periodically to ensure their physical safety during these times.

Regarding the use of substances:

The Agency shall make all possible accommodations for shelter seekers who are especially vulnerable and have traditionally had difficulty accessing social services because of their substance use.

The Agency will use a trauma-informed approach within a harm reduction framework, beginning at the intake phase, to support shelter seekers dealing with various challenges, including substance use.

The Agency will also ensure that all shelter seekers and their dependents feel and are safe. This will include regular assessments of immediate safety needs, and relevant community support for shelter seekers who are using substances.

The focus of service delivery will be on behaviors and not whether a shelter seeker has used substances.

Staff Will:

- Make clear there is no expectation shelter seekers must abstain from using substances while using service.
- Provide opportunities for shelter seekers to think and talk about their substance use and its possible connections to violence and other forms of oppression.
- Have ongoing conversations about a shelter seeker's substance use, including feelings about substance use and any goals a woman may have.
- Make information available on safe substance use practices.
- Provide referrals when requested and support shelter seekers in accessing referred agencies.
- Support shelter seekers in any changes they identify and wish to make (focusing on the goals a shelter seeker may have at this time).
- Staff will also provide support to other shelter seekers who may feel "triggered" by the substance use of other shelter seekers in the shelter.

Regarding Shelter seekers and their dependents with Mental Health Concerns:

- The Agency shall make all possible accommodations for shelter seekers and their dependents who are especially vulnerable and have traditionally had difficulty accessing social services because of their mental wellness needs.
- The Agency will use a trauma-informed approach within a harm reduction framework, beginning at the intake phase, to support those shelter seekers or dependents who are dealing with various challenges, including mental wellness.
- The mental wellness component of the intake process will include standard questions focused on thoughts of suicide or ideation.
- The Agency will also ensure that all shelter seekers and their dependents feel and are safe. This will include regular assessments of immediate safety needs, and relevant community support for shelter seekers with mental wellness concerns.
- The focus of service delivery will be on behaviors and not whether or not a woman or dependent has mental wellness issues.

Staff will:

- Provide opportunities for shelter seeker to think and
- talk about their mental wellness and its possible connections to violence and other forms of oppression and trauma
- Have ongoing conversations about client's mental wellness, including feelings about it
- Speak openly with shelter seekers on a regular basis about the best way to help them when they are in trouble or experiencing mental health symptoms

- Provide non-judgmental support when shelter seekers are experiencing mental health symptoms
 - Provide referrals when requested and support shelter seekers to access referred agencies
 - Support shelter seekers in any changes they identify and wish to make
- Whenever possible, staff will have conversations with shelter seekers about how best to support them before they are in crisis or experiencing symptoms/responses related to mental wellness.
 - Staff will also provide support to other shelter seekers who may feel "triggered" by the mental wellness of other shelter seekers in the shelter.
 - The Agency will work collaboratively with other community agencies to provide shelter seekers or dependents with mental wellness concerns with as broad a range of support services as possible, as well as to educate community partners about the relationships between mental wellness and violence against shelter seekers .
 - In the event a woman's or dependent's mental wellness concerns cannot be met within the shelter setting, the woman will be provided with information about other safe options for her and assisted in accessing those options.

Cultural safety is ensured by providing culture friendly Food and nutrition, celebrating various cultural events and holidays, and by providing support to Francophone client

Regarding Food, nutrition and cultural festivals:

- The Agency will document the food needs of shelter seekers and their children as part of the intake process.
- The shelter will make all reasonable efforts to meet the dietary needs of all residents;

- The shelter will have a supply of healthy and nutritious food that covers the most common dietary needs, so shelter seekers can find the food they need to prepare their meals.
- Shelter seekers whose diet includes country food such as game and fish can receive gifts of this food. It can be stored in the shelter refrigerator or freezer, but it belongs to the woman. They can prepare it for themselves and others, but the shelter staff will not prepare this food.
- Where a resident or their dependent has an unusual dietary need, the shelter will make appropriate food available so the resident can prepare their meals.
- Shelter seekers who purchase their own snacks label it. This food is kept in the staff area. From time to time, the shelter purchases snack foods to be shared communally.
- Celebrates various events and holidays of different cultures and religions.

Regarding support for Shelter Seekers who Speak French:

Agency X adheres to all contractual requirements related to French Language service delivery with our funders.

Agency X understands that by offering services in a woman's language, they can better understand and provide services that are responsive to her needs. This improves the quality of agency services and translates concern for equity into concrete action.

In acknowledgment of all of these factors and the internalized oppression that may be experienced when a person is unable to receive services in their language, Agency X is committed to:

- Ensuring there is a visible and/or active offer of French services at the first point of contact with a woman
- Building ongoing linkages with Francophone organizations working in the area of violence against women.

- Suggesting French services to all Francophone shelter seekers that we serve
- Making every possible effort for Francophone shelter seekers to have access to support groups and counseling in French
- Considering Francophone cultural and linguistic needs in all strategic planning

Incorporating multiple Francophone workers into our human resource development strategies.

The Agency provides services for First Nation, Inuit, Indigenous shelter seekers and their dependents.

The Agency shall:

- Respect the language of choice of First Nation, Métis, Inuit, and Indigenous shelter seeker and their dependents
- Ask all shelter seekers their Indigenous status during the intake process by asking if the woman identifies as a member of an Indigenous community. Shelter seeker may choose not to identify this status, and any disclosure of status will be confidential unless the woman chooses to share it with other staff and residents
- Connect Shelter seeker and their dependents with traditional knowledge holders
- Provide a respectful and meaningful space for traditional practices
- Provide Shelter seeker with compliant access to conventional medicines and healing practices
- Support and their dependents in having meaningful access to culturally appropriate Food
- Provide information about and referrals to culturally relevant services, as may be requested by shelter seeker and their dependents

- Provide cultural fluency training to staff and Board members
- Place symbols of Indigenous culture in obvious locations within the shelter
- The shelter will work collaboratively with Indigenous communities and organizations on and off-reserve to develop and implement best practices concerning serving First Nation, Métis, and Inuit shelter seekers and their children. Specifically, the shelter will work with the Aboriginal Shelter Association, where appropriate.

This collaboration may include:

- Working with local fire departments and regulations to ensure shelter seeker can smudge within the shelter
- Developing a list of community elders who can support shelter seeker while they are staying in the shelter
- Finding a location where shelter seeker can participate in sweat lodge ceremonies
- Finding a location where shelter seeker can grow traditional medicines

Approvals:

Policy Created Date:

Policy Approved By:

Policy Approval Date:

Policy Revisions:

Policy Revised Date:

Policy

Designate/overseen by: