



ACWS

Alberta Council of
Women's Shelters

A COMPARATIVE REVIEW AND EVALUATION

**Seeking Parity Between On-Reserve Shelters and
Shelters Funded by the Province of Alberta**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background on the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) was formed in 1981 to provide a unified voice for the sheltering movement and to give shelters strength in numbers, as it was felt that shelters would be more effective in negotiations for funding if the shelters were recognized together rather than individually. The Council was formally incorporated two years later, in 1983.

At the time the Council was formed, shelters were in crisis. Funding was on a year-to-year basis with no guarantee of renewal. In the beginning, the Council concentrated its efforts in dealing with the shelter funding crisis. Since that time the Council has expanded to provide public education, programming and research related to the issues surrounding family violence in Alberta. The Council has grown tremendously as an anti-violence organization over the last two decades, however, establishing an adequate funding base for shelters remains the root, and it is still at the top of the agenda.

“Our community needs to heal, the abuse needs to stop. How can we help our women and children if we have to extend ourselves too much to provide the support they need?”

1.2 Background on the Project

Nearly half of all women and children admitted into emergency shelters in Alberta identify as Aboriginal. The Aboriginal Advisory Committee was formed in order to provide a place for Aboriginal member shelters, both urban and on-reserve, to give guidance to non-Aboriginal shelters serving Aboriginal women and children, and to voice concerns unique to their shelters. This year's Organizational Meeting of the Council's Aboriginal Advisory Committee brought comparative figures to the table.

In order to accurately examine the discrepancies in funding between Provincially funded shelters and shelters funded by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, comparative tables were provided to Directors from each on-reserve member shelter. Each table provided a thorough breakdown of the staffing, administration, operational, facility and maintenance costs covered by Alberta Children's Services as part of core funding for a shelter of equal size. On-reserve member shelters submitted their own figures for comparison with the Provincially funded shelters.

2.0 ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

3.0 Study Methodology:

This section outlines the sources methods used for gathering and compiling the information in this study.

4.0 Study Findings:

This section illustrates the findings from all data gathering activities. For ease of presentation, this section is divided into the following sub-sections:

4.1 Management Findings

4.2 Funding Analysis*

4.2.1 Comparison of Funding by Shelter Size

4.2.2 Comparison of Funding Against Provincially Funded Shelters

4.2.3 Comparison of Salaries Against Provincially Funded Shelters

5.0 Study Conclusions and Recommendations:

This section provides an overall summary of study findings and recommendations based upon those findings.

**The Funding Analysis sub-section includes embedded comparison charts for ease of presentation.*

3.0 STUDY METHODOLOGY

“There is a death here almost every week. It is really hard on the staff because they support these women. When that happens, we come into the circle, we pray, and then we make one more black mark on our list of women who have been in shelter. There are so many black marks on that list.”

3.1 Project Initiation

This project was identified in the ACWS strategic plan and launched by the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters’ Aboriginal Advisory Committee during its Organizational Meeting in January of 2005. Objectives were identified at this meeting, research activities and protocols were reviewed and action items were drafted. Follow up on the action items commenced immediately, including data collection.

3.2 Data Sources

The following data sources were utilized during the course of the evaluation:

- Interviews with Shelter Management

Interviews were conducted with 5 out of 5 Senior Management of Aboriginal urban and on-reserve member shelters. Out of the 5 respondents, 4 held the title of Executive Director, and 1 held the title of Program Assistant. 4 out of 5 respondents were interviewed in person and over the telephone and 1 respondent was interviewed over the telephone only. Each respondent was provided with a listing of the funds allotted to a provincially funded shelter of the same size prior to the discussion.

- Surveys of comparably sized shelters receiving Core Provincial Funding

Several provincially funded ACWS member shelters provided a breakdown of the monies they receive from Core Funding for the purposes of comparison in this study. The budgets are in accordance with the Core Funding provided to the shelters by the Alberta Government.

- Budgets of on-reserve shelters receiving funds from INAC

The budgets detailed in this project have been provided by the on-reserve member shelters. They are in accordance with the funding provided to the shelters by the Federal Government. As the number of respondents are so few, a range is used to display budget, and wages have been averaged in order to maintain confidentiality at the request of our members.

- ACWS Recommended Funding and Staffing Model

The Council's Shelter Programs Committee developed a scaled funding and staffing model based upon the figures that would be required to safely and adequately meet standards established by the Province.

4.0 STUDY FINDINGS

4.1 Management Findings

Respondents unanimously identified a lack of funding as the primary issue facing on-reserve shelters. Respondents explained that there is no formula to determine the amount of funding each shelter will receive, despite vast differences in capacity based upon the size of the shelters and access to resources resulting mainly from geographic isolation. Respondents further explained that although the amount increases slightly from year to year, the funds from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada are provided as an annual lump sum, from which shelter Directors are to budget all shelter expenditures.

Respondents expressed that due to the enormous demand for service in their communities, staff salaries will often go without increase for many years, leaving little incentive for staff retention. Because of the difficulty in attracting qualified staff in remote areas, on-reserve shelter respondents stated that they have been forced to cut enhancement programs, and in some cases, cut their own salaries. Due to grossly inadequate resources, training for staff in on-reserve shelters is minimal, program standards are variable and health can be compromised for service.

