BC HOUSING

DESIGN GUIDELINES

FOR WOMEN’S SAFE HOMES, TRANSITION HOUSES,
SECOND STAGE HOUSING AND LONG-TERM RENTAL HOUSING

2019
Poem: Finally

I quietly close the door
Quickly securing the lock
Leaning against the door
I close my eyes
Finally I sigh heavily
Realizing I made it
I finally did it
I made it safely
Taking a deep breathe
I can do this
For I’m stronger now
I promised myself that
Things will be different
No more fear-filled days
Nor terror sleepless nights
Awakening to unfounded accusations
Marked with swollen bruises
Shame lowering my head
A smile slowly forms
I raise my head
I had finally left
I open my eyes
Glancing around in amazement
At my new home
Acceptance enters my eyes
My heart starts racing
Because my reality returns
I acknowledge sadly that
I still feel fear
Yet I smile for
Someday fear will leave

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Introduction

BC Housing supports more than 100 transition houses, safe homes and second stage housing and programs for women – with or without children – who are at risk of violence, or who have experienced violence.

BC Housing has prepared this guide to assist development teams with the planning, and design processes for upgrading existing buildings or constructing new buildings that are to be used for the women safe homes, transition houses, second stage housing and long-term rental housing. In BC, these buildings vary significantly by size, building type, layout, and types of spaces they include – many created through the conversion of existing buildings or homes.

Although these guidelines represent best practices, each new or upgraded building may involve some design compromises, reflecting the availability of an appropriate building, site size or other local circumstances.

The guidelines focus on design and space requirements for women safe homes, transition houses, second stage housing and long-term rental housing. Societies and development teams should also use BC Housing’s most current version of Design Guidelines & Construction Standards, which provides more detailed building specifications, requirements for interior, exterior materials and finishes, performance guidelines for building systems, BC Housing energy and sustainable goals, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies, drawings and other construction documents. The document is available on the BC Housing website.

In considering the design of new or upgraded buildings, integration with sound, comprehensive operating policies and procedures, and appropriate staff training is essential. The operators input at each stage is important to ensure the building is appropriate for the requirements of the program.

Safe homes, transition houses, second stage housing and long-term rental housing are part of a housing continuum that helps move from crisis to permanent accommodation and provide supports as necessary. In considering the development of a new building, or upgrades to an existing one, reference should be made to the most current version of BC Housing’s Women’s Transition Housing and Supports Program (WTHSP) Framework, which also provides definitions for terms used in the planning and operations of these facilities.
Glossary of Terms

**Affordable housing:** Housing is considered affordable when 30 per cent or less of a household’s gross income goes towards paying for housing costs.

**Anti-ligature design:** Design that reduces the risk of people using the construction or refurbishments to self harm, or in extreme cases, to complete suicide.

**Commissioning:** An integrated set of activities intended to ensure that a project meets both the operator’s project requirements and the operational needs.

**Considerations vs. Requirements:** Within this document, guidelines are either a consideration or a requirement. Considerations must be reviewed for each project but are dependant on the operator’s specific program needs. Requirements are mandatory, and must be adhered to.

**CPTED:** Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a multi-disciplinary approach to deterring criminal behaviour and nuisance activity through environmental design.

**Development team:** The consultants, contractors, funding agencies and other parties involved in the design and construction of the project.

**Glazing:** The glass component of a building’s facade or internal surfaces.

**Kitchenette:** A common use amenity kitchen that is not intended for commercial kitchen purposes. It should include an upper and base cabinet, microwave outlet and shelf, double bowl stainless steel sink, refrigerator, residential electric range and hood, and a dishwasher (if required by the operator).

**LGBTQ2S:** An evolving acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, two-spirit, queer, questioning and additional identities.

**Long-term rental housing:** Safe, affordable long-term independent rental housing that may include access to support services, typically in apartments or townhouses.

**Low barrier or minimal-barrier:** Having few requirements for entry into the program or housing.

**Operator:** An organization, society or other BC Housing partner that operates non-profit housing.
Safe homes: Safe, short-term shelter and support services, typically for 10 days. Safe Homes operate in a variety of ways depending on the community, such as an apartment or townhouse unit, a hotel or motel room, or a secure room in a private home.

Second Stage housing: Safe, affordable short-term housing with support services. Independent housing typically in apartments or townhouses and length of stay is typically no longer than 18 months.

Self-contained Housing: A dwelling unit that includes a kitchen, bathroom, living area, sleeping area, and dining area within the unit.

Subsidized housing: A type of housing for which the provincial government provides financial support or rent assistance.

Transition houses: Safe, 24/7 staffed shelter and support services, typically for 30 days. Most transition houses are residential homes in confidential locations where women and families live communally. Note that transition houses are different than transitional housing, which is used in a variety of programs, and is usually short term and for all genders to stay between 30 days to three years.

Trauma-informed design: Design that recognizes that the physical environment can have physiological and emotional impact. Trauma-informed design creates a supportive environment that resists the re-traumatization of people.

Universal design: Space that is designed to be understood, accessible and used regardless of a persons age, size, ability or disability without the need for adaption, modification, assistive devices or special solutions.
SECTION A:
Overview & Needs Assessment

1. About the Women’s Transition Housing & Supports Program
2. Current & Future Needs
1. About the Women’s Transition Housing & Supports Program

The purpose of the WTHSP in British Columbia is to assist women – with and without children – who are at risk of violence or who have experienced violence, with access to safe, secure and confidential services. This includes information and support for decision-making, short term shelter or housing, referrals to other services and links to safe, affordable housing.

There are four typical models along the housing continuum for the target client group: Safe Homes, Transition Houses, Second Stage Housing, and Long-Term Rental Housing.

