



Alberta Council of Women's Shelters
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Canadian shelters unite to end violence against women

OTTAWA: Provincial, Aboriginal and territorial representatives from sheltering organizations have converged on Ottawa this week to create the first-ever national network of women's shelters.

The action-based initiative: *Uniting to End Violence Against Women – Establishing a National Network of Women's Shelters*, will connect shelters that help abused women across the country: giving them a stronger medium to share resources and a bigger microphone with which to create awareness.

"We're getting to work immediately," reports Jan Reimer, Provincial Coordinator of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, "The provincial associations will be asking shelters what their top challenges and triumphs are, and how the network can better help them provide this essential service to their communities."

"As an Alberta Shelter that helps over 800 women and children annually, I am thankful that we are moving towards an integrated, coordinated effort to ending violence against women. For our agency it means that protocol development for transfer from one shelter to another for reason of safety can be achieved easily," says Patricia Vargas, Executive Director of *A Safe Place* shelter in Sherwood Park, Alberta. "It is exciting to know that we will be able to have a national voice that can increase the knowledge of policy makers."

Background: The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters is an umbrella organization representing 42 emergency, second stage and seniors sheltering agencies. In 2008, ACWS hosted the first Global Conference of Women's Shelters in Edmonton. The conference, themed: *Practical Frameworks for Change*, provided a forum for shelters around the world to share experiences. At this conference the need for a national network of women's shelters in Canada was reinforced. Representatives from provincial transition home associations have been working to create this network since meeting in Ottawa earlier this year.

The participating organizations are: BC Yukon Society of Transition Houses, National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence, Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan, Manitoba Association of Women's Shelters, Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH), Fédération de ressources d'hébergement pour femmes violentées et en difficulté du Québec, Regroupement provincial des maisons d'hébergement et de transition pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, The Transition House Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, PEI Family Violence Prevention Services, Fundy Region Transition House Inc. (regional representative – New Brunswick), YWCA Yellowknife, Yukon Women's Transition Home and the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. ACWS is proud to be the fiscal agent for this project.

Shelters are the safest option for abused women fleeing violence. They provide a robust offering of services, bridge the bureaucracy to community supports, are experts in issues surrounding violence against women and provide healing by virtue of the physical environment of the shelter itself.

- 30 -

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