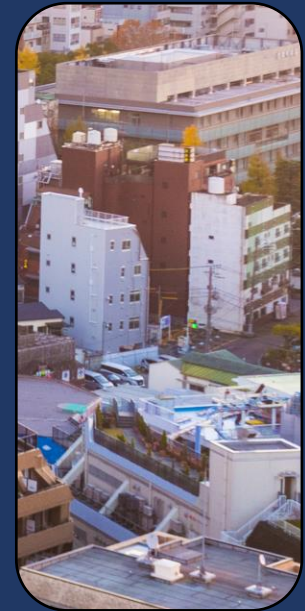
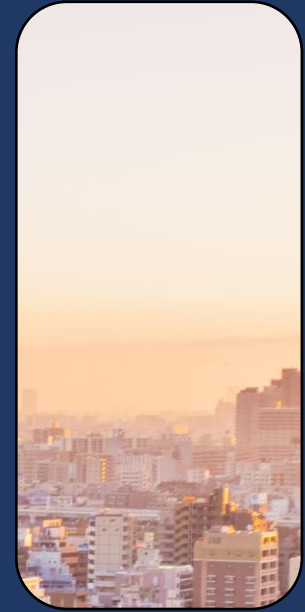
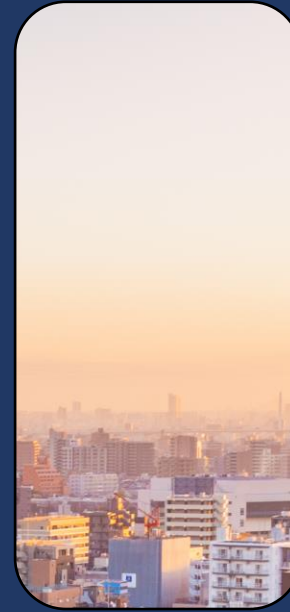


SUPPORTING
TENANTS
EXPERIENCING
GENDER-BASED
VIOLENCE

Michelle Choe & Keren Harvey
The Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario

Dicle Han
WomanACT



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



AGENDA

1. Introduction
2. Your Way Forward Research
3. Ontario Housing Context
4. Gender-Based Violence (GBV) & Rental Issues
5. Ontario Housing Legal Context
6. Introducing: Specialized Housing Legal Service
7. Case Study: Safe at Home

ADVOCACY CENTRE FOR TENANTS ONTARIO

Specialty housing legal
clinic:

- legal advice & representation
- law reform
- community organizing
- education & training





Woman ACT
WOMAN ABUSE COUNCIL OF TORONTO

WOMAN ACT

Advocates for a world where all women and gender diverse people live free from violence and have economic security:

research

- policy review
- strategic development
- education

TERMINOLOGY

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

VICTIM / SURVIVOR

PERPETRATOR / PERSON CAUSING HARM

TERMINOLOGY

GBV refers to the violence that women, girls, and gender diverse individuals face disproportionately because of their gender identity or expression, perceived gender, and/or sexuality. The term GBV contextualizes the various forms of violence within structural power dynamics.

VICTIM / SURVIVOR

PERPETRATOR / PERSON CAUSING HARM

TERMINOLOGY

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

Victim/Survivor are terms used for individuals who have experienced violence. Each person may use one or the other, the terms interchangeably, or both at once. It is important to lead with the term that feels most comfortable for the individual. Although the term survivor is often preferred, the term victim also acknowledges those who have been lost.

PERPETRATOR / PERSON CAUSING HARM

TERMINOLOGY

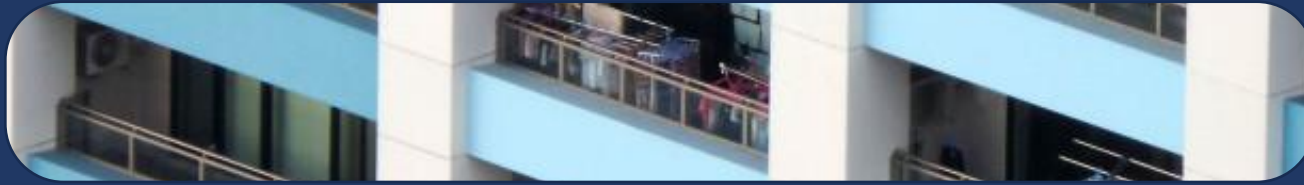
GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

VICTIM / SURVIVOR

Perpetrator or the person causing harm are terms used to describe someone who is being abusive, and can include partners, ex-partners, family members, caregivers, landlords, roommates, and strangers.

- Funded by the Department of Justice
- Collaborative project between nine Ontario legal clinics
- To expand and enhance legal services for survivors of GBV
- Evaluated by Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children (CREVAWC)





ACTO & YOUR WAY FORWARD

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do survivors of GBV experience the process of securing and maintaining permanent housing in Ontario?

- How well does the legal context meet survivors' needs?
- How well do housing services meet survivors' needs?