The understanding of who is affected by violence is expanding, and these design guidelines are meant to reflect this. Women come from all walks of life, age, race, sexual orientation, religion, education levels and socioeconomic status. Women and children have a variety of needs for support, including for physical disabilities, health needs, mental health issues, or substance use issues.

There are unique needs and resources within each community, and differences in operators philosophies and organizational capacity. These differences have influenced and changed how support is provided through these housing options. Some operators serve all women at risk of any type of violence. Other operators focus on domestic, family, or intimate partner violence. Functional program spaces may also vary from communal living to living independently.

1.1 Safe Homes

A safe home is safe, short-term housing when a transition house is unavailable, and is often in remote communities (although not always). The length of stay in a safe home is typically 10 days but may be extended to meet individual circumstances. Safe home programs provide emotional support, safety planning, and referrals.

Safe home facilities are provided in a variety of ways and may include a single suite in an apartment building, the use of private residences, or hotel and motel rooms. Some safe home providers use a combination of facility types in order to serve a diverse range of client needs. Some safe homes are communal and others allow women to live independently. Sleeping accommodations should be designed within the Minimum Floor Area as outlined in Section 8, Sleeping Accommodations.
1.2 Transition Houses

Transition houses provide safe, temporary housing with 24/7 staffing. The length of stay is typically 30 days but may be extended to meet individual circumstances. Most transition houses are residential homes in confidential locations where women and families live communally. Support workers in these homes provide emotional support, crisis intervention, and safety planning.

Transition house facilities vary in composition and facility type, but are generally composed of a home-like dwelling with a number of bedrooms, with common areas for food preparation, eating, living, and support services. Bedrooms may have more than one bed in order to accommodate families or single women. However, it is considered best practice to have private rooms and washrooms available when possible. Sleeping accommodations should be designed within the Minimum Floor Area as outlined in Section 8, Sleeping Accommodations.

1.3 Second Stage Housing

Second stage housing is safe, independent, and short-term housing. The length of stay is typically 6 to 18 months but may be extended to meet individual circumstances. Staff are available to provide emotional support, safety planning, and referrals.

Housing is usually a private and secure, self-contained, low-rise apartment or townhouse unit. Provided on-site is support and common spaces such as amenity/multi-purpose rooms and staff offices. Dwelling units should be designed within the Net Unit Areas as outlined in BC Housing’s Design Guidelines & Construction Standards. Depending on the operator’s need, enhanced safety and security may need to be considered throughout the building.

1.4 Long-Term Rental Housing

Long-term rental housing is safe, affordable and independent long-term housing. There is no limit on the amount of time a woman can live in this housing.

This type of independent, self-contained, permanent housing is typically in low-cost apartments or townhouses. Dwelling units should be designed within the Net Unit Areas as outlined in BC Housing’s Design Guidelines & Construction Standards. Depending on the operator’s need, enhanced safety and security may need to be considered throughout the building.
1.5 Clientele who will be Accommodated

Women who access safe homes, transition houses, second stage housing, and long-term rental housing are diverse and often have complex needs. Client populations include:

- Single women;
- Women with children;
- Children of every age and gender, from babies and toddlers to teenagers;
- Women come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, some with pets, and have a variety of storage needs;
- Senior’s experiencing age-related health conditions, such as diabetes, Alzheimer’s, and dementia, as well as women who are older with mobility impairments;
- Indigenous populations;
- Recent immigrants and refugees;
- LGBTQ2S individuals;
- Women who may be using substances; and,
- People with varying levels of physical abilities, such as those with physical disabilities, mobility issues, or developmental disabilities.
1.5.1 Increasing Access & Inclusion

As a part of the needs analysis, programs should have an understanding of the various cultures, languages and diverse communities that are in need of special consideration. This includes women who are refugees or newly arrived to Canada. If there is a large population of specific cultures or communities that access services, inclusionary design considerations should be explored. Women often face intersecting identities (i.e. sex, gender, education, race / ethnicity, sexuality, ability, religion) that may increase the level of vulnerability that they face.

Engage with identified cultural communities about the design consideration. Take the time to learn from program users’ experiences, checking with past, current or potential program users.

Indigenous Communities

Indigenous populations continue to be over-represented as women and children who have experienced violence. Designing spaces to have inclusionary considerations, having space to engage with culture, transitional and holistic healing through the following:

- **Space for Elders.** Shared programming or office space for Elders to meet with individual or groups of women;
- **Sacred spaces.** Space for holistic healing, balcony or a ventilated room that can be used for smudging or pipe ceremonies; or
- **Communal living rooms.** A living room like setting where users can socialize and build friendships.

- **Indigenous artists.** When possible, consider incorporating the work of local Indigenous artists or carvers into the construction and design of the space.

For additional information on the design and development of Indigenous housing, refer to BC Housing’s [Interim Guide to Indigenous Housing Development and Design](https://www.bchousing.org).

Cultural Communities

Some neighbourhoods have higher populations of specific cultural communities that will be accessing services and some operators focus on a specific underserved cultural community. In these circumstances, the design of space should have inclusionary considerations such as language, kitchen design (e.g. Halal or kosher friendly kitchens), and design considerations for religious practices.
**LGBTQ2S Access**

Intimate partner violence affects many LGBTQ2S people, but they do not always feel welcome or included in traditional programs or buildings. Program users or their children/teenagers may require gender neutral or inclusive spaces. Have private bedrooms and washrooms available for those who are not comfortable sharing their personal space.

