

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE HOUSING CRISIS

In just eight years, from 2016 to 2023, the number of beds made available in domestic violence shelters increased by 48 per cent in Canada.

Physical and emotional damage suffered by victims of domestic violence is life changing. There are also public costs incurred in a form of resources devoted by police, the justice system, the healthcare system, and social agencies that intervene. Domestic violence shelters provide a temporary haven for women and children trying to escape physical and emotional violence perpetrated on them by intimate partners.

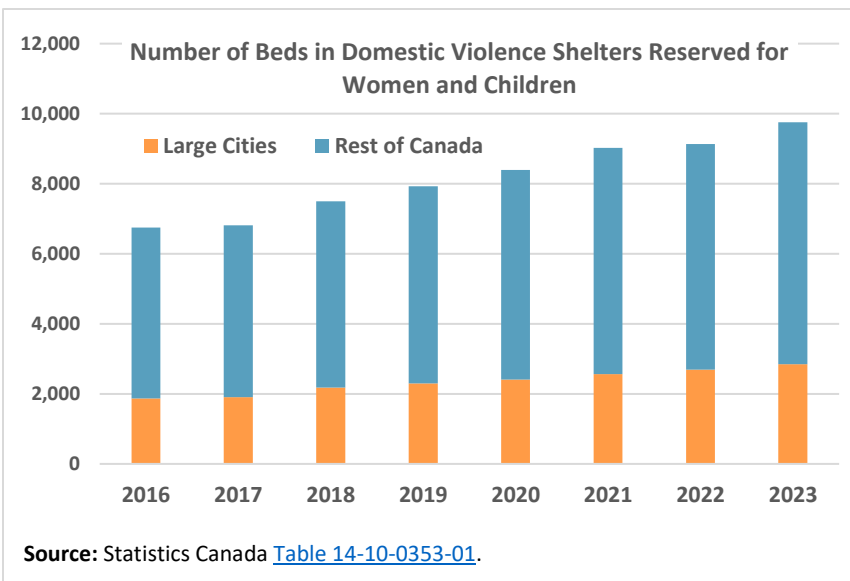
In the chart, we report the number of beds available in domestic violence shelters reserved for women with or without children in Canada in each year from 2016 to 2023. This eight-year period saw a 48 per cent increase in the number of all shelter beds in domestic violence shelters, from 6,749 in 2016 to 9,991 in 2023. Almost all these beds (98%) are reserved for women and children.

In the chart, the orange bars measure the number of beds in domestic violence shelters reserved for women and children in Canada's 16 largest cities, representing nearly half of Canada's population. There are fewer beds per capita in these large cities than in the rest of the country.

The need to increase the number of spaces in domestic violence shelters is an unexpected consequence of the housing crisis.

The average increase in beds masks extraordinary increases in some communities. In Vancouver, for example, the number of shelter beds increased by 163%. Other notable increases were in Montreal (+115%), Kitchener (+225%), Calgary (+95%), London (+72%), Victoria (+68%) and Toronto (+55%). Three cities saw a reduction in domestic violence shelter beds: Winnipeg (-37%), Oshawa (-43%) and Hamilton (-31%).

There are many possible reasons for growth in beds available in domestic violence shelters. One is an increase in the number of domestic violence incidents. Another is



an increase in a community's recognition that more needs to be done to support victims. Yet a third is the housing crisis.

A tight rental market means fewer women can escape violence by moving directly into housing away from their abuser. A recent [examination](#) of this issue concludes unaffordable housing is a significant barrier to anyone trying to escape domestic violence. A compounding effect of this is that women and children must increasingly rely on the intermediate step of using a violence against women (VAW) shelter.

In tight rental markets there are two related stressors on operators of VAW shelters. First, more spaces are required to accommodate women unable to immediately find housing away from their abuser and second, more spaces are required because women and their children must stay in a shelter for longer while searching for permanent accommodations.

The increased demand for additional spaces in VAW shelters represents one of the unexpected consequences and costs of the housing crisis.