RESEARCH PROCESS

LITERATURE REVIEW



JURISDICTIONAL
SCAN



MIXED METHODS
RESEARCH



RESEARCH PROCESS

Literature Review

- Relationship between GBV and housing instability/homelessness
- The legal and housing service contexts
- Impact of Covid-19

JURISDICTIONAL SCAN



MIXED METHODS RESEARCH



RESEARCH PROCESS

LITERATURE REVIEW



Jurisdictional Scan

- Comparative chart of residential tenancy and social housing legislation in all provinces and territories

MIXED METHODS RESEARCH



RESEARCH PROCESS

LITERATURE REVIEW

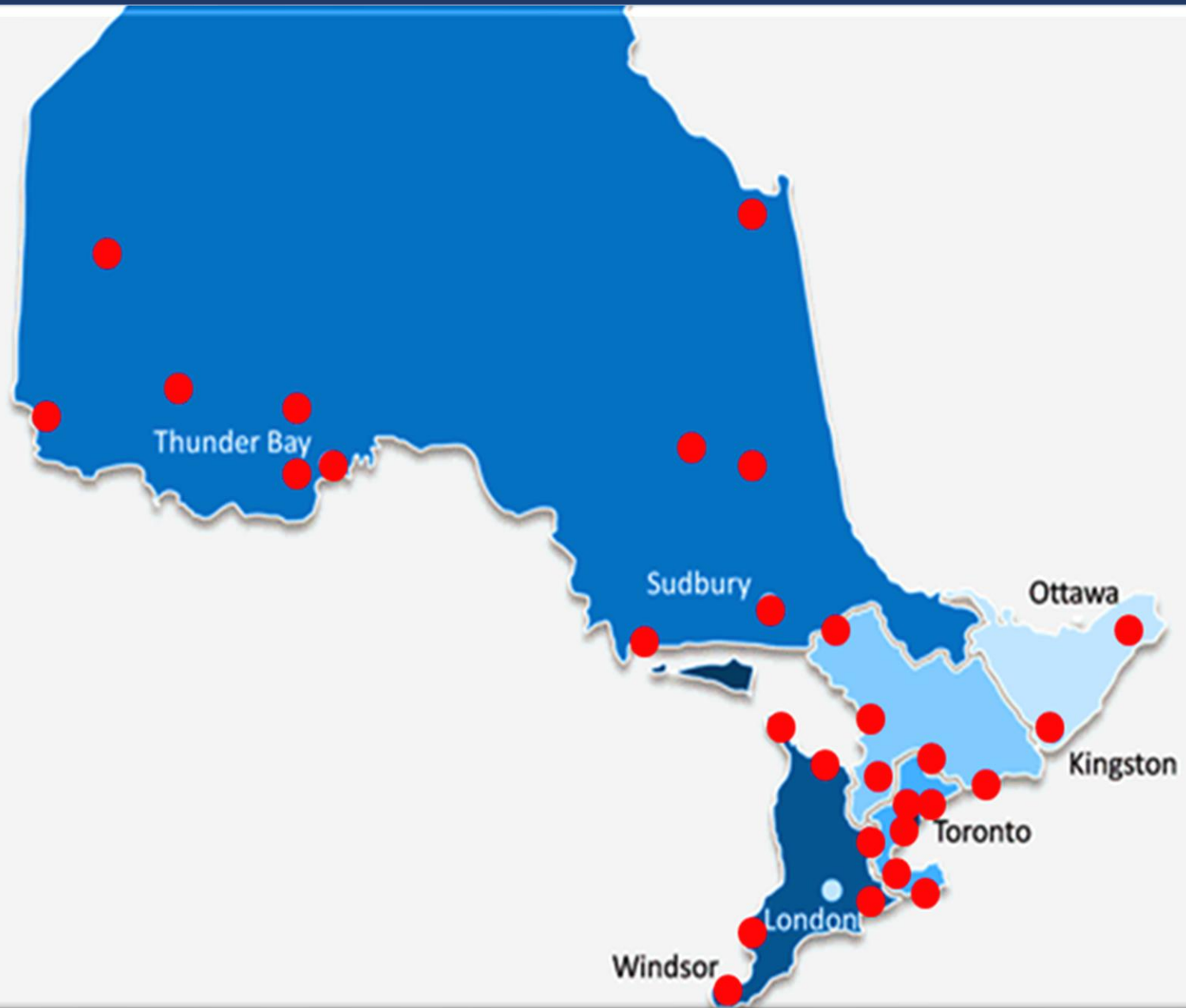


JURISDICTIONAL SCAN



Identify Gaps

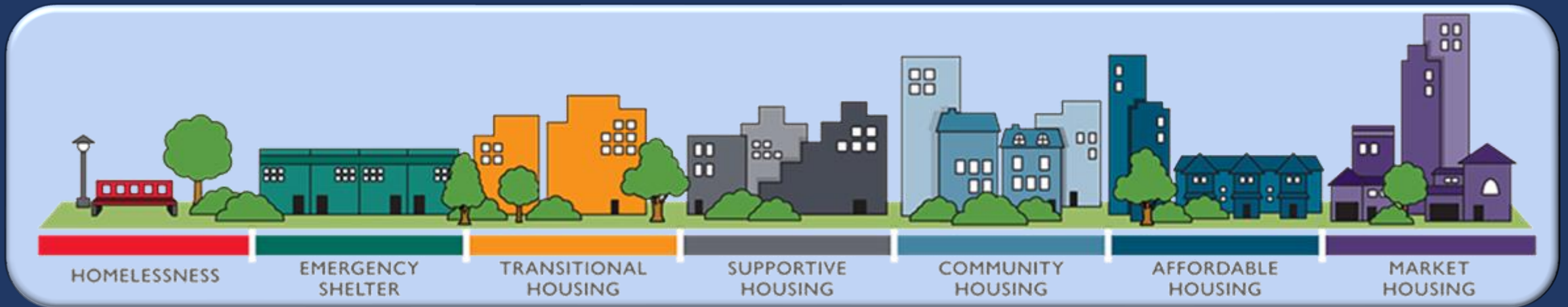
- Completed 80 interviews with key informants and tenants with lived experience
- 120 responses to service provider surveys





