

Mobilizing on the Right to Housing for Women & Gender-Diverse People in Canada



A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER'S GUIDE



Table Of Contents

SECTION 1

1. Introduction 02

2. Background – Our Work So Far 05

3. Understanding the Right to Housing in Canada 10

4. Getting Started 23

5. Community Engagement and Evidence Gathering 27

6. Crafting Your Submission 35

7. Advocacy and Media Strategy 46

8. Conclusion & Next Steps 68

SECTION 2



**Downloadable
Template**



**Support from
WNHHN & NIWHN**



**External
Resource**

SECTION 1



1. Introduction

In Canada, many women, girls, and gender-diverse people live in insecure or unsafe housing – or are made homeless – due to deliberate policy choices. Across the country, women, and gender-diverse people are facing widespread, systematic violations of their right to housing and their right to substantive equality. These violations all derive from a common systemic issue: the invisibilization of our unique circumstances, needs, dignity, and rights as women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

Homelessness among women and gender-diverse people in Canada has been recognized as a national human rights crisis. The good news: in 2024, there will be a [national human rights inquiry](#) into the Government of Canada's failure to prevent and eliminate homelessness among women and gender-diverse people!

This means that a 3-person human rights Review Panel will be established in 2024, and they will be responsible for reviewing the issue and making recommendations to the Government of Canada.

The Review Panel will involve two components: written testimony and oral testimony during public hearings where women and gender-diverse people with lived expertise can testify.

We want to prepare ourselves and our communities to participate in this historic process, so we wrote this Toolkit! The purpose of this Toolkit is to:

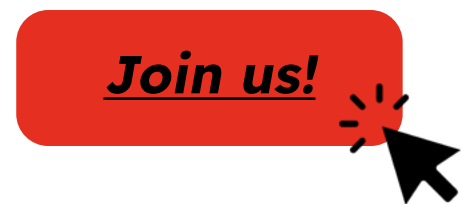
- ➔ Support lived experts and their allies to participate in the upcoming Review Panel
- ➔ Provide practical tools and templates to enable Review Panel participation
- ➔ Provide tools and diverse frameworks and mechanisms to enable community organizing on the right to housing
- ➔ Democratize knowledge about the right to housing in Canada and how to claim it



ABOUT US

This Toolkit is developed by the Women’s National Housing and Homelessness Network (WNHHN) and National Indigenous Women’s Housing Network (NIWHN) with generous support from the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate. Here is a little about us:

WNHHN: The [Women’s National Housing and Homelessness Network](#) (WNHHN) is Canada’s leading national organization working to eliminate homelessness and housing insecurity for women, girls, and gender-diverse peoples across Canada through research, policy advocacy, community engagement, human rights work, and strategic litigation. The WNHHN is comprised of over 1000 members, organizations, and agencies from across Canada with diverse expertise, including leading academics, individuals with lived/living experience of homelessness, social service providers, human rights experts, grassroots activists, and community-based organizations.



NIWHN: The [National Indigenous Women’s Housing Network](#) (NIWHN) is a movement of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples who are dedicated to improving the living situations of Indigenous women and girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse persons across Turtle Island and ending incidents of becoming displaced from our lands and unsheltered. All members have the lived experience of needing adequate shelter and a place to call home.



2. Background – Our Work So Far

JUNE 2022



The WNHHN and the National Indigenous Feminist Housing Working Group (now NIWHN) submitted two Human Rights Claims to the Federal Housing Advocate. We launched our Claims on the steps of Parliament in Ottawa on June 14, 2022, joined by national media outlets and advocates from across the country.

These Claims were developed by Human Rights Task Forces convened by the WNHHN and NIWHN over 6 months. Task Force participants spanned diverse regions, demographics, professions, and expertise. Lived expert leadership and guidance was the central pillar of this work!

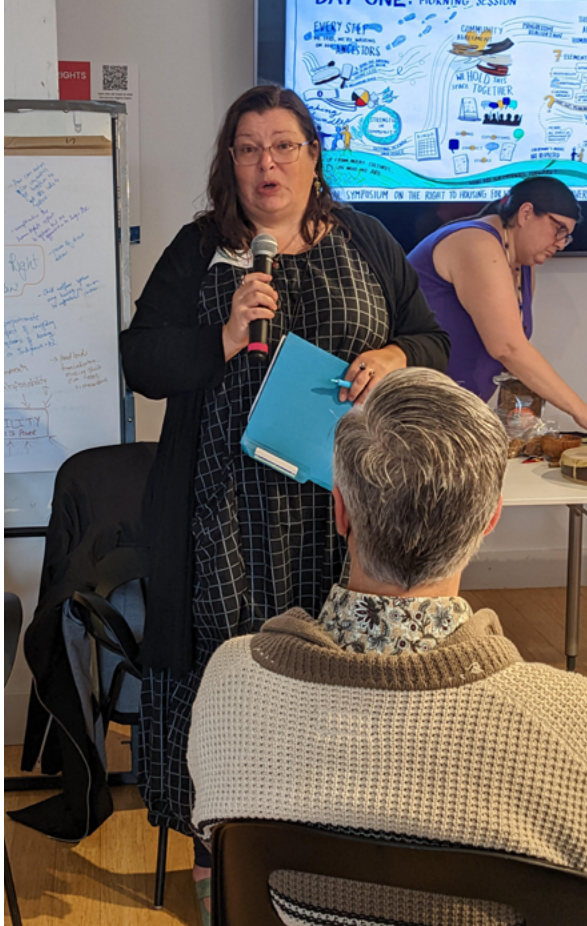


Read our claims here!



NOVEMBER 2022

National Symposium on the Right to Housing for Women and Gender-Diverse People



BACKGROUND - OUR WORK SO FAR

OUR PROCESS



WHY DID WE DEVELOP HUMAN RIGHTS CLAIMS?

We wrote these Claims to demand a better future for ourselves, our children, our communities, and the planet. We came together to utilize the new procedures under the [National Housing Strategy Act](#) to claim our right to housing and our right to substantive equality. Our Claims spotlight violations of the right to housing experienced by marginalized women and gender-diverse people across the country, calling for immediate action.

WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW?

MAY 2023

In May 2023, the [Federal Housing Advocate directed the National Housing Council](#) to establish a human rights review panel focused on the Government of Canada's failure to prevent and end homelessness for women and gender-diverse people. Homelessness has reached such a crisis for women and gender-diverse people that the Federal Housing Advocate now recognizes it as one of the top human rights issues in Canada.

SUMMER 2024

Commencement of the National Review Panel on Government's Failure to Eliminate Homelessness among Women and Gender-Diverse people.



We are ecstatic to see our Claims moving forward! Here is where we are in the process:

ROADMAP TO CLAIMING OUR RIGHT TO HOUSING UNDER THE NHSA

1.

PREPARING THE CLAIM

WNHHN and NIWHN co-develop and launch two historic Human Rights Claims with community advocates from across the country

WE ARE HERE

2.

REVIEW AND REFERRAL

The Federal Housing Advocate reviews and refers the Claims to the National Housing Council

3.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

The National Housing Council establishes a Review Panel and holds public hearings

4.

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Review Panel submits a report of the outcomes of the hearings (with recommendations) to the Minister

5.

MINISTER'S RESPONSE

The Minister of Housing must issue a response within 120 days in the House of Commons and the Senate

3. Understanding the Right to Housing in Canada

Human rights ... what are they? Do I really have a right to housing? How do we hold the Government of Canada accountable for our rights? This section will provide the basics you need to understand the right to housing in Canada!

WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS?

If you ask yourself, “what are human rights about?”, in their essence human rights are about preserving dignity. The [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) – the basis of all human rights – recognizes in its preamble that the inherent dignity and the equal rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world.

Human rights impose **legal obligations** on governments to act, and we can demand accountability through the courts and through human rights monitoring mechanisms. This means that human rights are ultimately about **action and change**. It involves individuals and groups identifying how their rights have been violated and seeking a remedy from actors who have legal obligations towards them. Human rights clarifies that governments are accountable to rights-holders – i.e. the people!



WHAT IS THE RIGHT TO HOUSING?

The right to adequate housing is understood as the right to live in peace, security, and dignity. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) offers **seven minimum standards for what constitutes “adequate” housing:**

Security of tenure:

Housing should offer steadfast security, ensuring legal protections are in place against threats such as forced evictions or harassment.



Availability of services, materials, facilities, and infrastructure:

Housing should have readily available services and infrastructure, from safe drinking water and adequate sanitation to affordable heating facilities.



Affordability:

Housing should not be a financial burden that compromises the enjoyment of other fundamental human rights. It should be priced such that it sustains a balanced livelihood.



Habitability:

The environment within the housing should be safe, healthy, and secure. It should guarantee physical safety, provide adequate space, as well as protection against the cold, damp, heat, rain, wind, other threats to health and structural hazards. It should be a space that contributes positively to the physical and mental well-being of its occupants.



Accessibility:

Housing must meet the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups including persons with any form of disability.



Location:



Housing must provide access to employment opportunities, health-care services, schools, childcare centres and other social facilities. Housing is not adequate if located in polluted or dangerous areas.

Cultural Adequacy:

Housing must respect and take into account the expression of cultural identity.



“

The right to housing is not just a rallying cry. It, like human rights more generally, offers **concrete standards that can be implemented and measured** for progress.”

- UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Adequate Housing

Did you know that the right to housing for women and gender-diverse people is ratified under various international human rights frameworks? Here are a few:



The Human Rights Council has urged States to “ensure women’s equal right to adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living in all aspects of housing strategies, including through equal access to credit, mortgages, home ownership and rental housing, to take the safety of such housing properly into account, especially when women and children face any form of violence or threat of violence, and to undertake legislative and other reforms to realize equal rights for all with respect to property and inheritance.” (Resolution 43/14)



The Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has recommended that States should in situation of violence against women “ensure access to financial aid, crisis centers, shelters, hotlines and medical, psychological and counseling services (General Recommendation No. 33 (2015), para 16.). Article 23 of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence of the Council of Europe says that “[State] Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to provide for the setting-up of appropriate, easily accessible shelters in sufficient numbers to provide safe accommodation for and to reach out pro-actively to victims, especially women and their children.”





Guiding Principle 6 of the Guiding principles on security of tenure for the urban poor (2014) calls upon States to strengthen and protect women's security of tenure, regardless of age, marital, civil or social status, and independent of their relationships with male household or community members.



Under [international human rights law and in keeping with the Sustainable Development Goals](#), States have an immediate obligation to effectively address homelessness and must take immediate steps to address as a matter of priority its underlying structural causes towards its elimination by 2030. Within that context, the measures adopted by national and local governments must prevent LGBT youth from becoming homeless, ensure that housing policies and programmes be inclusive of LGBT persons and address the needs of LGBT youth.



WHAT DOES THE RIGHT TO HOUSING MEAN IN CANADA?

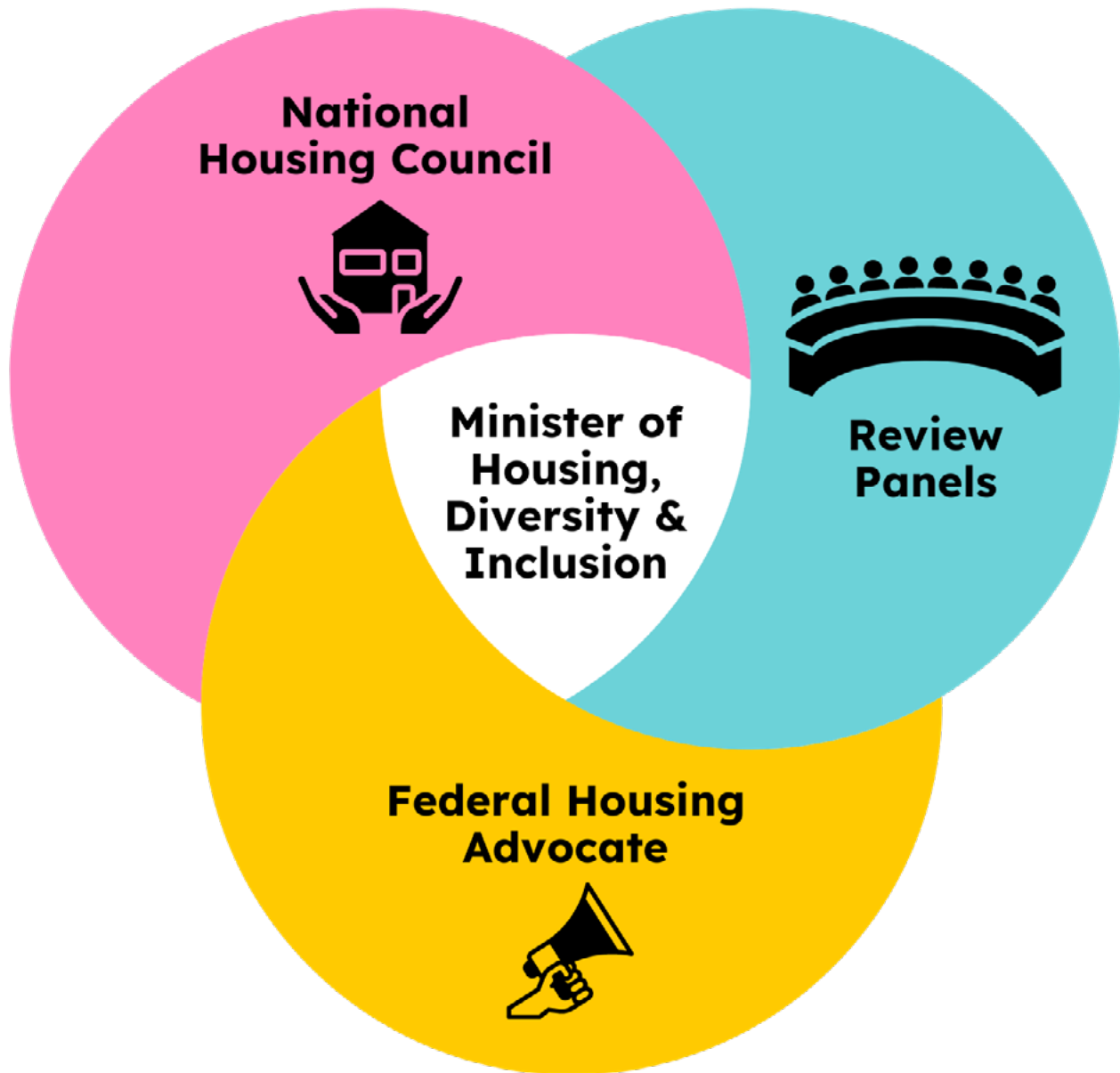
In 2019, Canada made a groundbreaking move: it adopted the [National Housing Strategy Act](#) (NHSA). The NHSA establishes housing as a human right in Canadian domestic legislation, recognizing “housing is essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person and to building sustainable and inclusive communities.” This legislation is grounded in international human rights law, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which guarantees that the right to housing “will be exercised without discrimination of any kind” and guarantees the equal right of women and gender-diverse people to “the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights.” This commitment to substantive equality is foundational to addressing the gendered housing crisis in Canada, and for making the right to housing real for marginalized women and gender-diverse people.

