



Canadian Centre to
End Human Trafficking

Strengthening housing supports for human trafficking survivors

Submission to the House of Commons Standing
Committee on the Status of Women



Overview

Human trafficking is the exploitation of a person for the profit and material gain of others. Traffickers often use trust or authority to manipulate the person they are exploiting into providing sexual services or performing work they wouldn't normally choose to do. Control can come in many forms, including guilt, shame, coerced debts, threats or blackmail. In Canada, the two most prominent forms of human trafficking are sex trafficking and labour trafficking.

Growing evidence demonstrates strong linkages between homelessness, housing precarity, and human trafficking. Lack of access to housing creates significant emotional, financial, and physical vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit. Once in a trafficking situation, survivors' inability to access secure housing is one of the biggest barriers to leaving.

Data from the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline (hotline) demonstrates the importance of housing for trafficking survivors: between 2019 and 2024, the most frequent referrals requested by sex trafficking survivors were housing and shelter supports (26%) (Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, 2025). Unfortunately, hotline staff regularly find it difficult to connect survivors with immediate, short- and long-term housing options. The current housing system – including existing intimate partner violence shelters – is not meeting the needs of survivors due to gaps in policy, funding and programming.

Survivors are underserved by existing house and shelter models

Sex trafficking survivors have unique needs that are often not adequately addressed through standard housing and shelter programs. When specialized human trafficking options are not available, survivors are served by shelters and transitional housing programs designed to address different challenges and circumstances, such as intimate partner violence and homelessness. For example, some housing programs impose certain operational policies that can mirror a survivor's trafficking experience (Polaris, 2018), including:

- curfews;
- mandatory daytime departures;
- limitations on accessing phones, the internet, or social media;
- required chores, and;
- behavioural obligations for continued residency, such as restricting the use of substances and mandatory participation in programming.

For some survivors, these policies serve to undermine their recovery and autonomy.

Survivors also face significant safety risks that many housing providers are not equipped to manage. In some cases, standard security protocols are not enough to deter traffickers from recruiting new victims or looking for survivors (Jordan, 2021; Noble et. al., 2020).

Together, these risks highlight the need for dedicated, trauma-informed housing and shelters programs that are specifically designed to support the safety, recovery and long-term stability of human trafficking survivors.

Systemic barriers prevent survivors from accessing supports

Eligibility parameters and operational procedures create barriers for survivors attempting to access housing and shelter supports. Relocating to another region or province is often essential to a survivor's physical safety, emotional well-being and long-term recovery. Yet, municipal restrictions that limit out-of-region clients from accessing services make it difficult for survivors to leave the community where they were trafficked. Other barriers – including intrusive intake forms and requirements to provide police reports – further complicate the intake process and deter survivors from accessing help.

Providers need greater capacity to respond to human trafficking

Shelter and housing providers often lack the specialized training and resources required to respond effectively to the unique needs of sex trafficking survivors. As a result, certain program requirements and misconceptions about trafficking can unintentionally cause harm. Studies have shown that failing to equip providers with the training and tools they need can discourage survivors from accessing and remaining in programs that are crucial to their recovery (Fukushima et. al., 2020; Recknor et. al., 2023).

In sum, strengthening the capacity of shelter and housing providers is essential. Investments in ongoing anti-human trafficking training, trauma-informed service, and survivor-centred practice can enhance staff effectiveness and improve outcomes.

Recommendations

Safe and stable housing is a cornerstone of recovery for survivors of sex trafficking. Housing stability reduces vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit, enables victims to leave trafficking situations, and provides the foundation survivors need to rebuild their lives. The Government of Canada has an important opportunity to strengthen housing pathways and address persistent service gaps by:

- Adequately funding the operation of housing and shelter programs dedicated to human trafficking survivors, including short-term (safe houses) and medium-term (transitional) housing. These programs should be accessible, barrier-free, culturally relevant, available across geographic regions, and responsive to the diverse needs of survivors.
- Increasing funding for all emergency shelter and transitional housing operators and establishing multi-year allocations to provide greater program certainty.
- Mandating and funding annual anti-human trafficking training for shelter and housing providers so staff can identify the signs of trafficking, support survivors, and prevent human trafficking.
- Ensuring shelter and housing processes, procedures, and eligibility requirements are flexible enough to meet the needs of sex trafficking survivors.

About the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking

Founded in 2016, [the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking](#) (the Centre) is a national charity dedicated to ending all types of human trafficking in Canada. We work to mobilize system change by collaborating and working with various stakeholders, including survivors, all levels of government, frontline service providers, and private sector businesses to advance best practices. The Centre supports the anti-human trafficking movement through education and awareness, policy development and advocacy, research and data collection, convening and knowledge transfer.

In May 2019, the Centre launched the [Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline](#) (the hotline), providing a confidential, multilingual service, operating 24/7 to connect victims and survivors with immediate and localized support, including social services and law enforcement if they so choose, as well as receive third-party tips from the public.

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