“Our community needs to heal, the abuse needs to stop. How can we help our women and children if we have to extend ourselves too much to provide the support they need?”

“We could do so much more if we just had the time and if there were more of us. The workers do the work because they want to help, but that does not mean they should be paid so little.”

“The staff are burnt out. Day in and day out they support women and children but the vicarious trauma is getting to them – there aren’t enough of them to take a break.”

“There is a death here almost every week. It is really hard on the staff because they support these women. When that happens, we come into the circle, we pray, and then we make one more black mark on our list of women who have been in shelter. There are so many black marks on that list.”

“In a small community, everybody knows everybody. So when somebody comes into shelter there is a good chance one of the staff will know them, but they are not trained to walk that fine line and often there is trouble.”

Respondents identified the secondary issue facing on-reserve shelters as the absolute lack of housing on the reserve, and that if women and children fleeing abuse want to set up a new household, they have to leave their families and the only community they know to come to larger urban centers.

“The reason most of [the women] go back to their abusers is because he has the house. If they go to stay with friends or family, he gets to keep the house for himself.”

“Many women do not want to go to the city. It is overwhelming for them to leave the community.”

“If the abuser has the truck how is she supposed to leave? Out here, we’re hours away from another shelter.”

“After I spoke, the relatives of three Aboriginal women who had disappeared or been murdered paid tribute to their loved ones. One was the aunt of Francesca Laboucan, who was stabbed to death in front of two of her children in Little Buffalo last winter. Another was the sister of a Roberta May Ferguson, who was raised mainly in Grimshaw and disappeared 16 years ago. She has never been seen since. When I asked if anyone else would like to speak, a woman came forward and spoke movingly of the loss of her own daughter. Unfortunately, there was not enough evidence to convict the perpetrator, she said. He not only got off scot-free, he assumed custody of the five children.”

***Brenda Brochu, Peace River Regional Women’s Shelter
Sisters In Spirit event.***

4.2 Funding Analysis

Each respondent representing an on-reserve shelter was provided with a listing of the funds allotted to a Provincially funded shelter of the same size broken down into staffing, operational, facility, maintenance and administrative costs. Respondents compared the figures from the Provincially funded shelters with their own lump sum funds and shared the discrepancies with the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters. In order to maintain the confidentiality of each shelter, the appended tables that follow use ranges and averages.

4.2.1 Comparison of Funding By Shelter Size

The five member ACWS shelters range in size, the smallest shelter holding 14 fewer beds than the largest. The difference in funding based upon shelter size is not based upon a formula. In order to maintain the confidentiality of our member shelters, we are not listing any identifying information, such as the number of beds. The mean funding amount in this range is \$236,730.

4.2.2 Comparison of Funding Against Provincially Funded Shelters

Shelter	Funds Provided by INAC	Funds Provided by the Province of Alberta	Disparity
A	\$165,460	\$398,903	\$234,443
B	\$261,292	\$398,903	\$137,611
C	\$262,000	\$404,142	\$142,142
D	\$282,000	\$484,726	\$202,726
E	\$308,000	\$640,686	\$332,686
TOTAL AMOUNT REQUIRED TO ADDRESS CURRENT DISPARITY			\$1,049,608.00
ANTICIPATED APRIL 1 INCREASE TO CORE \$53,000 X 5 (NOT INCLUDING ANY COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENTS)			\$265,000

* Provincially Contracted shelters start at 9 beds.

4.2.3 Comparison of Salaries Against Provincially Funded Shelters

Position	Average Salary: INAC Funded Shelter	Provincial Mean Provincially Funded Shelters
Executive Director	\$40,900	\$61,528.80
Administrative Assistant	\$25,125	\$32,975.50
Crisis Counsellor	\$22,623	\$37,876

5.0 STUDY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Initiated by the Advisory Committee for the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, this comparative analysis illustrates the reality of an ongoing injustice, the magnitude of which cannot be overstated.

On-reserve shelters are facing enormous disparity in contrast to their provincially funded counterparts. A simple review of contrasted funding reveals that ACWS member shelters funded by the Federal Government receive hundreds of thousands of dollars less per annum than shelters of an equal size receiving funding from the Province of Alberta. The feedback from respondents in this study only touches upon the barriers already faced by the staff and clients of on-reserve women's shelters. Geographical isolation, inadequate housing, minimal access to external resources and the ongoing intergenerational abuse resulting from colonialism are oppressions faced by on-reserve shelters on a daily basis. The fact that these shelters are able to provide service despite these oppressions and gross funding disparity is a testament to their amazing commitment to ending family violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That immediate action be taken to ensure parity for on-reserve shelters in Alberta with their Provincially funded counterparts, and that this initiative remains an ongoing commitment by the Government of Canada.
2. That an adequately funded on-reserve Shelter Program be established by January of 2006, which includes the crisis line, outreach, follow-up, safe visitation, second stage housing and public education components of programs.

NOTE: It is anticipated that funding for provincially funded shelters will increase as of April 1st, 2005, creating an even greater inequality for on-reserve shelters.