**Pets and Service Animals**

Women leaving an abusive relationship often fear for the safety of their pets and service animals. Abusers may use animals to manipulate women to stay in a violent relationship or return to one. Ideally, women and children will not have to be separated from their animal. Designing housing to accommodate pets and service animals can help women to feel more at-home. In order to design an animal-friendly building, consider materials (such as eliminating carpet as a flooring option) and providing pet-friendly units or rooms. Pets may require a protected outdoor space.
2. Current & Future Needs

2.1 Needs Analysis

To support the proposition of a new or renovated building, an analysis should be undertaken to determine the client group(s) to be served, and ensure their needs are fully understood. Where possible, the analysis should identify current and future needs, the required scale of the project, and the best location to provide these services.

Projecting the need is an inexact process. Conducting an analysis does not need to be a large and complex activity, but should draw on core housing need within the community and age group, population trends, existing program use information, and discussions with local agencies, including the health authority, municipality, the police, RCMP, victim services, violence against women programs, and the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). The role outreach workers play within programs and community, as well as that of any existing or proposed similar programs or buildings in the community (if applicable), should be taken into account. BC Housing is also a useful source of information for a needs analysis. Refer to **BC Housing Need and Demand Study**.

2.2 Functional Program

Following the completion of a needs analysis, an architect should be contracted to develop a preliminary functional program that responds to the identified needs, the operator’s project requirements, the client group to be served, type of housing and how the building will be operated. Where possible, buildings should be designed with flexibility to meet needs of changing population groups within the building.

The functional program will determine site needs, building layout, common spaces, the dwelling unit design, support services requirements, the design order of magnitude capital and operating budgets, and funding requirements. BC Housing cost target frameworks should be carefully calculated to target the efficiency of the building design. Operating policies and budgets for the program must be taken into account. In understanding a functional program, the design team should consider the efficiency of common and circulation areas to the sleeping areas based on operational needs.
2.3 Consultation with Stakeholders

A completed needs analysis, functional program, consultation with local agencies and approval from BC Housing should be done prior to finalizing any design. In addition, the design team shall review the BC Housing Design Guidelines.

The operator will be involved at each stage of design to ensure the building fits program and design requirements. The design team should consult with operational staff, BC Housing and receive feedback on functional space, clients to be served, and operational capacity. This will ensure the operator’s capacity and staffing levels to efficiently run the facility.

If multiple funders are contributing to the development, there should be consultations with each funder about their requirements. Other funders should be given an understanding of the costs before incorporating recommended design preferences, requirements and updates.

2.4 Considerations for Location

When considering a location for a new building or evaluating an existing building, assess the neighbourhood’s ability to support residents’ regaining independence. This includes access to services, employment, and to maintaining or establishing social connections. Living in a community can be a positive experience for women and children.

Consider if the following is easily accessible:

- Public transportation;
- Health care centres;
- Child care providers and schools;
- Community resources;
- Groceries / drug stores;
- Educational and recreational facilities; and
- Pedestrian and / or bicycle friendly travel.

Consider if the neighbourhood feels safe, particularly when women are walking with children.

2.4.1 Considerations for Rural Communities

Women in need of services in rural areas often face issues such as physical isolation, limited access to information and resources, lack of core services such as public transportation, cellular services, delayed response time from support providers or police, and lack of specialized services. On top of that, in smaller communities, everyone may know everyone
else, and it is hard to stay anonymous. It is helpful for a woman to have a choice of whether to stay in their own community, leave their community or leave for a time and return when ready. Many rural communities consider scattered-site safe homes. In this model, homes are spread out throughout a community rather than in one common building. They can be placed into existing neighbourhoods, be more inconspicuous, and can provide women with increased options of location, depending on need for access to schools, work opportunities, transportation, or services. With this model, women can be located within an area that provides the most safety and least amount of upheaval.

2.4.2 Confidential Versus Non-Confidential Location

Programs need to consider if they require a confidential location or if the program location will be known to the community.

If a site location is to be kept confidential, the location will require additional considerations. These considerations could include the building’s ability to blend into the neighbourhood and minimizing the exposure of residents and guests as they come and go.

Some programs are finding that protecting individual confidentiality does not always require a confidential location. If a program is located at a non-confidential site, programs will focus on security and individual client confidentiality.

2.5 Conversion, Renovation or New Construction

The need for a new facility, or additional capacity for an existing facility, can often arise quickly, requiring a timely response. Finding a site or building suitable to the scale of need, that is appropriately located, and that will secure community and municipal support for rezoning and other approvals, is often a major challenge.

Consider the best building option that works for the project’s functional program, location, approvals, available funding, timing until completion is needed. Possible options could be:

- Conversion of an existing building;
- Renovation / Capital improvement of an existing facility; or,
- New construction projects.

Considerations that will affect the building option could be:

- **Accessibility:** Older residential homes can be challenging to make accessible for people with mobility issues.
- **Confidentiality:** New construction can stand out and be conspicuous in smaller communities. This can compromise site confidentiality.
• **Potential changes to the building and compliance with municipal requirements:** The consultant will evaluate an older building, the degree of difficulty and cost for repurposing. An older building may require significant system upgrades – e.g. fire safety and/or electrical and mechanical systems, or structural seismic upgrades to the current code requirements. The zoning should be reviewed to see that use complies with current zoning or if change is required. The amount of required parking, relative to availability, is often an issue with municipalities.

• **Short versus long-term costs:** The owner will look at the current costs to build versus the cost to renovate and long-term maintenance of an existing building.

• **Available location:** The decision may be affected by the ability to find land or an existing building at an appropriate location, and what is available within that location.

• **Hazardous materials:** Older buildings often contain hazardous materials – for example lead paint or asbestos. A hazardous material survey will be undertaken by a specialist consultant hired by the owner to assess the risks and the mitigating measures necessary to manage these risks.

• **Efficiency & sustainability:** A new building allows for more control over energy consumption as it can be designed and built with energy efficiency in mind. Energy assessment (energy audit) will be performed for all renovation and conversion projects by minimum ASHRAE level 2 assessment or equivalent for appropriate project scope. The detailed energy assessment report should be completed by a qualified professional and submitted during design stage. Refer to [Design Guidelines & Construction Standards](#) (Section 2).

