



# Breaking the Connections: Emergency Planning, Gender-based Violence and Women's Homelessness

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## Land Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge that the work of the Canadian Women's Foundation and of the organizations we support takes place on traditional First Nations, Métis, and Inuit territories. We are grateful for the opportunity to meet and work on this land and through this acknowledgment commit to pursue truth, reconciliation, decolonization, and allyship in an ongoing effort to honour the treaties and make right with all our relations.



**We are Canada's public foundation  
for gender equality.**

The Canadian Women's Foundation is a national leader in the movement for gender equality in Canada.

Through funding, research, advocacy, and knowledge sharing, we work to achieve systemic change.





A large, diverse crowd of people is depicted in a muted, monochromatic color palette. The individuals vary in age, gender, and ethnicity, representing a wide range of human diversity. The style is that of a line-art illustration with soft, desaturated colors. The text 'Gender-Based Violence & Women's Homelessness' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

# Gender-Based Violence & Women's Homelessness

# Crisis Impacts: Gender-based Violence



“ Whenever communities are under stress, whether from climate-induced disasters like **floods** and **fires**, **economic downturns**, or **public health crises**—rates of gender-based violence increase.

“Most organizations in the GBV sector are deeply concerned about the increasing levels during, and even because of the pandemic, and are reporting increases of 20% to 50% in calls to crisis lines, to outreach and in admissions to VAW shelters. This increased demand is especially significant because it comes at a time when capacity levels for most women’s services, such as shelters and sexual assault centres, are stretched beyond their maximum. Most have waiting lists. At the same time, shelters are having to reduce their capacity to meet public health regulations to maintain physical distancing and safety of all residents.”

- **Resetting Normal Systemic Gender-based Violence and the Pandemic, December 2020**

# The *Shadow Pandemic* of GBV in Canada



“ Even before the pandemic, violence against women was one of the most widespread **violations of human rights**.

Since lockdown restrictions, domestic violence has **multiplied**, spreading across the world in a **shadow pandemic**.

- Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Former Executive Director of UN Women, May 27, 2020

## Indicators of the *Shadow Pandemic* in Canada:

- **Eerie silence** followed by **surging demand** for GBV services
- Increase in **domestic violence** calls to police
- Increases in **workplace sexual harassment** and violence
- Increased **severity and complexity** of violence reported
- Increasing **femicide** rate in Canada, 2019-2022





## COVID employment impacts:

- women accounted for 63% of the 1 million jobs lost in the first month of the pandemic
- employment losses were largest among those employed in precarious jobs, mostly women
- almost 60% of lowest income women (earning \$14 per hour or less) were laid off or lost the majority of hours February-April 2020
- lowest earning group is overwhelmingly women and highly racialized—Black, Indigenous, and women of colour

“Women in Canada have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to an extent that threatens to roll back equality gains. Economic losses have fallen heavily on women and most dramatically on women living on low incomes who experience intersecting inequalities based on race, class, disability, education, and migration and immigration status.”

- **Resetting Normal: Women, Decent Work and Canada’s Fractured Care Economy,**  
July 2020



**On a single day -  
April 18, 2018 - 699  
women and 236  
children were turned  
away from domestic  
violence shelters  
across Canada.**

## Unhoused Women:

- **often rely on relational, precarious, and dangerous supports** to survive housing instability
- avoid mainstream shelters, drop in spaces, public spaces, or other homeless-specific services
- negotiate high-risk survival strategies to obtain shelter and **avoid the dangers of the streets and co-ed shelter spaces**, including:
  - **staying in unsafe and exploitative relationships**
  - exchanging sex for shelter



# GBV Impacts are not Experienced Equally



The needs didn't change - they were just **amplified**. The importance of having not just a service response but a policy response was super clear during the pandemic.

-Gender Justice Labs participant, 2021

- **Compounded crisis conditions for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Women**
- **Women with disabilities** already 3x more likely to experience violence
- **Trans people** at higher risk of all forms of gendered violence
- **Black and racialized women** less likely to report, be believed

# Shockproofing Communities Against GBV



“ Violence against women and gender diverse people is **neither acceptable nor inevitable** in response to community stress.

## Things we need:

- A thriving Women’s & Gender Justice Sector
- GBA+ in all hazard & risk assessments and emergency plans
- Violence prevention through culture shifts
- Access to safe, affordable homes for women and gender diverse people



# An Overstretched, Undervalued Sector



“ COVID-19 has **exposed the cracks** of what years of lack of funding has done to the most vulnerable in our communities.

- SAVIS of Halton

- Chronically **under-funded sector** with no surge capacity
- **Feminized workforce** struggling to keep up
- “Feminist **brain drain**” from the sector



# Critical Gaps in Emergency Management & Planning



# Gendered impacts not considered in emergency plans



“ I found that victims of **GBV weren't really thought of** in the provincial responses [to the pandemic] and provincial messaging in British Columbia.