THE HOUSING JOURNEY IN ONTARIO

HOUSING CONTINUUM: Homelessness



High turn-away
rate at access
points

Increase in visible
encampments

Increase to the
rate of hidden
homelessness

Couch-surfing not
considered
homelessness

HOUSING CONTINUUM: Emergency Shelter



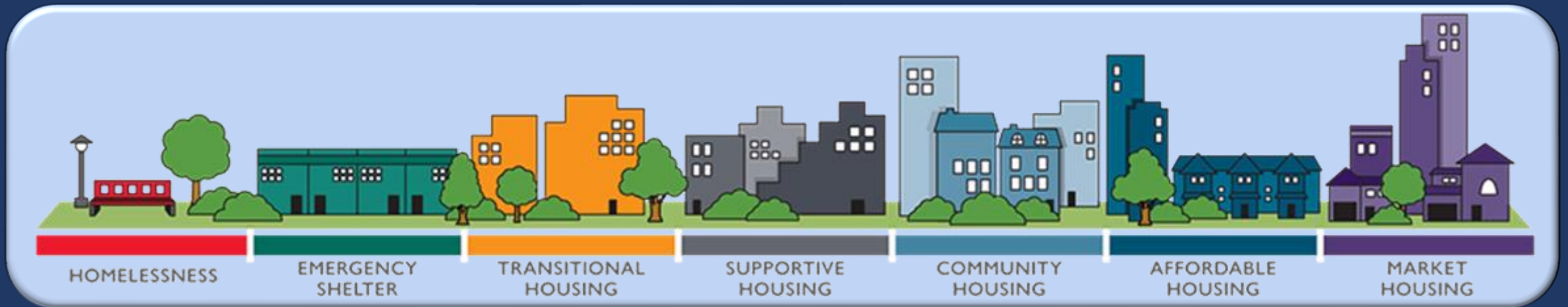
Always operating
at or above
capacity

Length of stays
extending past
guidelines

Pandemic funding
ended in 2023

Often inaccessible
& feels unsafe to
survivors

HOUSING CONTINUUM: Transitional Housing



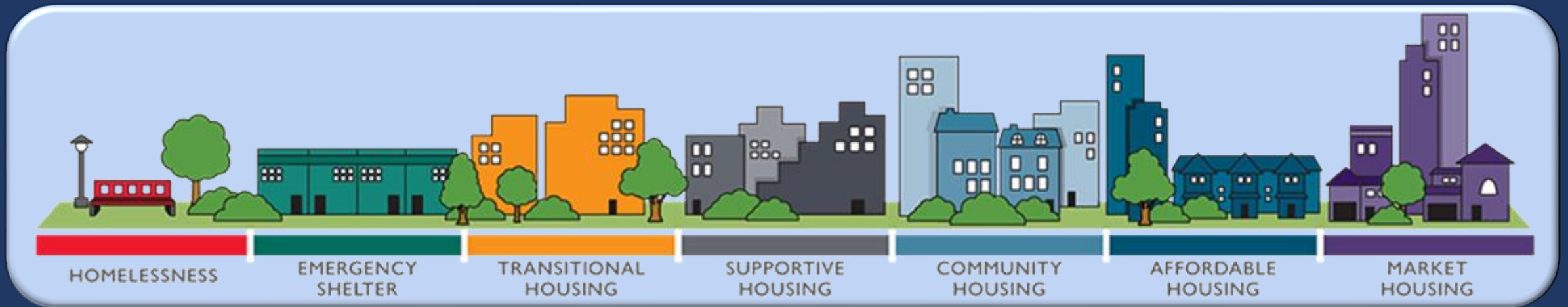
Residents have better outcomes

Limited availability - especially in rural communities

No core funding in Ontario

Can't attain affordable housing in time limit

HOUSING CONTINUUM: Supportive Housing



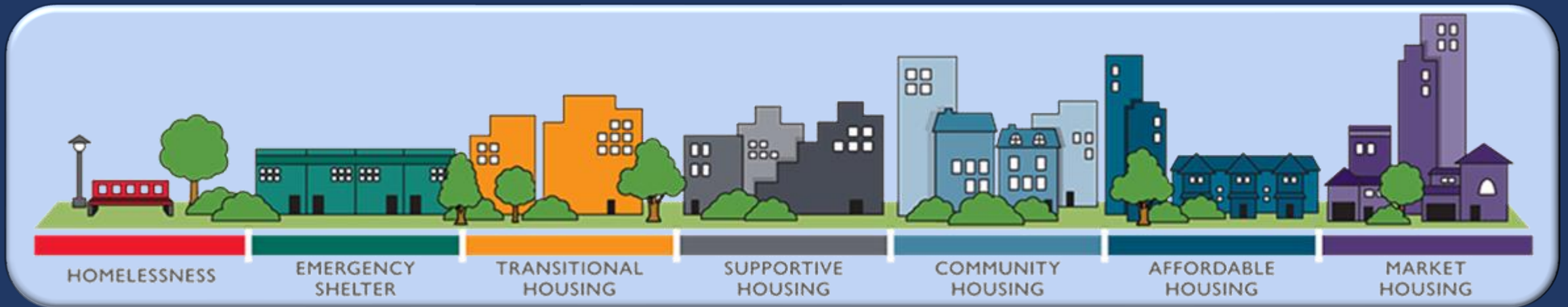
Various levels of supportive housing

Improves long-term housing stability

Long waitlists due to limited availability

No specialized supportive housing for survivors

HOUSING CONTINUUM: Social Housing



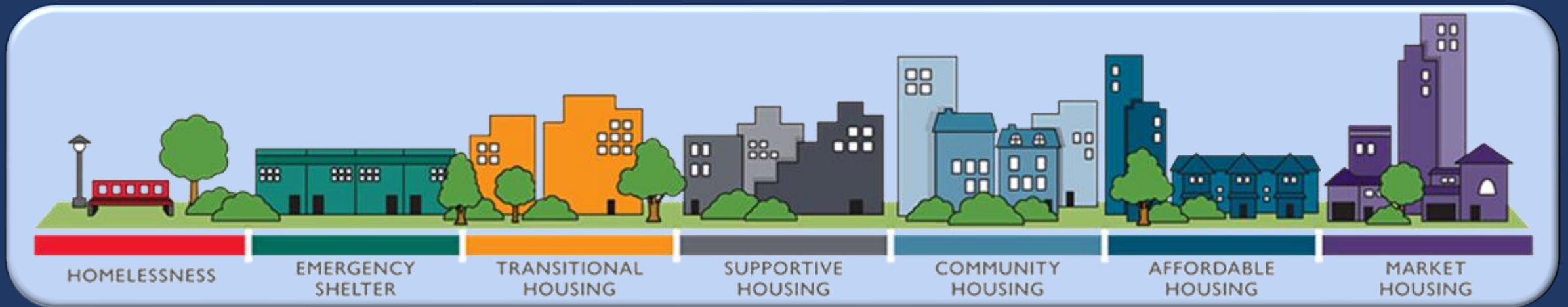
80,000 people on
choice-based
waitlists

Eligibility rules create
barriers to entry
(RGI & SPP)