HOW DO WE HOLD THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA ACCOUNTABLE FOR OUR RIGHT TO HOUSING?

To hold the Government of Canada accountable for our right to housing, we can engage with the accountability mechanisms established under the National Housing Strategy Act (NHSA). The Act established:

-  **The National Housing Council:** [The National Housing Council](#) is an advisory body that promotes participation and inclusion in the development of Canada’s housing policy.
-  **The Federal Housing Advocate:** An independent, nonpartisan watchdog, responsible for making recommendations to further the realization of the right to housing in Canada.
-  **Review Panels:** [Review Panels](#) consist of three members of the National Housing Council who convene human rights-based hearings on systemic issues related to the right to housing.

CANADA'S HUMAN RIGHTS ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS



Each plays a unique role in providing oversight on the right to housing in Canada. For the purposes of this Toolkit, we will focus on the Federal Housing Advocate and Review Panels – both of which are involved in the upcoming Review Panel on gendered homelessness!

International Human Rights Frameworks: Indigenous People's Right to Housing



[United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP) states that “Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security” and that:



“

Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. **In particular, indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.”**



The [International Labour Organization \(ILO\) Convention No. 169](#) takes account of the responsibility of governments to promote the: “full realization of economic, social and cultural rights [of indigenous and tribal peoples] with respect for their social and cultural identity, their customs, traditions and their institutions.” The provisions also include an instruction to governments to assist indigenous peoples:



to eliminate socio-economic gaps that may exist between indigenous and other members of the national community, in a manner compatible with their aspirations and ways of life.”

The Convention also emphasizes the right of indigenous and tribal peoples to: “decide their own priorities for the process of development ... and to exercise control, to the extent possible, over their own economic, social and cultural development.”

In respect of development projects, the Convention specifies that governments shall: “ensure that, whenever appropriate, studies are carried out, in cooperation with the peoples concerned, to assess the social, spiritual, cultural and environmental impact on them of planned development activities.” An important aspect of Convention No. 169 is its emphasis on indigenous peoples’ rights to land. The Convention recognizes that indigenous and tribal peoples have a special relationship with the land and that this is the basis of their cultural and economic survival.



WHO IS THE FEDERAL HOUSING ADVOCATE AND WHAT CAN SHE DO?



The [Federal Housing Advocate](#) is an independent, nonpartisan watchdog, empowered to drive meaningful action to address housing need and homelessness in Canada. The Advocate is responsible for making recommendations to improve Canada’s housing laws, policies, and programs so that they enable people and families in Canada to have access to adequate, affordable and safe housing that meets their needs.

**Marie-Josée Houle,
Federal Housing Advocate**

THE FEDERAL HOUSING ADVOCATE IS	THE FEDERAL HOUSING ADVOCATE ISN'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ A “watchdog” on the right to housing in Canada ➔ Appointed by the Government of Canada, but independent ➔ Part of the accountability mechanism established through the National Housing Strategy Act ➔ A potential ally and champion for us 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ A government decision-maker ➔ A policymaker ➔ Associated with any political party

THE FEDERAL HOUSING ADVOCATE CAN	THE FEDERAL HOUSING ADVOCATE CAN'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Conduct research and receive testimony about systemic violations of the right to housing ➔ Receive submissions from individuals and groups about human rights violations ➔ Make recommendations to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities that must be responded to within 120 days in the House of Commons and the Senate ➔ Speak out about human rights violations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Force governments to make changes ➔ Write law or policy ➔ Address individuals' housing issues

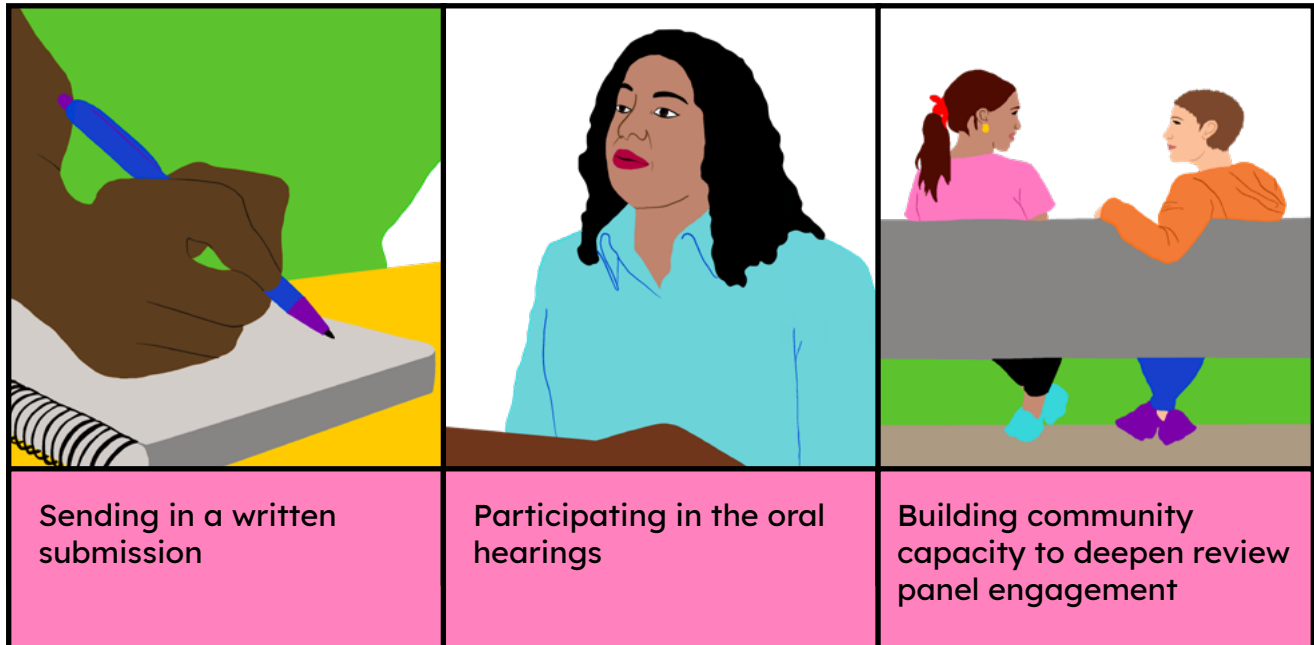
WHAT ARE REVIEW PANELS?

Review panels are important oversight and accountability mechanisms established in the [National Housing Strategy Act](#). Their purpose is to conduct human rights-based hearings on systemic issues related to the right to housing. Review panels are a human rights-based process that allows rights-holders (like you!) to share your lived experience and expertise of housing issues that appear in your communities and others communities all across the country.

Ultimately, Review Panels provide the Government of Canada with evidence-based opinions and recommended actions needed to uphold the right to housing as guaranteed by international human rights law. These panels offer a fresh way for affected individuals to seek justice, placing their dignity and rights at the forefront of Canada's housing policies and investments. You can find more information about review panels [here](#).