• **Flexibility of layout:** A new build will give greater flexibility in creating the preferred layout. If the preferred layout is not found in an existing building, major renovations may be required.

• **Other site investigation reports:** Other due diligence reports must be undertaken for assessing the site conditions as appropriate. This includes geotechnical report, environmental site assessment, site survey and topographical report for steep slopes and other potential physical constraints, etc.

### 2.6 Co-location of Safe Homes, Transition Houses, Second Stage Housing & Long Term Rental Housing

Incorporating safe homes or transition houses into second stage housing forms has the potential to make the best use of a site by providing economies of construction, staffing and offering opportunities for sharing certain facilities and services. This approach can enable
residents to build on existing relationships with support staff as they move from the transition house into second stage housing.

Adding one or two safe home units into a second stage or long-term rental housing building can be useful in increasing the number of emergency units and provide women with options in a variety of neighbourhoods. This can be especially helpful in keeping women connected to their neighbourhood and children to their schools and services.
SECTION B:

Guiding Principles & Design Considerations

Guiding Principles & Design Consideration
3. Guiding Principles & Design Consideration

The design principles are fundamental and foundational considerations to guide decision making for projects. The principles are gathered from the knowledge and experience of operators who serve women and children fleeing abuse.

3.1 Self Determination

The design of the building should promote women’s empowerment and self-determination. When women are in abusive situations, it can destroy self esteem, while independence and dignity is eroded. However, women are the best experts on their own lives and should be encouraged to reclaim their ability to choose within the program environment. Abusive partners often deny a woman’s right to set boundaries, and by creating a space that avoids unnecessary restrictions while at the same time diminishing conflict with other residents, a woman’s comfort and self determination can improve space design and can increase women’s control over their own decision making.

- **Choice to enter a space**: Consider visual access and sight lines that allow a woman to see who is in a space before entering. Maximize glazing in common area doors.

- **Option for privacy**: When an area is communal, create spaces that have options for privacy. This can be done through a variety of communal spaces or a single communal space that has options for seating arrangements can provide people with a sense of privacy. Provide private and lockable personal space for each woman.

3.2 Homelike Environment

Even when a building is intended for short-term accommodation, consideration should be given to creating a warm, welcoming and homelike environment. Women and children accessing these services are arriving from traumatic circumstances, many of them have left...
their home quickly. A homelike environment can be comforting and peaceful. An institutional design has the risk of re-traumatizing individuals who have had negative experiences within institutions including prison, mental health institutions, hospitals, and residential schools. This concept is important for clients, but also valuable for staff members who work in these spaces on a longer-term basis. Design considerations will vary according to the clients served in the program and operator's requirements, but may include:

- **Natural daylight:** Window locations should be carefully planned to maximize daylighting, balancing between outside exposure and manage heat loss / gain at the same time. Consider adjusting the window size based on children safety, and glazing assembly based on orientation and reducing overheating. In bedrooms, operable windows should be provided for effective ventilation and natural supply of air. For second stage housing where apartment type building form is considered, whenever possible, incorporate daylighting from exterior windows in stairwells, and hallways.

- **Separation of use:** Separate high stimulus, noisy areas such as TV room, common dining from quiet areas such as bedrooms.

- **Child-friendly spaces:** In order to help children return to a normal routine have child-friendly places. These are spaces where they can operate easily as a family and have space to play and learn.

- **Calming environment.** Consider furniture and other services with a curvilinear rather than a hard edge. Rocking chairs can be therapeutic for self soothing or for a parent comforting a child. An uncluttered environment where all items have a place reduces the feeling of chaos. This requires well thought out storage, shelves and cupboards.

- **Interior finishes:** Colour choices for floors, walls, and furniture that are homelike and appropriate for people with visual impairments. Provide colour contrast between floor and wall finishes with minimal glare and not be heavily textured.

- **Exposure to nature and beauty.** Exposure to nature, nature-like features and beauty can promote healing and have a restorative effect on people. Consider outdoor residential gardens to encourage social interaction.
• **Sleeping accommodations.** In order to create home like sleeping accommodations, the following should be considered:

• **Ability to control & adjust their environment.** Provide women with the ability to adjust their own environment. This could mean control over their own thermostat, flexible furnishings, etc.

• **Expandable spaces for families.** Create flexible spaces that accommodate larger or smaller families as needed. Adaptable space is necessary design to prevent displacement and support all family types.

• **Opportunities for Personalization.** Instead of fully decorating sleeping accommodations, create opportunities for women and children to decorate and personalize their own space. Place cork or magnet boards for hanging art and chalk board doors or walls to display art work, write or draw and allow for personal customization.

• **Access to medication and secure storage.** Discuss with the operator the preferred location for women to store medication. In most cases, women will have control of their own medication in locked storage in her bedroom.

### 3.3 Flexibility in Design

The diversity of women and families should be respected and seen as valuable. Abuse affects all types of people from diverse family sizes, ethnic backgrounds, languages, sexual orientation, gender identity, cultures, and level of ability. Designing with flexibility in mind is not an easy task, but where possible the following can be considered:

• Individual bedrooms / units that are expandable and interconnected to make room for larger families.

• Plumbing, and electrical components should be designed to permit amalgamation into larger bedroom / unit in future.