Pressure on
applicants to take
inadequate housing

Difficult to get a crisis
transfer

HOUSING CONTINUUM: Affordable Market Housing



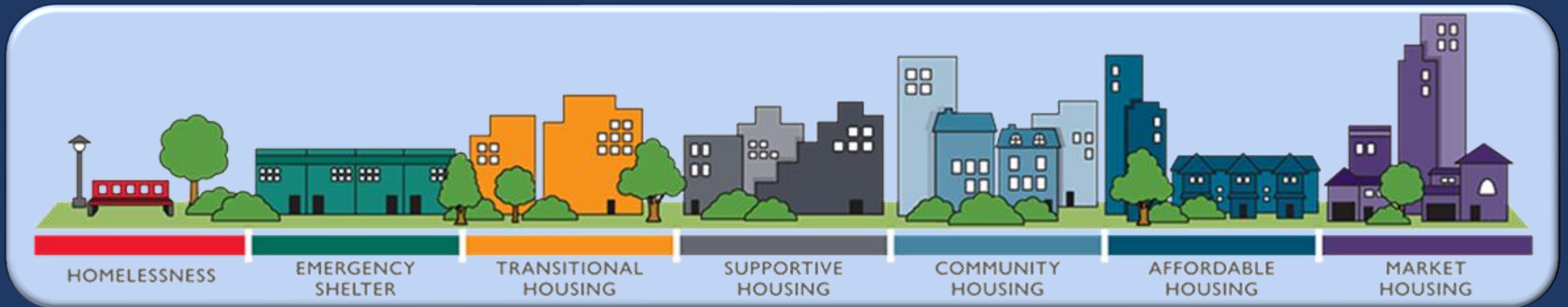
No rent or vacancy control

Financialization of housing

Rise in bad faith evictions

COHB: limited & no long-term guarantee

HOUSING CONTINUUM: Market Housing

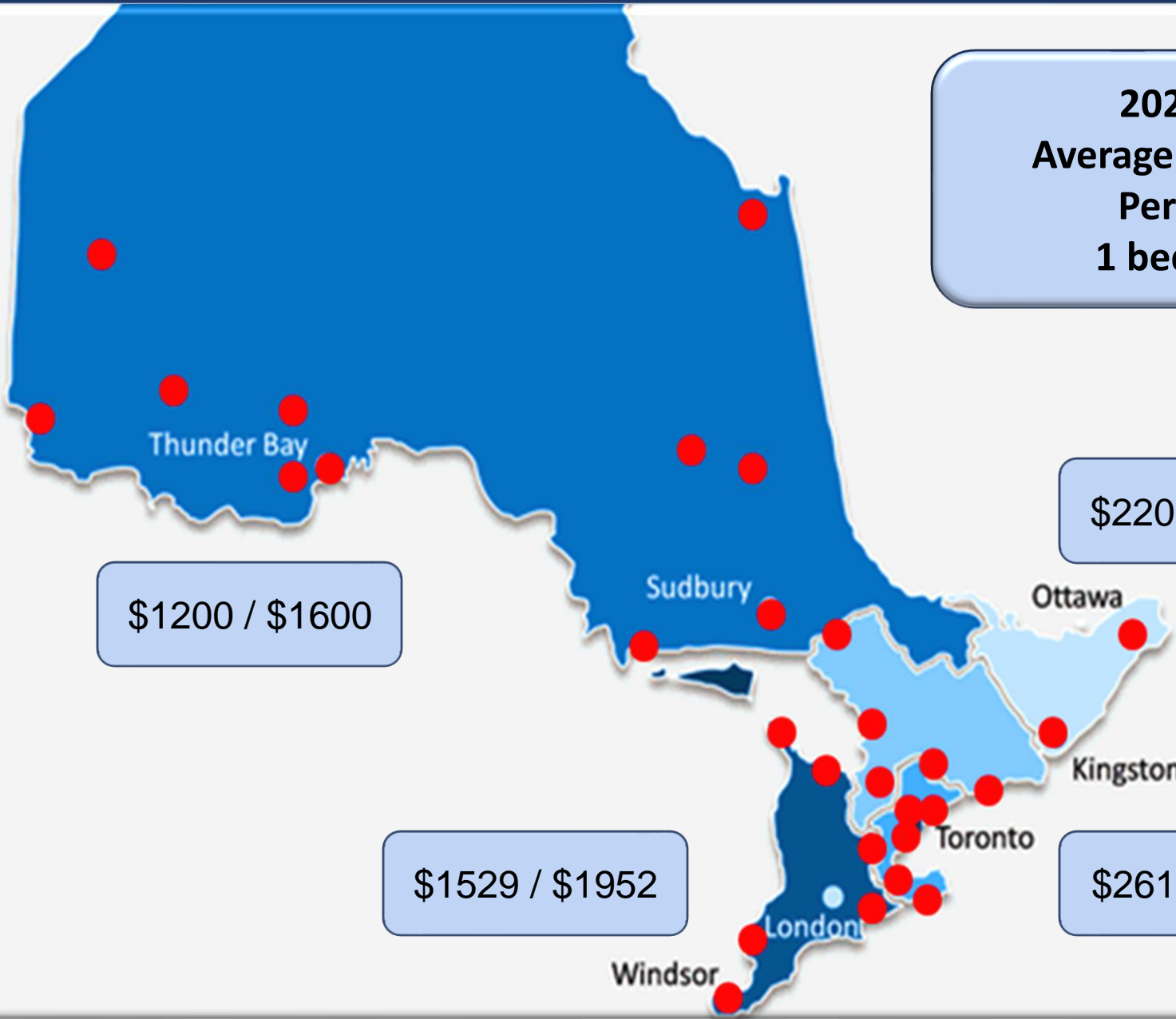


Discrimination in housing access

Survivors being exploited by landlords

91% of survivors living in core housing need

40% of tenants paying unaffordable rent



**2022-2023
Average Asking Rent
Per Month
1 bed / 2 bed**

\$1200 / \$1600

\$2203 / \$2523

\$1550 / \$2000

\$1529 / \$1952

\$2614 / \$3411

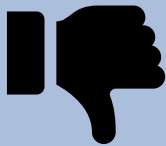
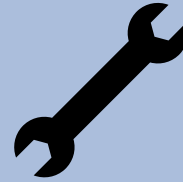


“Now in my retirement... I'm really, really tired. I'm really tired. I'm friggin, I'm drowning now. And each month it's like a struggle to just come up with that, you know, other \$1,000 for the rent, and to live. Meagerly too. This isn't living, it is certainly not thriving, it's hardly even living”



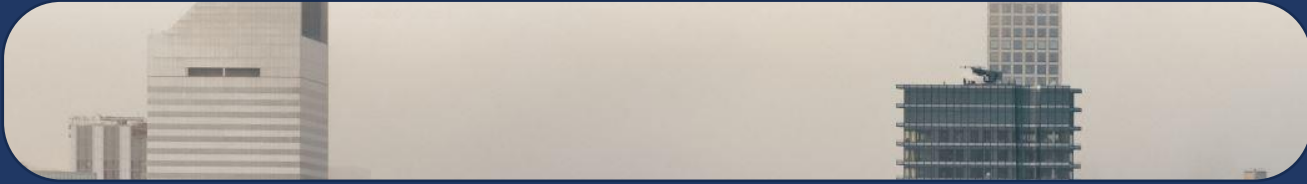
THE HOUSING LEGAL CONTEXT

RENTAL ISSUES






“I should have sought some sort of legal help there. But I also didn't want to stay there. Yeah. I wanted to get out of there and get away from them as soon as I could. But I knew I was being illegally evicted. But it wasn't...it wasn't a safe place for me to be.”



HOUSING LEGAL SERVICES

EXISTING HOUSING LEGAL SERVICES

<p>Community Legal Clinics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Income eligibility is too low• Operating at capacity• Prioritizing eviction prevention	<p>Pro-Bono Legal Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Only 30 minutes free legal advice• No housing legal certificate
