

# Practical Approaches to End Indigenous Women's Homelessness

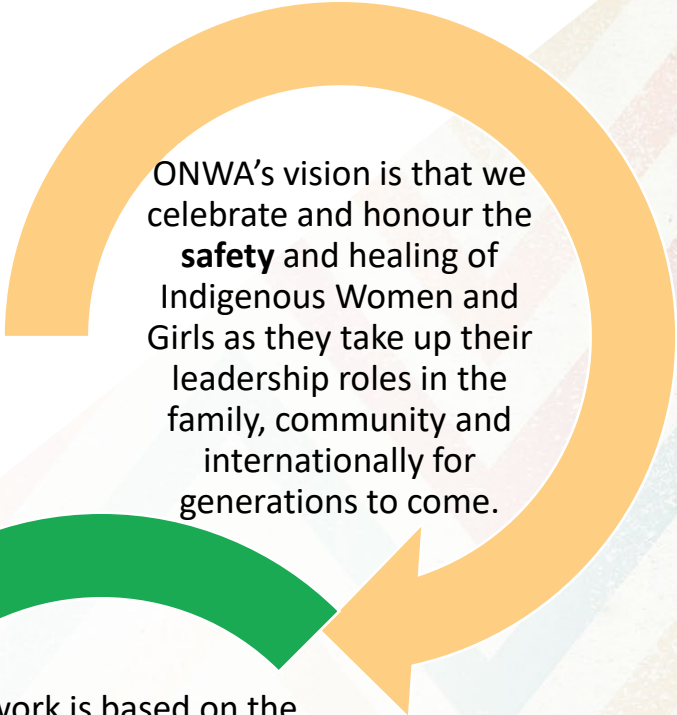


Ontario Native Women's Association

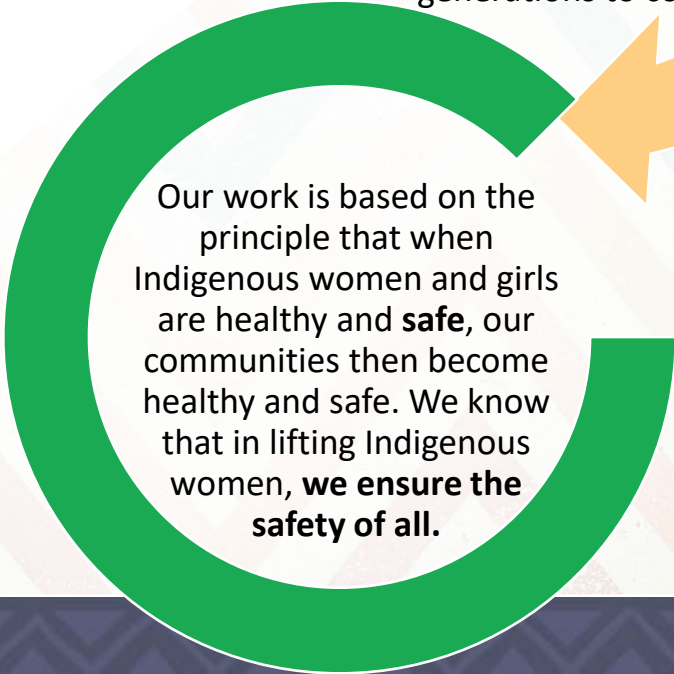
# Background on Ontario Native Women's Association

- ONWA is both an Association of 13 Chapters (incorporated organizations providing frontline services) and 21 Councils (grassroots groups supporting community development models) as well as a front-line service delivery organization with 10 service delivery sites across the province.
- ONWA is the largest and oldest Indigenous women's organization in Ontario, with over 50 years of experience and expertise in amplifying Indigenous women's voices and advocating for solutions created and led by Indigenous women for Indigenous women.
- ONWA is a leader in Indigenous women's rights, Indigenous women's access to culturally relevant programming and policy, and Indigenous women's leadership.
- ONWA fills a unique gap in supporting Indigenous women from Ontario but also those from across the country who relocate to Ontario.
- [ONWA's Strategic Picture 2021-2031](#), outlines overarching goals for ONWA as a Centre of Excellence, leading policy and systemic changes that end violence against Indigenous women.
- ONWA is a Director Member Organization of Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS)

*In working towards our shared vision of reconciliation and relationship building, ONWA looks forward to collaborating with municipal partners on issues that impact Indigenous women and their safety, including housing and homelessness.*



ONWA's vision is that we celebrate and honour the **safety** and healing of Indigenous Women and Girls as they take up their leadership roles in the family, community and internationally for generations to come.