HOW CAN I PARTICIPATE IN A REVIEW PANEL?

You can engage with review panels (i.e., claim your right to housing) by:



Want to learn more about review panels? Click here!



SECTION 2



4. Getting Started

Our communities are in a housing crisis, and we are seeing egregious violations of our right to housing. As right holders, we have decided that we want to do something about it, but how do we get started?

The Human Rights Review Panel on the Government's Failure to Eliminate Homelessness for Women and Gender-Diverse People will provide an opportunity to all individuals to engage in ways that make the most sense to them. This means that you can engage with the panel as an individual or as a group or a community. While all forms of engagement are valuable, engaging with the Review Panel in collaboration with other community members can add strength to the engagement and show power in numbers!

Regardless of how you decide to engage, it is commendable that you've decided to engage, and this toolkit will have all the information you'll need!

ENGAGING COLLABORATIVELY

Walking alongside other community members to engage in a human rights process can be invigorating!

Human rights community organizing is fundamentally a relationship-building process. It involves talking to your family and friends, your neighbors, your co-workers, your local political representatives and your online networks to build a community or an alliance of individuals who collectively recognize the violation of rights happening in their community and decide to do something about it.

As a right holder interested in mobilizing the right to housing a great first step is to identify collaborators (groups or individuals) who would be interested in working alongside you.

Whether you're representing yourself, an organization, or an ad-hoc community group, identifying collaborators can enrich your engagement with diverse perspectives and help you refine your participation in the Review Panel process.

As you identify collaborators, feel free to note different perspectives each collaborator brings, and how they'll contribute to engaging with the human rights review panel. For example, community members bring lived expertise and lived knowledge of housing systems that can guide your engagement with the review panel, an academic collaborator might be able to contribute statistical evidence to your claim or submission or a journalist might help you get media attention.



CREATING A TIMELINE AND ASSIGNING TASKS

Effective planning is key to successful advocacy. Regardless of if you are working collaboratively or individually, it is critical that you set up a timeline to gather all relevant information and compile your evidence into your preferred form of engagement.

The first thing to make note of are key deadlines. The first part of the National Review Panel involves a portal that allows for written and oral submissions. This portal will remain open for a limited period of time, so it is important that you take note of the deadline to ensure your submission is accepted.

Based on our knowledge from previous review panels, once written and oral submissions are collected, panelists conduct a second round of engagements through public hearings that invites individuals to appear who participated in the first round. Not everyone may get invited, but the hearings will be broadcast publicly, and everyone will have an opportunity to watch them live.

Now if you're working collaboratively, it is also important to set dates for when you'll meet as a group and who will be doing what. Our sample template below provides a brief example of how a group can collaborate to set up a timeline.

WNHHN and NIWHN staff and volunteers can help you organize your submissions. We can provide writing support, deliver a human right to housing training presentation and host a Q&A with community members. For any support you might need, you can get in touch with us at info@womenshomelessness.ca.



TASK	ASSIGNED TO	DEADLINE
Hosting initial group meeting	Sam	June 12
Issue Identification	Sam and Erin	June 28
First submission draft	Jay	July 15
Meetings City Councillors	Mike	August 5
Final submission draft	Sara	August 20
Submission to portal	Ali	August 30 (Deadline)

Advocacy Timeline Template






(Download)

TASK	ASSIGNED TO	DEADLINE

5. Community Engagement and Evidence Gathering

When preparing your written or oral submission to the Review Panel, there are a few things you should know:

-  Individuals, groups, and organizations/agencies can make submissions (and you can make one as an individual, and as part of a group/organization).
-  The format of your submission is totally up to you! When the Review Panel is announced, the details about word length and other guidelines will be published.
-  After making a submission, you may be invited to participate in the oral hearing.

WHAT SHOULD YOU CONSIDER WHEN DEVELOPING YOUR SUBMISSION?

When developing your submission, you may want to consider that the Review Panel benefits from various kinds of information: lived experiences, research and statistical evidence, policy analysis, human rights analysis, and arguments related to why the issue falls within federal jurisdiction. Not all submissions will include all of these. Maybe you just want to focus on one! That is totally fine.

We have found that part of the success of our Human Rights Claims was because we were able to bring all of these areas together. We would thus suggest that in order to strengthen your submission, you may want to include several (or all!) of the following:

LIVED EXPERIENCES

Lived expertise of women and gender-diverse people experiencing homelessness, illuminating how and why homelessness is a gendered experience requiring gendered solutions.

Stories and narratives directly from lived experts, documented in their words and on their terms, are an integral and significant part of the evidence building process.

RESEARCH & STATISTICAL EVIDENCE

Draw on research to demonstrate the points you are trying to make. This research can be from academic journal articles, public reports, Statistics Canada, or any other reputable source.

RELEVANT HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

Outline the relevant dimensions of the right to adequate housing under the ICESCR, the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the UNDRIP and other international human rights to which Canada is bound under international law.

JURISDICTION

The NHSA focuses primarily on federal jurisdiction. It can be helpful for the Review Panel if you are able to identify areas of responsibility that fall under the umbrella of the federal government and make recommendations with that in mind.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Review Panel will benefit from your clear, concise recommendations for policy change that would tangibly improve housing for women and gender-diverse people. Don't forget to include these!

IDENTIFYING KEY ISSUES

To shape impactful engagement with the Human Rights Review Panel, clearly identify the issues you want to address. The issues you identify may pertain to different levels of government and involve different government and non-government actors. The most effective strategy in issue identification is narrowing in on specific policies or legislation instituted by government or non-government actors that create systemic housing rights violations. It is also encouraged to present key issues with recommendations or proposed solutions.

You can utilize the template below to guide your issue identification process.

Issue Identification Template



What are three key housing/homelessness issues impacting women and gender-diverse people?	1. 2. 3.
What levels of government are involved and what role can the Federal Government play?	
What recommendations or solutions are you proposing?	

GATHERING SUPPORTIVE EVIDENCE

Now that you have identified your key issues, it's important that you gather evidence that supports your claim to human rights violations. As detailed above, your supporting evidence can look like different things. It can be a research paper you read, or a news report in your local media. It can be stories and narratives from community members, or meeting minutes from a local city council meeting. Any data that supports your key issues and recommendations can count as evidence!

		
Research paper	News report	Community stories

CONSENT & CARE

When supporting lived experts to make submissions, it's important to record their consent, transcribe and prepare their submissions with direct quotes and transcriptions from their narrative and share any submissions prepared on their behalf with them before making the submission. There should be high level of care exercised when engaging lived experts, ensuring a focus on trauma-informed approaches and respecting their agency and autonomy in the submission-making process.



Consent Forms



When collecting stories and narratives from community members, make sure that they are fully aware of what they are participating in and what impact their participation in the Review Panel will have. You can collect verbal consent before engaging with a community member and documenting their story.

If a community member is sharing their story or narrative over email, you can send them this script over email and ensure their consent over email as well.

NEW MESSAGE



Thank you for joining us in this important effort to advance the human right to housing for women and gender-diverse people. Before we continue, I want to make sure that you understand and are comfortable with the process.

By participating in this Human Rights Review Panel submission, you are agreeing to share your experiences, insights, and any other relevant information related to your housing situation. Your contribution is vital in shedding light on the challenges faced by individuals in securing adequate housing.

Please note that your privacy is of utmost importance to us. While your experiences will be shared to advocate for positive change, we will ensure that all identifiable information is treated confidentially. Your name and personal details will be kept confidential unless you explicitly agree otherwise.