<p>Affordable Legal Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low-income tenants will often self-represent instead of taking on another cost	<p>Non-Legal Housing Help</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unintentionally providing incorrect legal information• Cannot represent

A woman wearing a black hijab and a light-colored patterned sweater is shown in profile, looking towards the right. The background consists of out-of-focus green foliage and tree branches. The entire image has a dark blue overlay.

“I was scared to talk to lawyers because the lawyers I have talked to, even the ones in my community that I should have been able to trust, I had a kind of weird experience with. They weren’t kind or understanding or as trauma-informed as I needed them to be for how sensitive my situation was.”

ONTARIO HOUSING LEGISLATION

RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES ACT

- I. Cannot remove perpetrator from the lease
- II. Early termination provision (N15) has limited usefulness in the affordability crisis

HOUSING SERVICES ACT

- I. Eligibility rules for special priority program do not reflect the realities of GBV
- II. Indiscriminate use of discretion by service managers



**SUPPORTING TENANTS
EXPERIENCING GBV**

SUPPORTING TENANTS EXPERIENCING GBV




Safe at Home

A housing approach for women living with an abusive partner to either remain in the shared home with their partner removed or move directly to independent housing when leaving the relationship.




Why explore Safe at Home?


Dominant response to intimate partner violence is for women and their children to leave home to reach safety



Fleeing violence is a leading cause of women's housing instability and homelessness and creates significant life disruptions



Leaving home to reach safety can be conceptualized as a violation of women's right to housing