• There may be times when a facility is full and the operator will choose to increase the number of beds beyond the preferred capacity. This should be acknowledged during the design phase, and the best possible provisions made to accommodate overflow (storage space for cots, communal spaces that convert into private room, etc.). This should be considered a short-term solution, and every effort should be made to create privacy for women regardless of the situation.
3.4 Designed for Parenting

Programs that welcome women and children need to ensure the space is welcoming and appropriate for children of all ages and empowers the parent. Child-friendly spaces help children to return to a routine by creating spaces where they can operate easily as a family and by having space to play and learn. Design features that have the child in mind and enable a mother to parent their child with ease have the following:

- **Diversity.** Designing with children’s diversity in mind. Children will be different ages, genders, sexual orientation, and level of ability.

- **Sight lines.** Create sight lines to enable parents to supervise their children without being in the same space. Use design strategies such as open plans and glazing on walls or doors so that children are within sight while their mom could be preparing food, visiting, sitting, or meeting with a staff member. Have sight lines between the kitchen, communal space, and exterior. Create visibility using glass doors between the kitchen, communal space, and the exterior.

- **Childproofing safety features.** Give peace of mind to mothers by providing power socket covers, secured lower cabinets, windows that open from the top or window restrictors, cordless window blinds, gates for the kitchen, cutlery out of reach, rounded or padded corners on furniture, cooktop controls, inaccessible cleaning supplies, and anti-scald devices to regulate water temperature in the washroom.

- **Accommodating play areas.** A play/toy area, and space that accommodates strollers for small children;

- **Pet friendly facility.** For children, the loss of their pets can be as traumatic as the loss of their home. Bringing their family pet with them can be therapeutic.

- **Washrooms designed for parents and children.** Washrooms should be designed considering the following in order to create child-friendly spaces that support parents:

  - **Washroom design.** Hygienic areas are needed that are appropriate for all ages of children. Provide single washrooms for privacy. Consider washing stations that are
outside of washrooms that can be complimentary when there are a number of children around

- **Change stations and diaper disposal.** Baby diaper changing stations should be in or near washrooms. A diaper disposal unit should be at each changing table / station (eg. Diaper Genie).

- **Child height fixtures.** In washrooms that will be used by small children, consider child height fixtures or space for a step stool so that children can access all areas.

- **Options for bath time.** Consider what a mother will need to bathe her children. Depending on the age of the child, bathtubs for bathing toddlers and large sinks for bathing babies.

### 3.5 Public Access & Programming

Transition Housing Programs need to be thoughtful about how much public access is given to a location. On one hand, women who frequent a transition house to access programming may find fears are reduced and stigma is diminished about accessing other services. However, inviting the general public into the building can reduce anonymity and the ability of the operator to create a safe environment.

### 3.6 Reducing Barriers

Women who have experienced violence and who have mental health and / or substance use issues often face restricted access to transition houses, safe homes and second stage housing. This can place women at greater risk of homelessness and violence. Some programs are specifically serving women who are using substances and experiencing health conditions, other programs are working with all women and children, while other programs are working towards being more inclusive, including for those with behaviours that may be difficult for other program users and staff.

For programs that have reduced barriers, it can be helpful to create separate space for adult women and space for families. This means having spaces that are specific to women with children, such as living areas, common areas and amenity space, in addition to having adult only spaces for women.

Women may be using substances and therefore harm reduction practices and procedures are important, including provision of information, safe supplies and safe options for syringe disposal.

Reduced barrier programs will have the design features identified in this guide, and those of particular importance include:
• Secure and accessible storage space for harm reduction supplies and medical supplies. Women should have direct access to their storage to encourage autonomy, respect and dignity;
• Opportunities for accommodating individuals with higher support needs;
• Dependant on the program mandate, structured to support safe drug use;
• Secure outdoor storage for buggies, and bikes;
• Adequate indoor storage space for women’s belongings, such as designated bins or lockers for valuables;
• A meeting room for visiting professionals to serve clients; and,
• Opportunities for accommodating individuals with pets.

3.7 Finishing & Furnishings

Typically, safe homes and transition houses are furnished. Approximately half of the second stage units across the province are furnished, and the other half are unfurnished. Most long-term rental housing units are unfurnished.

Operators have different levels of resources and respond to the furniture needs of women in different ways. If space is limited and units are furnished, some programs have a policy that woman cannot bring any furniture. Other programs provide storage space for women’s household possessions (this is especially important in furnished second stage housing). Some providers have storage space dedicated to accepting donations from the community to provide to women when they move out.

Furnishings for common areas should be durable, while homelike, and able to accommodate all levels of accessibility. Furniture should allow for flexible space use, accommodating a variety of group seating sizes.

3.7.1 Trauma Informed Design

Trauma-informed design acknowledges that the physical environment affects a person’s feelings of worth, dignity, and empowerment. Certain design elements can trigger people’s trauma, making them feel unsafe. For program users who experience anxiety, panic attacks, depression, hyper-vigilance, concentration disturbances, trouble sleeping, fear or flashbacks, suicidal thoughts or feelings, sensitivity to loud noise, lights or smells and chronic headaches, the design of an environment can provide and maintain a supportive and healing environment.
• **Non-institutional.** An institutional environment can remind women of being in prison, hospital, residential schools or a mental institution. The goal is to create spaces that are a homelike environment that is not reminiscent of an institutional setting. For example, people who have gone through residential schools may find numbers on bedroom doors or sleeping on bunk beds are triggers for them. Some buildings have chosen to have single beds and pictures of animals or colours instead of room numbers. Avoid exposed concrete and choose materials that are reminiscent of home (such as wood-like design).

• **Light and lighting.** Avoid harsh fluorescent lights. A space should be well lit, but not institutional. Consider layers of lighting from lamps, dimming light switches, indirect lighting and being able to control different areas with a different light switch in order to create intimate spaces. Have adjustable blinds or curtains so that flashing lights can be shut out. An abundance of natural light is calming for most people. At night, have nightlights or dimmed lights left on in hallways and in washrooms.