- Gender Justice Labs Participant, 2021

- Stay-home orders did not say that GBV services were open
- Lack of disaggregated data collection on pandemic and its impacts
- Emergency management and pandemic planning guidance was gender neutral

# Gendered impacts not considered in emergency plans



## In 6 federal-level plans reviewed:

- 2 mentioned “women”
- 3 mentioned “gender”
- 1 mentioned “violence”

## In 28 regional plans reviewed:

- 5 mentioned “women”
- 2 mentioned “gender”
- 2 mentioned “domestic violence”

## In 24 municipal plans reviewed:

- 0 references to women or gender

**Research Snapshot:** [Recognition of the Gendered Impacts of Disasters: A Missing Dimension in Canadian Emergency Management and Pandemic Plans \(2022\)](#)

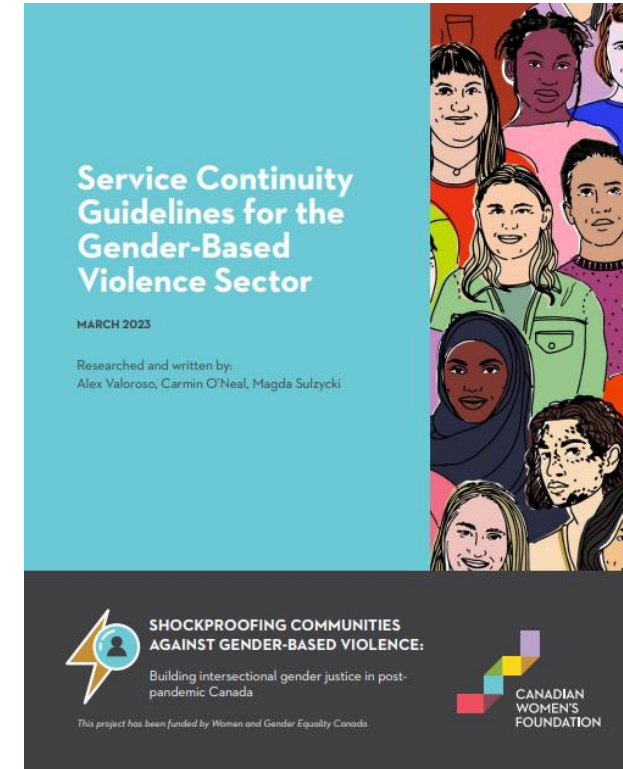


# Organizations Need Service Continuity Planning



“ Develop **tools to help nonprofit[s] ... create their own emergency preparedness plans or update existing plans**, focusing on ensuring safety for those who are most marginalized, particularly women, trans, and non-binary people who are also Black, Indigenous, and racialized, living with disabilities, and those with precarious immigration status.

- Recommendation from Gender Justice Labs, 2021



Released March 2023  
Online course version available spring 2024

# GBA+ Service Continuity Planning Toolkit - What is it?



**Service continuity planning** is essential for organizations to minimize the impact of disruptions and ensure the continuity of critical operations.

Social service organizations can **use the toolkit to:**

- Minimize the impact of disruptions
- Ensure that critical functions can continue
- Maintain trust, minimize losses, and remain available in the face of disasters or emergencies

# GBA+ Service Continuity Planning Toolkit - What is it?



What is your organizational **mission, values, goals, and objectives**?



What **critical organizational functions and resources** do you need to realize your mission?



What conditions could **interrupt** your critical functions or **impede** access to critical resources?



How will you **continue to deliver your critical functions** in the face of an interruption?



**Who will do what, when, and how** during or following an emergency or disaster?



# GBA+ Service Continuity Planning Toolkit - What is it?



**GBA+  
guidance is  
integrated at  
every stage...**

REDUCTION STRATEGIES			
Reducing organizational activities to only the most critical functions to minimize resource strain and continue to deliver on the organizational mission.			
Strategy	Details	Risks & Opportunities	GBA Plus Considerations
<b>Pause non-urgent work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suspend operations that are not time sensitive.</li> <li>Limit activities to those that fit the budget.</li> <li>Redeploy staff to urgent area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suspended operations may have to be restored by a certain point.</li> <li>Consider whether staff who are being redeployed have the skills, experience, and knowledge to carry out assignments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What assumptions are being made (about redeploying staff and suspending certain operations)?</li> <li>How is this decision being informed (who is determining the urgency of work and who was consulted)?</li> <li>What is the impact on service users who experience this pause?</li> <li>What other gaps will this create? Will this create additional barriers; for whom and how?</li> </ul>
<b>Modify services and delivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modify (i.e., reduce) the number of service users you can provide service to.</li> <li>Modify (i.e., reduce) the number of services you will provide.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider how changes will be communicated to service users.</li> <li>Solicit input from service users on service interruption to ensure that understanding of essential services is shared.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What assumptions are being made (about reducing the number of service users)?</li> <li>How is this decision being informed (who/ what is determining the access of service users)?</li> <li>What is the impact on service users who experience this reduction?</li> <li>What other gaps will this create? Will this create additional barriers; for whom and how?</li> </ul>



# Continuing Directions for our work

# Building GBA+ Capacity in Emergency Management



- **Systematic review of provincial and territorial guidance** for municipalities on their hazard, risk, and vulnerability assessments (HRVAs)
- **GBA+ guidance for municipal emergency managers** on applying GBA+ to HRVAs
- Contributing to **Public Safety Canada's national risk assessment process** (*you can too* - [survey here!](#))



# Directions for our work - GBA+ in Climate Crisis Initiatives and Responses



## Areas of Climate Crisis Event Impacts on Women & Gender Diverse People

- Gender-based violence
- Economic security
- Food security
- Housing access and security
- Transportation
- Health and health care services
- Displacement & migration (internal and international)





# THANK YOU | MERCI

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