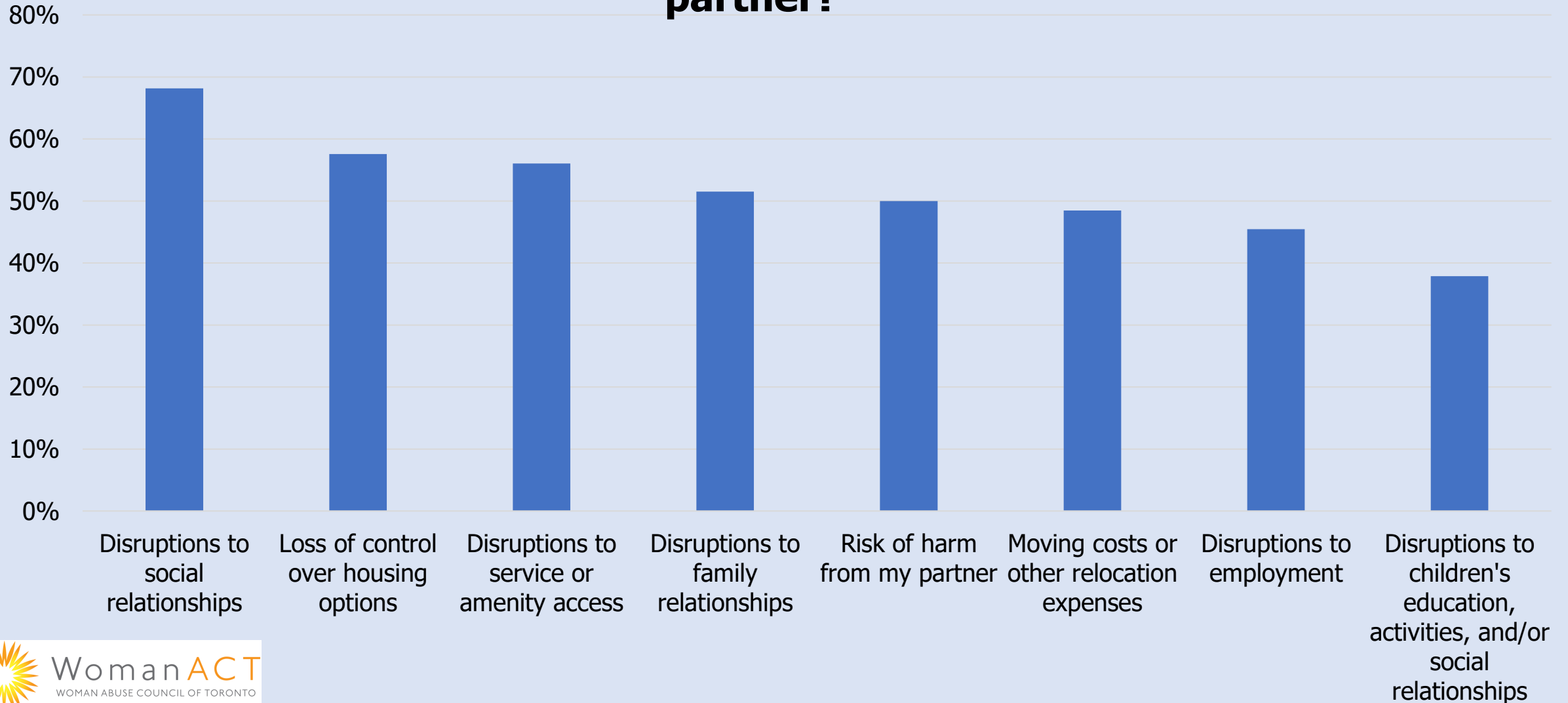


Safe at Home models are a core housing option for women experiencing violence in Australia and the United Kingdom

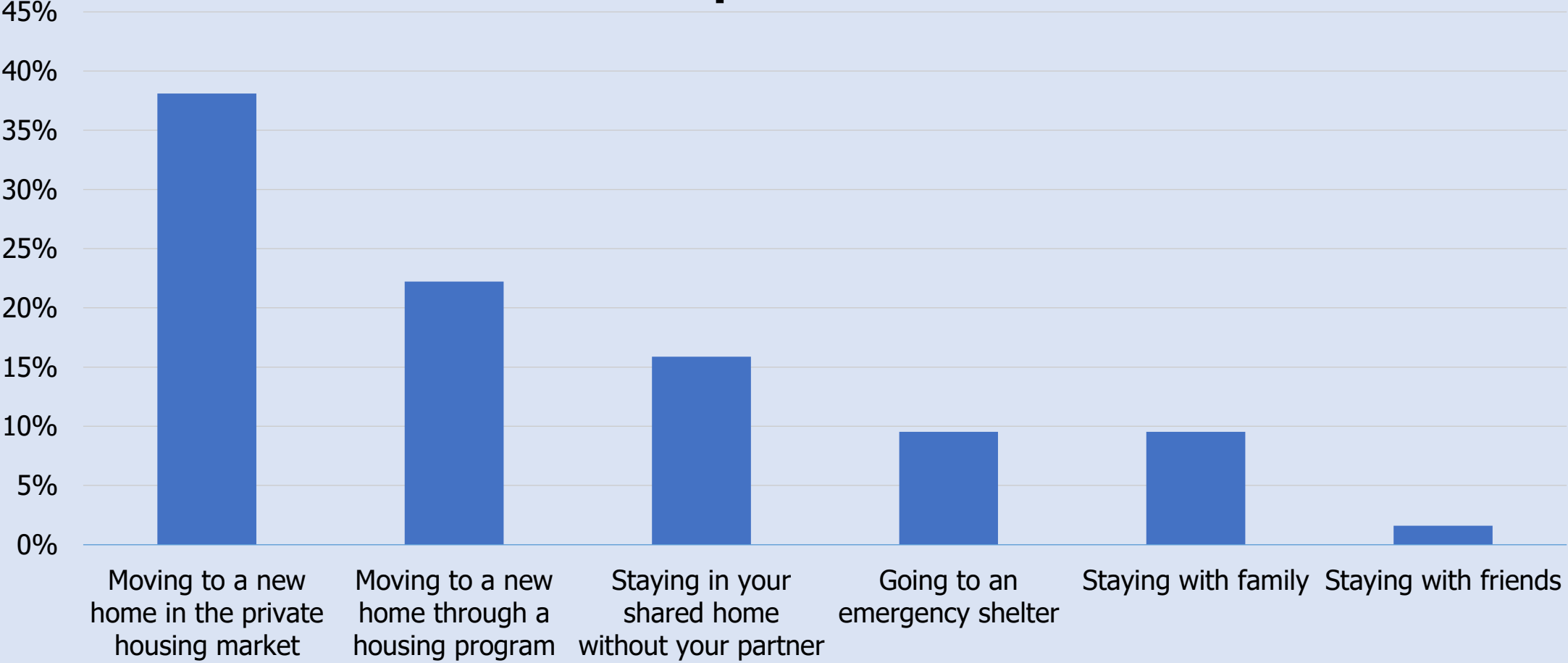
Safe at Home programs have a strong **evidence** base