• **Self determination of ones own space.** Having the ability to open a window, eat food when hungry, or change the temperature in a private space gives people a sense of control over their own environment.
3.8 Minimize Conflict, Guidelines & Noise through Design

Space design can be used to minimize the conflict between residents, reduce the number of necessary guidelines imposed by staff and decrease the noise that carries throughout different living areas. This can be done by:

- **Number of washrooms.** Ideally, each family has their own washroom, but when they are common, having a generous number of washrooms can reduce stress.

- **Separate noisy areas.** Create a separation between high activity / noisy areas and quiet spaces such as bedrooms.

- **Shared kitchen work areas and food storage.** When a kitchen is shared by residents, have ample kitchen space with multiple work areas and access to snacks. Provide individual storage and possibly consider additional fridges in this area. This can reduce conflict over missing food and protects residents with food allergies or dietary restrictions.

- **Lockable client storage.** Provide small independent lockers where clients can store valuables and belongings.

- **Outdoor smoking.** Provide an outdoor, protected designated space for smoking away from operable windows, doors (as required by law) and outdoor spaces used by other residents.

- **Easy laundry.** Especially when residents have young children or larger families, the laundry space needs to be easy to access, child-friendly (for when a mom has their children with them) and close by. Provide a seating space in this area.
SECTION C:

Building Form & Design Requirements

4 Building Form

5 Design Requirements
4. Building Form

Building form will vary depending on the need analysis within the community, functional program, location and whether the facility will be new construction or a conversion / renovation of the existing facility. Consideration of communal living versus self-contained units will also significantly impact the building form. While communal living and integration will foster healing of women and children who have experienced trauma, having individual self-contained units allows them to interact with others when they choose, and build skills to live independently.

Projects under BC Housing’s Women’s Transition Housing and Supports Program will typically take the following building forms.

4.1 Safe Home Forms

Safe Homes require specific considerations in terms of location and type of building or unit. They may be a single room or a self-contained unit, dependent on the availability and considerations for safety. Safe homes often use a scattered-site model in order to provide short-term emergency shelter for women and children.

Dedicated / permanent locations are preferable over temporary locations. Safe home facilities are provided in a variety of ways and may include:

- Rooms in local hotels or motels;
- Rooms in residential homes, operated by families;
- Rented or owned self-contained apartments or townhouses;
- Dedicated units in a second stage or long-term rental housing building; or
- Immediate transportation out of the community to a safe location.

Considerations for safe homes include:

- **Access to private accommodation**: At a minimum, safe homes have units with a washroom, sitting area and sleeping space. Ideally, they are a self-contained unit with a kitchen, washroom, bedroom(s), living room and secure parking.
- **Safety**: Ensure that doors are lockable, safety measures are in place to control and limited access by visitors to the building, visitors are monitored, and the risk posed to a family in a residential home is assessed.
- **Confidentiality**: Hotels, suites, and communal spaces including private residents need to commit to keeping the resident’s name and room number confidential.
• **Control:** Women need to have control over their own space, including who is allowed to enter.

• **Access to transportation and community supports:** When possible, safe homes should be within a reasonable distance to transportation and other community supports.

• **Available on short notice:** Safe homes are used when there are no other options for housing for women and children in case of emergency. They need to be available quickly and on short notice including outside of regular working hours.

• **Variety of locations:** Safe homes need to provide a variety of options in order to fit the diverse needs of the women and children who access them in different regions and locations.

### 4.2 Transition House Form

Traditionally, transition houses have been the conversion or renovation of a detached home with a number of bedrooms, common areas for food preparation, eating, living, and service provision that offer communal living. It is preferred that individuals or families have private bedrooms and washrooms. However, due to space limitations or programming requirements, some bedrooms may have to accommodate more than one individual or will be shared by single women. When washrooms are shared, the design should consider privacy, safety, control for the users and a balance between long waiting period.

As more transition houses are being purpose built, in addition to conversions, they can be either a:

- Large detached home; or
- Multi-Bedroom space in combination with second stage housing.

Transition houses have space available for:

- Private bedrooms for each resident. The best practice is to have a private bathroom in each bedroom. If single women are required to share a bedroom, there should be no more than two people in a room, with separate, secure closets and storage.
- Areas for food preparation.
- Common dining room.
- Living areas including a living room that can accommodate children’s play area, teen space.
- Amenity areas including common laundry, multi-purpose / group meeting room, one 3-piece wheel-chair accessible common washroom, space for computer station and a common land phone access.
• Support service spaces and staff areas.
• Service areas including janitorial closet, electrical and mechanical room, storages for tenant’s belongings, linen, donation, maintenance items.
• Outdoor spaces with children’s play area, an amenity space such as patio or covered seating/gazebo, access to nature, bike racks, storage for maintenance/landscaping items, designated smoking area, garbage recycling space and bed-bug area (if required).
• Parking requirements (either underground or surface parking) based on project confidentiality, scale, location and municipal requirements.

4.3 Second Stage Housing Form

In second stage housing, self-contained units give women a sense of control and dignity as they move towards more independence. For women with children, a self-contained unit offers the opportunity to set up their living space and schedule in a way that works best for them. Women are able to provide their children with a sense of independence, as their routine is not dependent on others and outside stimulation is kept to a minimum.

The availability of on-site supports, staff and services varies by the needs of the individual program and the operator. Some buildings combine second stage housing with a transition house or safe home. This allows for program continuity and a sense of community with staff close for support.

The building form can be either:
• Low-rise apartments; or
• Medium-density housing such as townhouses.

