

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING



Advocacy Centre
for Tenants Ontario

Tenant Duty
Counsel Program

An Overview

What is Transitional Housing?

Transitional housing is temporary housing that serves as a bridge between emergency shelter and stable housing. It is designed for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, including survivors of violence. Other commonly used terms for transitional housing include second-stage housing, bridge housing and service-enriched housing (Sylvia et al, 2009).

The primary aim of transitional housing is to provide stable housing along with specialized supports such as counselling, child care, mental health care, case management, housing and job search support, education and other resources that enable residents to get back on their feet and secure permanent housing. Residents are typically granted stays between three months to two years, with the goal of achieving long-term housing stability and preventing individuals from returning to homelessness.

Who Does Transitional Housing Serve?

Transitional housing supports individuals with complex needs, including histories of trauma, substance use, violence, and mental health issues, who require more than just a place to live. Examples of populations that have long relied on transitional housing as a step toward independent living include:

Survivors (women, youth and gender-diverse people) of domestic and family violence

Individuals with a history of substance use

Individuals with chronic health issues including disabled persons

People with periods of incarceration

Refugees and asylum seekers

Importance of Transitional Housing Programs

Transitional housing programs offer a more structured and supportive environment for survivors because of core focus on personalized skill-building and addressing the issues that led to homelessness.

The research findings from ACTO's "[The Journey to Housing Stability for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence](#)" (ACTO, 2025) found that the lived-experience and service provider interviewees raised three key factors that contributed to the success of the transitional housing programs:



Supportive services like counselling, employment assistance, and intensive case management had helped residents build life skills.



The residents bonded over their shared experiences, creating a community environment of peer learning and support.



The longer timeline allowed residents to cope with stressors and strategize their next steps, without overwhelming them.

Lived-experience interviewees suggested the expansion of transitional housing and extended shelter stays will prevent pathways to homelessness. Notably, because [residents of transitional housing are granted a longer stay of up to two years](#), in mostly self-contained units, which provide the best option for survivors fleeing violence to heal without pressure. In our research, this model improved outcomes for survivors, including their long-term housing stability.

“

I have never been in so much peace like before. Nobody's allowed to come to my house here because it's a woman [transitional] shelter.

- Lived Experience Interviewee (LE13)

“

The whole point is to break that cycle of violence, and having a client leave where there is a chance that they might return back is counter to the work that we're trying to do. Those two years of work that we did with them will basically be pointless if we had them leave before they were really ready.

- Service Provider (SP08)

Transitional Housing in Ontario

Across Ontario, more than 268,000 households remain on social housing waitlist, with average waits exceeding five years (AMO, 2025). This shortage of affordable, suitable housing means that when people leave transitional housing, they face significant barriers to securing suitable housing.

Homelessness prevention programs have expanded across Ontario. Notably, transitional housing program supports grew steadily, with the number of service managers reporting such programs increasing from 64% in 2021 to 79% in 2024 (AMO, 2025). Our research findings showed that [32% of lived-experience interviewees had stayed in specialized transitional housing for gender-based violence survivors](#). A stay in transitional housing was described as improving their overall well-being and contributing to their success in reaching housing stability.



Despite the increasing demand for transitional housing programs, the development of [transitional housing remains underfunded](#) (Maytree, 2025). Transitional housing receives minimal direct funding from the federal government through the National Housing Strategy. Instead, funding allocation is a shared responsibility between federal and municipal partners who manage local housing programs and determine eligibility (Sylvia et al, 2009). This results in a lack of designated funding source, which has contributed to a nationwide scarcity of units.

In 2021, the [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation \(CMHC\)](#) pledged to allocate \$420 million over 5 years for the construction of a minimum of 38 shelters and 50 new transitional homes (CMHC, 2024) as a step toward the Government of Canada's [Federal Pathway to Address Violence against Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+](#) for Indigenous women, children and 2SLGBTQIA+ people escaping gender-based violence. While this was a step forward, gaps remain.

Key Challenges with Transitional Housing

Transitional housing in Ontario faces serious gaps:

1

Survivors Get Stuck:

With the existing housing affordability crisis canvassing Ontario, survivors faced leaving their affordable transitional housing unit and having to grapple with the rental housing crisis. As a result of this, residents request extensions to stay longer than intended, blocking access for others in need.

After the two years, where do I go? Start over again? Do I go live in my brother's house? Do I start the whole process again, 15 days there, 4 months there, then find the housing again?

-Lived Experience Interviewee (LE16)

2

No Tenant Protections:

Many residents in transitional housing are not covered by the Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) meaning;

- No formal lease
- No legal eviction process
- Fewer rights compared to tenants in traditional residential housing

3

Cultural or Systemic Barriers:

Programs may not be culturally safe for disabled, Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities. Many survivors fall through the cracks due to language, disability, or discrimination.

4

Lack of Clear Definition:

In Ontario, there is no clear legal framework for transitional housing. As such, many programs operate in a grey area between shelter and permanent housing. This in turn makes it hard to protect tenants or measure outcomes.

Policy Recommendations on Transitional Housing

1

Increase Stable Funding:

Increase stable and predictable funding, especially for Indigenous-led, culturally specific, and disability accessible programs.

2

Clarify Role of Government:

Establish clear jurisdiction over transitional housing to ensure effective regulation and accountability for upholding commitments to support service providers across Ontario.

3

Mandate Trauma-Informed and Culturally Sensitive Practices:

Establish clear jurisdiction over transitional housing to ensure effective regulation and accountability for upholding commitments to support service providers across Ontario.

4

Facilitate Data Tracking On Exit Outcomes:

Establish a province-wide mechanism for systematic monitoring of transitional housing services and outcomes.



For further insight into transitional housing tailored to survivors of gender-based violence, refer to ACTO's [“The Journey to Housing Stability for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence”](#), June 2025 research report.

Glossary References

Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario. (2025, June). The Journey to Housing Stability for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence. <https://www.acto.ca/production/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/ACTO-Your-Way-Forward-Report-1.pdf>

Association of Municipalities of Ontario. (2025, January). Municipalities Under Pressure: The Human and Financial Cost of Ontario's Homelessness Crisis. <https://www.amo.on.ca/sites/default/files/assets/DOCUMENTS/Reports/2025/2025-01-08-EndingChronicHomelessnessinOntario.pdf>

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). (2024, March). Progress on the National Housing Strategy. https://assets.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/sites/place-to-call-home/pdfs/progress/nhs-progress-quarterly-report-q1-2024-en.pdf?_gl=1*1ov013j*_gcl_au*MTg3NzY1ODEzMy4xNzU1MDAzMjA3*_ga*NTA2MDcwMDIuMTc1NTAwMzlwOA..*_ga_CY7T7RT5C4*czE3NTUwMDMyMDckbzEkZzAkDE3NTUwMDMyMDgkajU5JGwwJGgw

Housing Infrastructure Canada. (2024, January). Everyone counts 2020-2022: Highlights - National Shelter Study. <https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/reports-rapports/pit-counts-dp-2020-2022-results-resultats-eng.html>

Maytree (2025, February). Provincial Spending on Housing and Homelessness in Ontario. <https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Provincial-spending-on-housing-and-homelessness-in-Ontario.pdf>

Sylvia Novac, Joyce Brown, and Carmen Bourbonnais. (2009). Transitional Housing Models in Canada: Options and Outcomes. <https://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/1.1%20Novac%20et%20al%20%20-%20Transitional%20Housing.pdf>