Our work is based on the principle that when Indigenous women and girls are healthy and **safe**, our communities then become healthy and safe. We know that in lifting Indigenous women, **we ensure the safety of all.**

# Centering the Safety of Indigenous Women

- ONWA advocates for increasing Indigenous women's healing and safety on a physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental level.
- Indigenous women's safety is inextricably linked to each of these 9 strategic issues - **an essential element of safety and wellbeing is the provision of safe, adequate, and culturally responsive housing.**
- ONWA recognizes that all issues that Indigenous women strive to overcome are interconnected and must be responded to in relation to one another – this requires collaboration across governments and with service providers.





# Current State: Key Statistics



Ontario has the highest population of Indigenous women in Canada with **211,495** in 2021. 88% of Indigenous peoples in Ontario live off reserve. The flow of Indigenous people into urban spaces, particularly women, has increased steadily.



Indigenous-led households living off-reserve experience significantly higher rates of core housing need and deep core housing need. These households are also nearly twice as likely to be living in homes in need of major repairs (11.7% vs. 6.0% overall).



Indigenous women (9.4%) are about five times more likely than non-Indigenous women (1.9%) to experience homelessness.



The vast majority (91%) of Indigenous women who reported having experienced homelessness also experienced violent victimization in their lifetime



Average monthly rent is \$1,200- \$1,400 per month for a 1 bedroom. Average income for a single person on OW is \$733 per month.

# Indigenous Women's Experiences of Homelessness

**Lack of core housing has been deemed a national crisis yet Indigenous women still experience the greatest lack of access to safe shelters, affordable housing, and wholistic support.**

- Normalization of homelessness and lack shelter access
- Increase in requests for services from full time employed
- Gender-based violence coupled with a lack of affordable housing is a key driver
- Indigenous women with mental health or substance use challenges experience barriers in accessing shelters and systems
- Lack of culturally safe and Indigenous gender-based shelter options – homeless shelters are often not safe for Indigenous women and are not designed to meet their needs
- Lack of culturally relevant wrap around supports to assist with healing and maintaining housing
- Competitive bidding for rental units
- Indigenous women are forced to negotiate safety to meet housing needs
- Lack of flexible housing option

# What do Indigenous Women Need?

- **Shelters cannot be the only answer** - a variety of immediate responses that meet their need for safety, rapid rehousing, and support is required.
- **Low-barrier access** to housing through a “**safety first**” approach that meets immediate safety needs, reduces harm, stabilizes families and ensures they have the resources and support to choose where to live
- **Priority access** to safe affordable housing to rapidly respond to Indigenous women’s experiences of violence and human trafficking and to prevent CAS involvement
- **Collaboration between service managers, social housing and Indigenous women’s organizations** to assist tenants to maintain housing, facilitate access to internal transfers, achieve an optimum quality of life, and receive culturally relevant supports and services.
- **Financial stability through a livable income** and support to meet their basic needs, secure housing, and sustain tenancy including portable subsidy’s
- **Culturally grounded wrap-around supports** to assist with healing and sustaining tenancy.
- **Indigenous-led housing solutions** through urban Indigenous organizations, Indigenous women’s organizations and OAHS
- **Community-driven housing models** with flexible capital investments that address the unique, intersectional issues of each community

# ONWA's Nihdawin "My Home" Program

**ONWA is a leader in culturally grounded housing supports.  
The Nihdawin Program is one of a very few Indigenous women's housing programs in Ontario.**

Based on the **Housing First Framework** - a recovery model that focuses on ending homelessness by placing individuals who are facing chronic and/or episodic homelessness into permanent housing. ONWA has tailored this framework to the needs of Indigenous women – taking a **Safety First Approach** - which has led to the success of the program in supporting Indigenous women and their families to gain access to housing within the province.

The program assists community members who are at risk of homelessness or are experiencing homelessness with the services they need to improve self-sufficiency, independence, and stability.