This submission is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any point before the submission deadline. If you have any questions, concerns, or if there's anything specific you would prefer not to discuss, please feel free to let us know.

Your voice matters, and we appreciate your willingness to contribute to this advocacy initiative. Do you have any questions or concerns before we proceed?

ORGANIZING YOUR EVIDENCE

Gathering evidence can be a big and sometimes overwhelming task. One of the best ways to organize your evidence is by ensuring your evidence supports the key issues you have identified. To help guide you in this process, we have provided a template below that might be helpful.

Evidence Collection Template



KEY ISSUE:				
Evidence Type	Title	Link/Source	How does it support your key issue?	What are key gendered aspects highlighted?

SITUATING YOUR EVIDENCE WITHIN RELEVANT HUMAN RIGHTS LAW DIMENSIONS

An important part of your submission can be how your evidence relates to relevant dimensions of the right to adequate housing under the ICESCR, the CEDAW, the *UNDRIP* and other international human rights which Canada is bound to under international law.

If you happen to have a human rights lawyer or legal expert as a collaborator, this might be a good place to tap into their expertise.

Want to include legal or jurisdictional analysis to your submission but not sure how? **WNHHN and NIWHN staff and volunteers can work with you to include appropriate references to legal and jurisdictional frameworks in your submission. Get in touch with us at info@womenshomelessness.ca.**



RESEARCH TO SUPPORT YOUR SUBMISSION

The WNHHN, and our collaborators, have done some of the most extensive research on gendered homelessness in Canada. You can find it all [HERE!](#)

We would suggest the following resources for key statistics, policy reviews, and human rights analyses:



[The Pan-Canadian Women's Housing & Homelessness Survey](#)



[Implementation of the Right to Housing for Women, Girls, & Gender-Diverse People in Canada](#)



[A Rights-Based, GBA+ Analysis of the National Housing Strategy](#)



[Literature Review: The State of Women's Homelessness in Canada](#)

6. Crafting your Written Submission

DRAFT TEMPLATE FOR SUBMISSION

How you develop your submission is up to you, and all formats are welcomed and valued. You can choose to write your submission as a story or a narrative, or you can work within a structured template to provide an overview of multiple issues. Regardless of how you format your submission, we encourage you to include analysis and recommendations as they play an important role in illuminating rights violations. Here is a draft template that may be of assistance for groups, organizations, or agencies preparing a submission (template adapted from the [National Right to Housing Written Submission Template](#)):



Written Submission Template



National Housing Council
Canada
Review Panel on the Government of Canada's Failure to Prevent and Eliminate
Homelessness among Women and Gender-Diverse People

[Your Name]

[Your Organization (if applicable)]

[Your Address]

[Your Phone Number]

[Your Email]

[Date]

WRITTEN SUBMISSION OF

[YOUR NAME/ORGANIZATION]

PART I - INTRODUCTION

This written submission is provided before the National Housing Council, concerning their Review on the Government of Canada's Failure to Prevent and Eliminate Homelessness among Women and Gender-Diverse People. [...]

PART II - KEY ISSUES

In this submission, we identify [x] key issues that deserve urgent human rights review: (1) ...; (2) ... (3) ...

[You can use this section to write your story or narrative.]

PART III - ARGUMENTS

Issue 1

[Evidence - Lived expertise, statistics, research, and/or other data]

[Impact and implications for women and gender-diverse people who are unhoused]

Issue 2

[Evidence - Lived expertise, statistics, research, and/or other data]

[Impact and implications for women and gender-diverse people who are unhoused]

Issue 3

[Evidence - Lived expertise, statistics, research, and/or other data]

[Impact and implications for women and gender-diverse people who are unhoused]

PART IV - POLICY & HUMAN RIGHTS ANALYSIS

Violation of the Right to Adequate Housing

[Explanation of how key issues identified infringes upon the right to adequate housing as recognized under international human rights law.]

State Responsibility and Government's Role

[Discussion of the State's obligations to protect, respect, and fulfil the right to adequate housing for women and gender-diverse people.]

[Analysis of how the government’s laws, policies, programs, regulations, or inactions have contributed to homelessness among women and gender-diverse people.]

Remedies and Solutions

[Proposal of legal and policy measures to address homelessness among women and gender-diverse people.]

[Suggestions for government action to ensure the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing for all women and gender-diverse people.]

PART V - RECOMMENDATIONS

[Name/Organization] seeks implementation of the following recommendations from the National Housing Council:

PART VI - CONCLUSION

[Name/Organization] respectfully requests the National Housing Council to consider the arguments and evidence presented in this submission and to take appropriate action to protect and promote the right to adequate housing for all women and gender-diverse people in Canada.

[Your Name/Your Organization]

[Signature (if submitting a physical copy)]

FURTHER TOOLS TO HELP YOU DEVELOP YOUR SUBMISSION

1.

[Incorporating Human Rights Language](#) - A guide to support organizations and rights claimants in incorporating human rights language in their written submissions to the review panel.

How to use this tool: You can refer to this guide as you are drafting written submissions to better infuse human rights language and framing. If you have not engaged with rights-based frameworks before, this can help you use human rights-based language to strengthen your arguments and recommendations. It also explains key terms, concepts, and principles of international human rights law.

2.

[Meaningful Advocacy Spaces](#) - Tools for reflection and deepening engagement with impacted communities in a safe, respectful, and inclusive way to build community capacity in engaging with the right to housing.

How to use this tool: You can use this tool to assess your current practices for creating impactful spaces centered on advocacy and justice, identify areas for improvement, and implement changes that will deepen your engagement with communities affected by human rights violations, as well as bolster their capacity to claim their right to housing.

3.

[Ethical Standards](#) - A guide that provides human rights-based insight to complement university-based research ethics boards, to centre individuals and communities participating in research as agents of their own experience.

How to use this tool: You can use these ethical standards as a benchmark for respectful, meaningful, and culturally appropriate engagement, as well as consent and confidentiality in a human-rights informed research framework. Pages 6-11 are particularly useful for reflecting on how to meaningfully engage with research participants.

7. Advocacy and Media Strategy

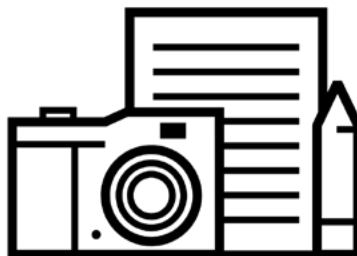
This section includes:

- ➔ Engaging with Media and Crafting Key Messages
- ➔ Utilizing Social Media and Online Platforms
- ➔ Building Public Support

ENGAGING WITH MEDIA

When is the right time to engage with media outlets and invite them to the work you are doing to mobilize on the right to housing? How do we best engage with them? This section aims to answer these questions strategically to make the best use of your and media's time and efforts.

Overview: This section will identify best practices to engage with media, tips for when/how to invite media in, as well as templates for media advisories, press releases, and key messages.



PITCHING MEDIA

First, you must know why you want to reach out to media. Here are some helpful questions to ask yourself or your team:

Would we benefit from media coverage?

Is this going to be worth the effort and time it takes to pitch?

What story are we hoping to tell?

Do we need help/boost in raising the profile of an event or launch to the wider community?

If we promote this story, will it spark a potential controversy at this time?

Do we want to raise awareness about a critical issue and the media would be useful?