Second stage housing should have space available for:
• Self-contained units with a mix of studio, one, two or three bedroom units with a kitchen, private living, dining and washrooms. The net unit sizes and dwelling unit designs should follow BC Housing’s Design Guidelines & Construction Standards (Section 1). Common and amenity spaces are categorized as Type B Program Space in the BC Housing Social Housing Cost Target Framework.
• Amenity areas including common laundry, multi-purpose room with communal kitchen, wheel-chair accessible common washroom, space for computer station or internet / phone access.
• Support service spaces and staff areas.
• Service areas including janitorial closet, electrical and mechanical room, storages for maintenance items, tenant’s belongings or bikes, bed-bug area (if required).
• Outdoor spaces with children’s play area, an amenity space such as patio or covered seating / gazebo, access to nature, bike racks, storage for maintenance / landscaping items, designated smoking area, garbage recycling space.

• Parking requirements based on project confidentiality, scale, location and municipal requirements.

4.4 Long-Term Rental Housing Form

The long-term rental housing for women and children can be either:

• Medium-density housing such as townhouses;

• Low-to-high rise apartments; or

• Any other form as outlined in BC Housing’s Design Guidelines & Construction Standards.

Long-term rental housing should have space available for:

• Self-contained units with a mix of studio, one, two, three or four (if required) bedroom units with a kitchen, private living, dining and washrooms. The net unit sizes, dwelling unit design and program area design is outlined in BC Housing’s Design Guidelines & Construction Standards. Common and amenity spaces are categorized as Type A Program Space in the BC Housing Social Housing Cost Target Framework.
5. Design Requirements

The following design requirements are for all facilities, whether they are new construction or a conversion / renovation of the existing facility. The way in which these requirements are realized will vary depending on the building form, location and functional program.

5.1 Healthy Interior Environment

A healthy environment can minimize respiratory and health issues including asthma. Consider using natural finishes and furnishings, air-tight construction, insulated windows, positive ventilation, resilient flooring (instead of carpet) and doormats to reduce dirt in the home. Select low emitting materials and products for interior paints, coatings, adhesives, sealants, flooring, composite wood, ceilings, walls, and thermal and acoustic insulation. Refer to BC Housing’s Design Guidelines & Construction Standards (Section 2) for low emitting materials requirements.

5.2 Durability, Operational Needs & Operating Costs

Design decisions should consider cost-effective building operations, which can be impacted by the number of beds per floor, ease of supervision, and sight lines for common spaces. Consideration of required staffing levels is also important.

Operational costs are impacted by the durability of materials used in the building’s construction, ease of maintenance, as well as the various fixtures, fittings, and furniture.

5.3 Efficiency in Design

The building form and design should be simple, spatially efficient and meet the operators needs in serving the community at the particular location. As much as possible, maintain continuity of load bearing walls between floors and standardize unit types, kitchen and bathroom layouts within a project. The overall building efficiency is calculated as the total residential area divided by the Gross Livable Area. Efficiency targets are found in BC Housing’s current Design Guidelines & Construction Standards.

The amenity and support service spaces should be coordinated and planned to maximize efficiency of circulation for both clients and staff. The kitchen and bathroom layouts within a project should be standardized as much as possible. Amenities should be located centrally and grouped for efficiency and to encourage social interaction. The project team should avoid unnecessary amenity areas and consider the use of multi-use amenity spaces whenever
possible. Avoid multiple laundry rooms, dining and service areas (such as janitorial closets) except in low-rise projects without an elevator. If required by the operator, these buildings should have a janitor closet on every floor.

Staff office space should be separate from the living spaces, preferably close to the front entryway to reduce disruption to the living space.

5.4 Energy Performance & Sustainability Requirements

All buildings must meet BC Housing’s current Design Guidelines & Construction Standards and minimum Energy Step Code Targets for new BC Housing projects as per Section 2, Energy and Environmental Design section. The building form and thermal performance of building elements (including architectural, structural, envelope and mechanical elements) should be carefully considered, optimizing the passive strategies in design. Recommended passive strategies are described in Section 2 of the Design Guidelines & Construction Standards.

Buildings must also meet BC Housing’s current sustainability requirements. The targets should be verified through mandatory building and energy modelling, as per the Provincial Energy Step Code. All buildings need to be tested to determine Envelope Air Leakage Rates, as airtightness of the building envelope is critical to its performance. Follow BC Housing requirements on incentive and rebate documentation and construction waste management tracking.

Select low emitting materials and products for interior paints, coatings, adhesives, sealants, flooring, composite wood, ceilings, walls and thermal acoustic insulation. More information is found in Section 2 under Building Material Selection of the Design Guidelines & Construction Standards.

Follow the current BC Housing sustainable waste management targets through sustainable demolition, construction and contractor obligations. Details are found in the Design Guidelines & Construction Standards.

5.5 Universal Design & Accessibility

Projects should be planned, designed and built to be understood, accessible and used by women and children regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. The built form, all areas of the site and all parts of the building that will be used by the residents should be wheelchair accessible and designed to meet the needs of all women and children who need to use it
and consider the safety of all ages and degrees of abilities. Designing for adaptable units will allow residents to age in place if they desire or allow adaptations in their units to meet possible changes in their physical abilities. This applies for both renovation and new construction projects.

Accessibility requirements should be designed in accordance with the BC Building Code, and reference shall also be made to BC Housing’s Design Guidelines & Construction Standards.

Design should consider the following, but is not limited to:

• At least 5% of the bedrooms in transition houses or dwelling units in second stage and long-term rental housing will be wheelchair accessible. Programs supporting older women may have additional accessibility needs. Consult with the operator to determine the level of accessibility that is required.

• The number of adaptable units in projects, allowing residents to age in place, will be based on the operator’s requirement supported by a need and demand in that geographical location.

• All exterior areas intended for tenant use, including landscaped open space and outdoor recreation areas, should be universally accessible to persons of all ages and abilities. Outdoor seating area is to be durable, low maintenance, and universally designed.