- Improved safety, confidence, and wellbeing of women
- Fewer disruptions to women's lives compared to relocation
- Reduced repeat incidents of intimate partner violence
- Reduced homelessness caused by intimate partner violence
- Strengthened integration and communication between participating agencies
- Cost savings for service agencies, housing providers, criminal justice system

Which of the following did you experience in the first housing option you accessed after separating from your partner?



If your desired supports were in place, which of the following housing options would you most prefer when separating from an abusive partner?

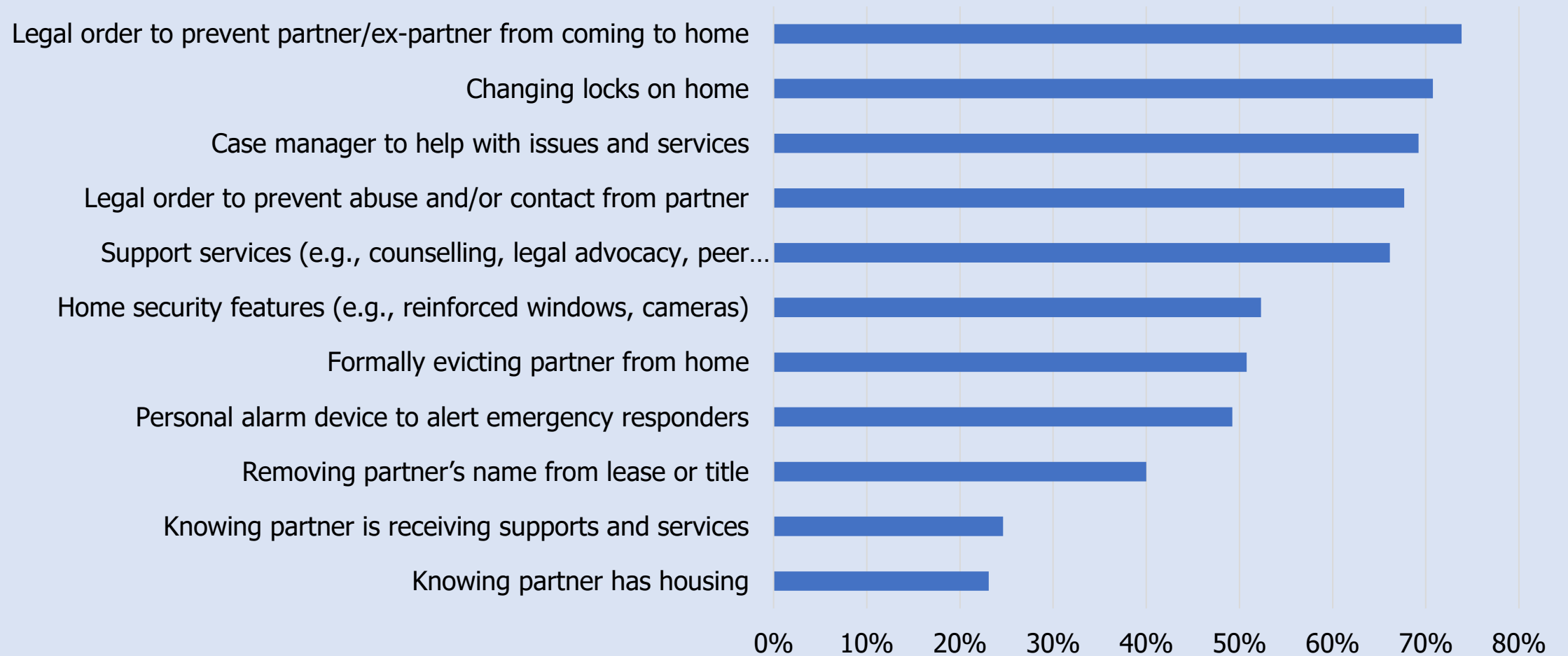


Safe at Home Housing Options – 76%

Participants' Perspectives on Safe at Home

Benefits	Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sense of control and ownership• Feelings of justice, security, stability• Housing is already suited to needs• Fewer disruptions to everyday life (e.g. health, mental health, safety, employment, children) compared to relocation options	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Affordability of housing costs and security features• Risk of harm from partner, especially in high risk cases• Access to only short-term supports• Limited justice system responses• Trauma attached to the space• Broader community safety

Participants' Program Preferences



Levers, Strategies, Opportunities

Municipal strategies on gender-based violence and housing

Existing networks and service system planning tables with anti-VAW agencies

Multi-agency risk tables and situation tables

Municipal programs regarding eviction prevention, rent subsidies, housing allowances

Federal interest in addressing women's hidden homelessness

Municipal partnerships with private landlords

Shifting norms and attitudes

That shelters
are the only
option

The expectation that
people experiencing
violence should have to
leave or move

Separation
between the anti-
VAW and the
housing and
homelessness
sectors

That violence has to
be physical to
necessitate this kind
of intervention

Where money
for women's
housing goes

Policy Analysis Key Findings

- Common **challenges** across policies and programs:
 - Unsupportive application processes
 - Access to services and supports exclusively through justice system
 - Program offerings and eligibility using gendered definitions of homelessness
 - Assumptions about leaving home and accessing only shelters or social housing
 - Limited recognition of Safe at Home principles (e.g., right to housing, trauma-informed)
 - Limited recognition of root causes of gender inequities and norms