If the above questions lead you to reaching out to media, then are three different ways to go about it:

Individual Pitch(es):

A.

If you want to give the impression of exclusivity to a reporter/radio producers/tv producer you may or may not have a pre-existing relationship with, then you would write out a pitch to them and personalize it. Explain why you think it's the right story for them to cover.

Media Advisory:

B.

This is a very basic form of an advisory, best used for events or a precursor to a press release. In the event of a Media Advisory coming before a Press Release, it would generally mean it comes before a major announcement. Media Advisories are the Who/What/Where/When/Why of releases. It lets the media know something important is coming up and you're giving them a head's up ahead of time so they can prepare or get ahead of the story or prepare to send reporters/cameras to the event. The [Media Advisory template](#) has instructions on how to build the best one.

Press Release:

C.

This tells a news story, it explains the announcement or issue by following the "Inverted Pyramid," which is a style of writing hard news stories. Press Releases are best used to talk about an issue, a reaction, or an announcement (such as new research, announcing an event, or reacting to a major news event.) The [Press Release template](#) has instructions on how to best compose a release.

WRITING AN INDIVIDUAL PITCH

An individual pitch can be sent to either only one or a handful of specific reporters/ tv or radio producers. Individual pitches give the media a sense of exclusivity, especially if you identify that in your pitch. Usually, you'd reserve the individual pitches for important stories or reach out to reporters ahead of time to build excitement toward the event/announcement.


PROS FOR INDIVIDUAL/ SMALL PITCHES	CONS FOR INDIVIDUAL/ SMALL PITCHES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Build relationships with individual media folks. ➔ Great way to learn what stories media outlets are interested in. ➔ The reporter is likely to reach out to you in future for stories/ interviews/commentary thanks to making a connection. ➔ Builds trust with media outlets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Risk having to wait to hear back from reporters, it's great to follow-up but can end up being a waste of time. ➔ Risk having low coverage if the story doesn't take off, or if your story goes to a wire it's just the same story over and over in different outlets, which can be a pro, but it can also be a con if it's not a particularly well written story/or well covered.



HOW TO PITCH

1.

Do not underestimate the importance of a subject line. It often determines whether or not the reporter will open the email or just delete/ignore it. Keep it short, sweet and to the point. Often it helps to use this example:


NEW MESSAGE 	
SUBJECT	STORY PITCH: (and then describe the story in 6 words or less, like writing a succinct headline)

2.

If you have an updated/well kept media list or interview request list, then when you have a story, announcement, or event to promote then you will have a great sense of who you think would be interested in pursuing the story. Once you've identified the one or few media folks, it would help to know what stories they've covered before that are relevant to what you're pitching to them—so you know if it's something they have experience covering before or would want to cover. Try to surmise from their previous stories.

3.

When writing your media pitch, make sure you address the email pitch to them by their first name. Identify who you are, your title (or group you are with/representing), and that you are reaching out with a story you think they would personally be interested in (i.e., they covered a story similarly and reference that story).

NEW MESSAGE 	
Dear [reporter's first name],	
I am [your name] of [organization/group] and I am reaching out with a story...	

After that initial two-sentence paragraph, keep the pitch itself extremely brief. Let them know you're only reaching out to them. Reporters don't have very long attention spans for story pitches because they usually already have a lot going on during the day (you're not the only story they'd be covering) so you're competing with a lot (not just people pitching their own stories but the reporter's own workload). So, make it worth their time by keeping it right to the point and brief. What's so special about your story? Why should the reporter care?

4.

The pitch, in one or two sentences, encapsulates what the story is exactly. If it's relevant, highlight the 'who' of the story, especially if they're someone well known or respected in their field (name recognition always helps, where possible). Let them know when this story is happening—if it's urgent to cover then express that.

Always end with how you're an avid reader and appreciate the work they do for the community, which is why you reached out to them. Then end with your availability and how best to reach you (cell or email).

Then, you *wait*. If you feel confident and have their phone number, you could call them the next day to pitch the story after sending the email. It depends on your relationship, but it is another great way to build relationships.

5.

If a reporter doesn't get back to you by the next day, they could just need a nudge. Don't hesitate to reach out, usually they will let you know if they are interested or are passing on the story. Then, you move on to the next reporter if you do not hear from them.



6.


When doing individual pitches, if you decide to send it to a few reporters at once, send them individually. Do not send them in one email. Only Media Advisories and Press Releases are sent to a large group at once (see more below).

COMPOSING MEDIA ADVISORIES/PRESS RELEASES AND SENDING THEM

The Media Advisory and Press Release in this Toolkit provides a lot of tips and tricks on how to compose these two very different ways to reach out to media. Usually, these are written and shared with many media outlets or a media wire (such as Canadian Press).

When sending an email to more than one email address, only use the “BCC” line so you do not share who you are sending the email to and not sharing the individual emails to other outlets. It’s just a professional courtesy.

Again, the email subject lines are critical here. Media Advisories are usually sent ahead of time. The subject line can start with:

NEW MESSAGE 	
SUBJECT	ADVISORY: (and then perhaps a shortened version of the headline used for the advisory)

There are two ways to send a Press Release:

1.

When a Press Release is being shared ahead of an event or announcement, you can send an “EMBARGOED” version. If it is embargoed, be sure to include that in the subject line and in the press release. In the Press Release document, have it up at the top highlighted and you have to include when it is embargoed until so reporters know when it is safe to share publicly.

For example, you would write it like this:

*****EMBARGOED until Sept. 12, 2024, at 6 a.m. EST*****

2.

When you send a Press Release that can be immediately shared you do not need any kind of embargo warning. The subject line would then be:

NEW MESSAGE 	
SUBJECT	FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: (very short version of the headline in the Press Release)

Sending the Email for either an Advisory or Press Release:

- Ensure all emails are in the “BCC”.
- Make a PDF of the Advisory or Press Release and have it as an attachment to the email.
- Are there any other helpful attachments? Either a photo(s) or a report, for example?
- In the body of the email, have the relevant logo at the top left, and then copy/paste the Headline, Subhead and all of the contents of the Advisory or Press Release into the body of the email.
- Do not need to address it to anyone, make sure your signature is deleted.

TIPS ON WHAT TO DO IF THE MEDIA REACHES OUT TO YOU FOR AN INTERVIEW/ INFORMATION

It is helpful to keep a Media Tracker, a simple spreadsheet capturing the name, contact information, when and why a reporter has reached out. The Media Tracker can quickly help build your media list.

NAME	CONTACT	WHEN/WHY THEY'VE REACHED OUT

When a reporter reaches out, respond as quickly as possible. Reporters typically have very tight turnarounds and need as much time as possible to know you're available. It also helps build relationships if a reporter knows they can rely on you to quickly respond.

Ask for their deadline, the latest you can schedule an interview, and it is important to ask them for more details about the story. Generally, interview requests are quite short and to the point. Sometimes, it's when the story isn't totally clear in the reporters' head so they may not have a well thought out angle and are hoping to find it as they research and interview for their story.



Ask:

When do you think the story will run/ what is your deadline for the interview/info request?

What can you tell me about the story? What angle are you looking for?

Do you have a sense of what questions you will be asking (say this will help to prepare the person with the best information)?

Do you know who else you may be speaking with for this story?

Do not expect the reporter to give you all the answers to these questions, or in-depth answers. But it will really help give you a better sense of what the request truly is about. If you don't have the answers right away, let the reporter know you will get back to them before the deadline and coordinate their request.