- Assist clients in reducing justice, violence, legal and health services usage with fewer emergency and/or police interactions.
- Assist those with addictions and/or mental health issues that fall through the gaps of the current system.
- Promote recovery and support social and community integration.

# Nihdawin Program Highlights

- Recent expansion to 7 locations across Ontario: **Timmins, Sioux Lookout, Peterborough, Hamilton, Ottawa, Kenora, and Thunder Bay**
- **Priority is given to Indigenous people who are at a greater risk of losing their children to the child welfare system, experiencing violence, and who are at a greater risk of becoming in conflict with the law because of their homelessness.**
- Referrals from judicial systems are prioritized to ensure individuals to have a home to go to when discharged
- Workers build relationships and work closely with the individual over a 6-month timeline and provide intensive case management until the person is stable within the unit
- Addresses any issues with landlords or housing providers for a preventive approach to maintain housing.
- Assists with unwanted guests and home takeovers to address the safety issues of Indigenous women within community housing who are being targeted by traffickers and exploited because of their circumstances
- Coordinated access to housing, eviction supports, budgeting assistance, and shelter diversion
- Financial assistance with rent arrears, utilities arrears, time limited rental assistance (e.g., rapid rehousing; emergency housing assistance), and emergency repairs
- Financial assistance to set up a housing unit, including first/last months' rent, moving costs, furniture, etc.

**Culturally grounded services, geared to individual needs, empower community members to reach attainable goals.**



# Program Impact (2023-24)

**858 community members found and maintained housing,  
with 58% receiving housing in less than 60 days.**

407 individuals newly housed

63 individuals rehoused

**Total Provincial savings approx. \$25M-\$50M**

# Considerations for Future and Next Steps

In working towards our shared vision of reconciliation and relationship building, ONWA seeks to collaborate meaningfully with your municipalities to address issues of homelessness and housing instability that impact Indigenous women's safety.

Recognition and support for Indigenous women experiencing housing/homelessness concerns when interacting with systems (e.g., child welfare/justice systems). This includes engaging appropriately with Indigenous women and Indigenous women's organizations when developing policies and programs.

Indigenous women's organizations need sustainable funding to design, develop, and deliver safe shelter services and housing options for Indigenous women that provide culturally safe spaces free from racism and discrimination.

Investments in culture-based wholistic programming with specialized wrap around services and supports to address root causes of Indigenous women's homelessness and housing concerns (e.g. violence, experience of mental health and addictions, intergenerational trauma, poverty).

# Nihdawin – A Best Practice Model

- A culturally grounded approach that incorporates a strength-based, trauma-informed, culturally safe lens to address intergenerational trauma and healing through Traditional Healing, Ceremony and Teachings.
- Centralized intake provides individuals with access to multiple programs, culture-based wrap around supports and seamless service delivery.
- Utilizes a "Two-Eyed Seeing" approach that draws on both Indigenous and Western practices, which allows for individuals to benefit from multiple areas of support and gain a stronger understanding of how Indigenous identity, healing methodologies, and ways of knowing can support their care and goals.
- Works in tandem with ONWA's Mental Health and Wellness Program and Day Treatment Program, which provides access to a hub of services and a continuum of care for communities using a living program approach that allows for adaptation of specialized services based on the needs of Indigenous women and their families.

**Cultural practices and self-care are at the forefront of services**

Cultural programming and practices are integral to maintaining the wellbeing of individuals so that they ultimately achieve stability and remain housed.

# Additional Resources



Learn more about the  
Ontario Native Women's  
Association (ONWA)

[onwa.ca/welcome](https://onwa.ca/welcome)



[www.onwa.ca](https://www.onwa.ca)



[@ONWA7](https://www.facebook.com/ONWA7)



[@onwa\\_official](https://www.instagram.com/onwa_official)



[@\\_ONWA\\_](https://www.twitter.com/_ONWA_)





**MIIGWETCH**  
(OJIBWE)

**KINAHNASKOMIHTIN**  
(CREE)

**NAKURMĪK**  
(INUKTITUT)

**MARSEE**  
(MICHIF)

**NIÁ:WEN**  
(MOHAWK)

**MERCI**  
(FRENCH)

**THANK YOU**  
(ENGLISH)



[www.onwa.ca](http://www.onwa.ca)



@ONWA7



@\_ONWA\_



@onwa\_official



Ontario Native Women's Association