Housing Policies & Programs

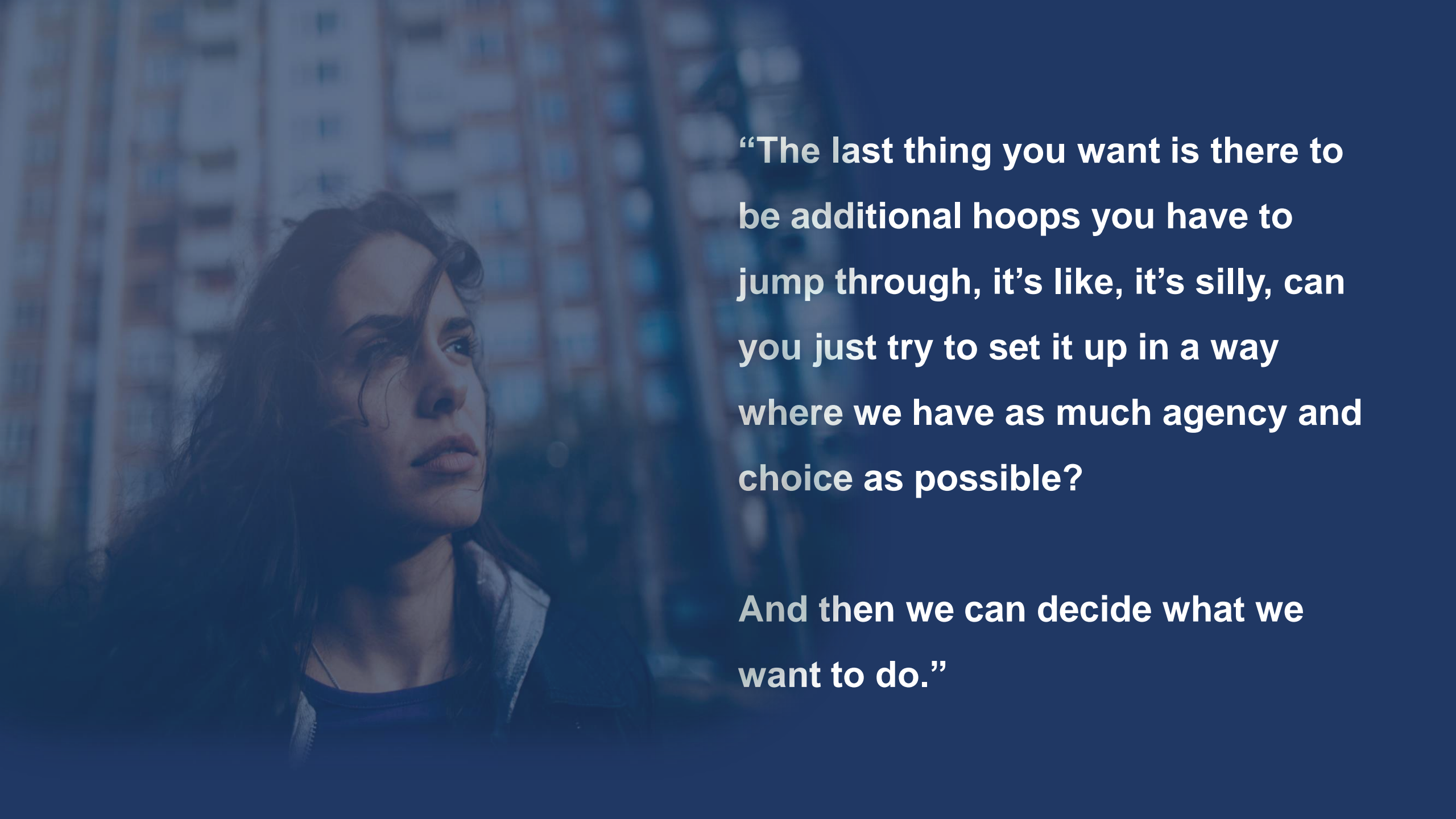
	Residential Tenancies Act	Municipal Housing Allowances
Strength	Exemptions for people experiencing or at risk of domestic or sexual violence to end a tenancy early without financial penalty	Proportion of housing allowances are earmarked for people experiencing domestic violence
Challenge	Exemption is limited to tenants who want to remove their interest in the tenancy. Does not allow tenants to alter or remove other tenants from the lease	Housing allowances are only available to survivors once they have entered the shelter system

Justice Policies & Programs

	Policing Standards Manual on Domestic Violence Occurrences	Integrated Domestic Violence Court
Strength	Provides guidance on protocols when attending domestic violence incidents and requires police forces to develop policies and procedures	Combines criminal and family court proceedings for domestic violence cases for better coordination
Challenge	Responsibility of police included in manual is coordinating transportation for survivor to go to shelter	Does not hear cases related to the Landlord and Tenant Board

Income Security Policies & Programs

	OW/ODSP Policy Directives	OW/ODSP Housing Stabilization Fund
Strength	Survivors maintain benefit amount when relocating to interval and transition houses, in order to preserve their right to return to previous home	Social assistance recipients can access emergency housing funds, with housing impacts of domestic violence acknowledged as a reason
Challenge	Maintained benefit amount is reduced if the survivor does not return to the previous home within three months	Example eligible uses of funds for survivors are listed as relocation or establishing a new residence



“The last thing you want is there to be additional hoops you have to jump through, it’s like, it’s silly, can you just try to set it up in a way where we have as much agency and choice as possible?”

And then we can decide what we want to do.”

THANK YOU!

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