Then, it'll be about coordinating and finding a time to do the interview. You can either connect the reporter and interviewee directly to find a time between the two or act as intermediary and then provide the reporter with their contact info. Make sure all parties know when the interview is, the contact info for each other, and anything else they need.

If you didn't do the interview yourself, follow-up with the interviewee and reporter after to make sure they got everything they needed and ask when they think the story will run.

MEDIA LIST AND INTERVIEW REQUEST TRACKING

A Media List is an incredibly useful tool to have when pitching media. It will save you so much time. The Media List should include the following information (using an Excel Spreadsheet):



FIRST NAME AND LAST NAME OF THE REPORTER/ PRODUCER/ EDITOR	THE OUTLET	THE REGION THEY ARE BASED OUT OF	THEIR TITLE (IF POSSIBLE)	EMAIL	PHONE NUMBER (WHERE POSSIBLE)	THEIR BEAT/ WHAT THEY COVER

In a second tab on the Media List, it would be helpful to have an ongoing list where any time a journalist reaches out with an interview or information request. It's an opportunity to track how often you are being reached out to, what topics are of interest to journalists, and can lead to updating the Media List.

In the Media Interview Request list, include:



FIRST & LAST NAME	OUTLET	REGION/ AREA COVERING	TITLE	EMAIL	PHONE NUMBER	THEIR BEAT	WHAT THE REQUEST WAS	WHO WAS CONNECTED TO THEM (WHO TOOK THE INTERVIEW FROM KOC)	LINK TO THE PUBLISHED STORY AFTER THE INTERVIEW

GENERAL MEDIA TIPS

When sending a Media Advisory or a Press Release—always send it early AM—by 7am (your local time zone) at least. This goes for pitches, as well. Avoid sending anything on Friday afternoons. The best days tend to be Monday-Thursday.



- The exception to this rule is if you are reaching out to a weekend crew.



Try to have a document with prepared Media Messaging, and any tips or tricks on how to engage with media to help those who have less experience.

- It may help to have a quick call with the person taking the interview request to prep them ahead of time to and talk through messaging, it can make a huge difference in comfort levels.

It is critical to be polite with journalists, and to meet their deadline. Even if you cannot make an interview with someone work by that deadline—let them know immediately, and if you have any recommendations on another organization they can reach out to (perhaps a partner) and send them to the Comms Lead there.



- Missing a deadline or radio silence breaks trust, and likely the journalist will never reach out again. It is totally okay to decline an interview, better to let them know rather than ghost them.



Finding a reporter or journalist to contact starts by going to the outlet you want to approach. Visit their “Contact” page—there will always be a masthead of editorial folks with their emails and sometimes phone numbers listed too.

- If you take the time, read through the articles, and find reporters who cover relevant stories. Click their byline—often it will go to a profile with their email. If not, find them on Twitter, there are many ways to reach out to a reporter to get their email, which is often the best way to contact them.

It is important to ensure the person on your team knows how to best engage with a reporter. Make sure your team member taking the reporter’s call feels supported and is not in danger of feeling vulnerable or re-traumatized. Always approach with care.



TEMPLATES TO DOWNLOAD:



Media Advisory Template



Press Release Template

UTILIZING SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE PLATFORMS

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, LinkedIn and over 340 other social websites make up the trend of Social Media Marketing. They are also referred to as ‘Social media platforms’ as they entitle the development, deployment and management of social media solutions and services. Utilize social media platforms to connect with a broader audience. Share engaging content, respond to comments and messages, and use these platforms as a tool for building relationships and promoting your cause.

Newsletters are also a great way to keep your supporters in the loop of what you’re up to and there are free platforms to do this (such as MailChimp). Newsletters can motivate supporters to take some form of action such as: reading your latest blog post, sign up for upcoming events, take part in an action, or sign-up new supporters.

Here are some helpful social media tips and goals:

Post Schedule:

- 1-2 Tweets per day, depending on relevant news
- 3-4 LinkedIn posts/week
- 5-7 Facebook posts/week
- 3-5 Instagram posts and stories/week



Post more videos and interactive media, calls to action or program recruitment.



Use popular and relevant hashtags to amplify posts.

#HousingForAll

Types of Posts:

Platforming our successes



Promoting programs/recruitment



Posting events



Days of recognition
(International/National Days)



Promoting newsletter content



Posting relevant news articles
(especially if featuring your
campaign, team, or partners)



Interact and retweet
partners and allies



Work with partners when
appropriate to help us promote
programs, etc (providing them
with Comms Material Packages)

Share DYK (Did you know) posts to
promote local cultural initiatives,
histories and facts to spread
awareness and education

Tag folks in images and ask them
to share



CRAFTING KEY MESSAGES

Creating a key messages document for media is crucial for ensuring consistent and effective communication. Sometimes it helps to write out what you want people to know/think/feel first. Whether you're representing a company, organization, or individual, here are some tips to help you build a strong key messages document:

Know Your Audience:

Understand who your target audience is and tailor your key messages to resonate with their interests, values, and needs.

Define Your Objectives:

Clearly outline the goals and objectives you want to achieve with your key messages. Whether it's building brand awareness, promoting a product, or addressing a crisis, your messages should align with your overall communication strategy.

Identify Core Messages:

Determine the core messages that you want to convey. These should be concise, memorable, and aligned with your brand or individual identity.

Single sentences:

A good starting formula is Brand Language + CTA (call to action) for whatever campaign push this is for. Be sure to shine light on what you want people to look at. Including some background is good but should not be the main star. Avoid jargon and overly complex language. Use simple, straightforward sentences to convey your messages. Make it easy for the media and your audience to understand and remember.

Don't overdo it:

About six to seven bullet points are good.

Prioritize Messages:

Rank your messages in order of importance. Ensure that the most critical information is presented first, as media may only use a portion of your messages in their coverage.

Stay Consistent:

Maintain consistency across all messages and communication channels. This consistency helps build a strong and recognizable brand or personal image.

Address Potential Concerns:

Anticipate potential questions or concerns from the media and address them in your key messages. Be prepared to provide clear, concise responses to any potential challenges.

Use Real Examples:

Support your key messages with real examples, stories, or statistics. Concrete examples make your messages more relatable and credible.

A key messages document can help build your Press Release and help people doing an interview ensure they get the important points across.

BUILDING PUBLIC SUPPORT

Building public support involves creating a positive perception of your group or cause among the general public. Here are some strategies to help build public support:

Define Clear Goals and Objectives:

Clearly articulate your mission, goals, and objectives. Ensure that your purpose is well-defined and communicate it in a way that is accessible and resonates with the values and interests of your audience.



Engage in Transparent Communication:

Foster trust by being open, honest, and transparent in your communication. Address concerns and provide regular updates to keep the public informed about your activities.



Identify and Understand Your Audience:

Know your audience and tailor your messaging to their preferences, needs, and values. Understanding your audience allows you to create more relevant and compelling messages.



Online Presence:

Using social media and newsletters consistently shows how active you are and can help you reach out to new people.



Tell Compelling Stories:

Humanize your organization or cause by sharing compelling stories. Personal narratives create emotional connections and make it easier for people to relate to your mission.



Involve the Community:

Engage with the community directly. Attend local events, participate in community projects, and seek feedback. Involving the community helps create a sense of ownership and fosters a positive relationship.



Build Partnerships:

Collaborate with other organizations, influencers, or community leaders who share similar values. Building partnerships can expand your reach and credibility.



Offer Value:

Provide value to your audience through educational content, resources, or tips. Demonstrating the positive impact of your group or cause can win public support.



Create a Strong Online Presence:

Develop a professional and user-friendly website that serves as a central hub for information. Maintain active and updated social media profiles to stay connected with your audience. A Facebook page is also a great and free alternative to a website.



Celebrate Successes:

Highlight your achievements and milestones. Celebrate successes, no matter how small, to showcase the positive impact of your efforts.



Encourage Advocacy:

Empower your supporters to become advocates for your cause. Provide tools and resources that make it easy for them to share your message with their networks.



Address Concerns and Criticisms:

Acknowledge and address concerns or criticisms promptly. Show that you are responsive and committed to continuous improvement.



Public Events and Campaigns:

Organize public events, campaigns, or awareness drives to increase visibility. These activities can generate media coverage and engage the public directly.



Measure and Evaluate:

Regularly assess the effectiveness of your outreach efforts. Use surveys, analytics, and feedback to understand how well your strategies are resonating with the public and make adjustments accordingly.



Building public support is an ongoing process that requires dedication, consistency, and a genuine commitment to your cause.

8. Conclusion and Next Steps

This section includes:

- ➔ Reflecting on your Accomplishments
- ➔ Celebrating Successes
- ➔ Continuing the Fight for Housing Rights
- ➔ Resources for Further Learning

REFLECTING ON YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

At the WNHHN and NIWHN, we talk about doing things in a good way. The journey of advocating for the right to housing has been both challenging and rewarding. Decades of advocacy resulting in the 2019 legislation that enshrined the right to housing in Canadian law is now being realized and your efforts are now part of that critical history.

Your accomplishments will take the shape of increased awareness about the importance of the right to housing and filing a submission through targeted outreach, media presence, social media campaigns, and perhaps community events, will allow you to reach a wide audience, fostering understanding and empathy for those facing housing insecurity.

That increased awareness and partnership and alliance building leads to community empowerment. By collaborating with our neighbours, friends, colleagues, and community members at large, you empower people to advocate for their housing rights. You helped equip individuals and groups with the knowledge and tools to assert their right to adequate housing by engaging in a new and historic human rights process.

CELEBRATING SUCCESSES

Highlight your achievements and milestones. How many submissions have you collected? How many folks came to your event? Celebrate successes, no matter how small, to showcase the positive impact of your efforts.

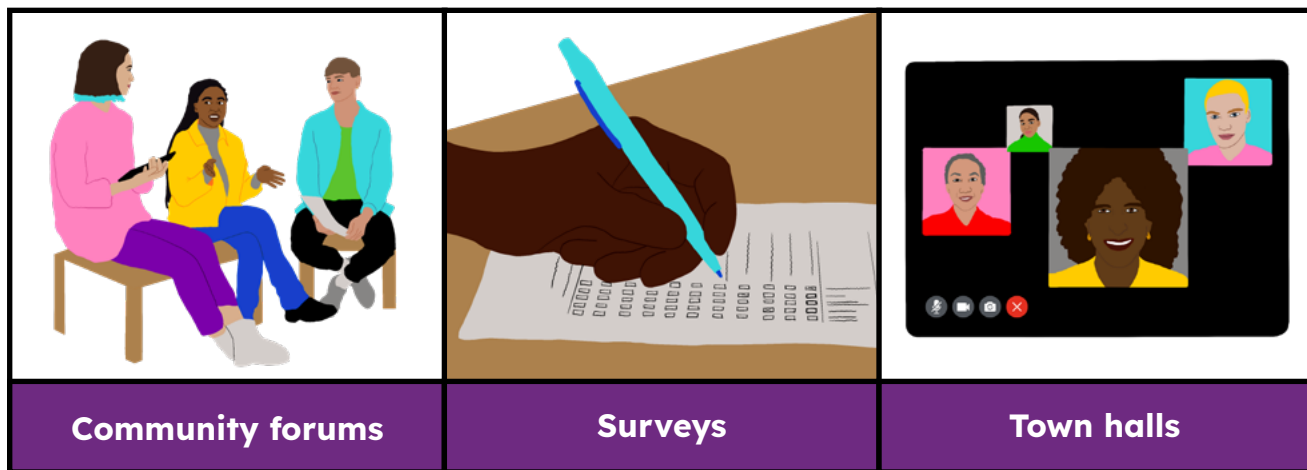
Beyond the systemic changes our collective efforts are aiming for, this movement will have a direct impact on individuals and families. Through sharing stories, experiences and insights, we are elevating the voices of women and gender-diverse people with the goal of deeply understanding the root causes and conditions of the housing crisis. This work is building real and immediate solutions to those suffering most from today's current policy and housing climate.



CONTINUING TO FIGHT FOR HOUSING RIGHTS

The fight for the right to housing is ongoing. There is more work to be done, more partnerships to forge, and more policies to shape. Our achievements serve as a foundation for continued advocacy, ensuring that the right to housing remains a fundamental human right for all. This work requires sustained dedication, strategic planning, and ongoing collaboration.

Our work will be defined by how well we engage with communities and people directly impacted by the current housing landscape. Regularly engaging with rights holders and providing opportunities through community forums, surveys, or town halls (virtual or in-person) is a way to understand the evolving needs of women and gender-diverse people.



It is our task to stay involved in policy advocacy, legal initiatives, awareness campaigns, education and training, research and data collection, and publicize success stories and the benefits of seizing any and all platforms to change the direction our housing crisis is headed in, so it meets the needs of people who need it most.



Engaging in lobbying efforts and grassroots organizing to influence decision-makers and advocate for housing rights at local, regional, and national levels is key. Supporting grassroots organizing initiatives to mobilize community members will create a collective voice for change.



Remember that the fight for housing rights is an ongoing process. Participating in the right to housing mechanisms such as a National Review Panel or submitting to the Federal Housing Advocate is an important step. By maintaining momentum, staying informed, and adapting to new challenges, you can contribute to long-lasting positive changes in housing policies and practices.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

1.

Briefing Document - An overview of community oral hearing testimonies from right to housing organizations who participated in the first review panel.

How to use this tool: You can reference this document for context when preparing for your own written and oral testimony. This document contains the themes and arguments presented by organizations like: The Shift; Canadian Centre for Housing Rights; National Right to Housing Network / WNHHN, and more.

2.

Human Rights Language - A guide to support organizations and rights claimants in incorporating human rights language in their written submissions to the review panel.

How to use this tool: You can refer to this guide as you are drafting written submissions to better infuse human rights language and framing. If you have not engaged with rights-based frameworks before, this can help you use human rights-based language to strengthen your arguments and recommendations. It also explains key terms, concepts, and principles of international human rights law.

3.

If you are a tenant in Ontario, and need support in housing stabilization or legal services, you can access resources here: housingrightscanada.com/our-work/our-tenant-services

4.

For a guide to understanding laws around accessibility of housing for tenants, you can access this resource from CCHR: housingrightscanada.com/resources/ontario-housing-law-101-accessible-housing

5.

Advocating for yourself as a renter is complex, and this resource can help renters in Ontario know what to do, who to call, and what your rights are: housingrightscanada.com/resources/human-rights-rental-housing-ontario-self-advocacy-toolkit

6.

This resource shares tips on creating a submission to the Federal Housing Advocate to document rights violations you or your community are facing: housingrightscanada.com/resources/making-a-submission-to-the-federal-housing-advocate-a-guide-for-tenant-leaders