• Provide accessible parking, with all required pavement markings and signs, as required by municipal regulations and the BC Building Code.

• Stairs and ramps must be easily usable by people with reduced mobility and impaired vision.

• For community resident gardens, provide raised beds to facilitate access for tenants with wheelchair or restricted movement.

• Provide an accessible path from the main entrance to all parts of the building inside. Ground surfaces will be stable, firm and slip-resistant.

• All amenity and common areas must be fully wheelchair accessible.

• All appliances in residential and common area intended for tenant use will be ADA compliant.

• Choices of furniture type in the outdoor and indoor area will accommodate accessibility.

• Accessible washrooms, including common and in dwelling units, must have resilient, non-slip floors, knee clearance under the sink, ADA compliant toilets with seats at 430 mm - 480 mm (1’4” to 1’7”) from the floor, solidly backed grab bars as required by code, and clear door openings.

• Roll-in showers should be provided for wheelchair accessible showering.

• All doors, faucets, and shower heads should have lever handles.
• Light switches, thermostats, controls and storage should be mounted at a height that is accessible for a person in a wheelchair.
• At least one pair of laundry room appliances, both washer and dryer, should be side by side, raised and front loading.
• Use contrasting surfaces and finishes to make areas easier to see (eg. contrasting coloured baseboard and door trim to more easily identify door locations).
• Shared kitchens shall incorporate work surfaces and storage for both standing and seated use.
• Install low resistance, delayed action closers for all doors on accessible routes, including suite entrance doors in accessible sleeping areas.
• Consider adaptability in design wherever possible, so that it can easily accommodate change. This could include a removable cupboard in the kitchen or washroom to create knee space for a person in wheelchair or rough-in wiring in the building entry / lobby for future automatic door opener.

5.6 Safety & Security

Safety is important for all program users, staff, and visitors. It is especially important that women are able to trust that they are safe and secure, otherwise they may avoid seeking support or leave the site, which has the possibility of greater risk or harm.

Buildings should be designed with safety as the primary goal. The building design should create immediate safety, as well as a feeling of physical and emotional safety. Living in a safe and secure environment can support women to begin rebuilding their lives.

Site planning and building design should consider Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies, eg. territoriality, natural surveillance activity support, and access control, as well as other recognized CPTED principles as outlined in BC Housing’s Design Guidelines & Construction Standards (Section 3). All the requirements in this section should be considered at an early design stage, with an exception of the following criteria, found in Article 4: CPTED Performance Standard Checklist table. Here are the updated requirements for safe homes, transition houses, second stage and long-term rental housing:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle / Objectives</th>
<th>Design Intent</th>
<th>Evaluation Standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fencing</strong></td>
<td>Fence design should maximize natural surveillance from the street to the building and from the building to the street, and minimize opportunities for intruders to hide.</td>
<td>The exterior fence height and design should blend in with the surrounding neighbourhood so it does not stand out or appear to be a fortress. The fencing should be selected through a CPTED review. It is best to use a combination of mid-height fence (1.2 meters to 2 meters) with solid boards or open pickets, with adjacent planted Berbers or solid hedge materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mix of Uses</strong></td>
<td>In mixed use buildings, increase opportunities for natural surveillance while protecting privacy.</td>
<td>Commercial or retail space co-located with transition houses, safe homes, second stage housing or long-term rental housing is dependant on the operator’s programs and the best way to provide safety for women. Allowing the general public into the building reduces confidentiality and increases security risks for the women and children who are staying there. If co-location happens, it is preferable to have complimentary programs for similar clientele. The co-location may help to reduce stigma for women and children who may need to access the services in the future. If there are publicly accessed programs co-located in the space, there needs to be care given to increased security and confidentiality for the women and children who live there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership and Maintenance</strong></td>
<td>Create a “Cared for” image.</td>
<td>It is not recommended to use industrial / potentially institutional materials that create an institutional image.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Site and Building Layout</strong></td>
<td>Allow natural observation from the street to the occupancy, from the occupancy to the street, and between occupancies.</td>
<td>Position occupied offices and common rooms (but not sleeping rooms) with windows at the front of the dwelling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neighbourhood Integration</strong></td>
<td>No matter where they are located, or proposed to be, transition house programs may be controversial. It is important to demonstrate that the proposed program will be designed to be a good neighbour.</td>
<td>The following design features should be considered for neighbourhood integration: • Adequate interior spaces and outdoor space so that users can stay within the site; • Adequate on-site parking / storage for buggies / strollers, and bikes; • Windows and surveillance cameras that provide staff with sight lines onto the street; • Off-street areas for smoking, sitting, and pets; • Adequate separation between neighbours in terms of landscaping / fencing; • Exterior design that integrates into the neighbourhood by using residential materials and colours to avoid an institutional appearance; and, • Adequate, but non-intrusive, exterior lighting.</td>
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</table>
Programs providing services for women fleeing violence require additional safety measures including appropriate staffing, clear staff sight lines, or video monitoring. In addition to BC Housing CPTED principles, the building design should consider the following, but is not limited to:

- **Secured main entrance.** This may consider an audible connection before allowing the guests or new residents entry into the transition house and can be electronically controlled from the reception / intake office. The residents can have fobs, cards for a card reader or simply a numerical key pad operated access (depending on operator preference) that will allow entrance to the building, access to their rooms, and common areas.

- **Provide a video surveillance system that addresses the operator’s security requirements.** Security system options include Digital Access Control (DAC), Intrusion Detection, and Video Surveillance (i.e. CCTV) Systems. Exterior cameras should ensure there are no blind spots on the exterior of the building. The extent of the camera locations inside the building shall depend on the operator needs and requirements, taking into consideration women and children’s privacy.

- **Design shall allow ease of supervision and ensure good sight lines for staff supervision that involve outdoor areas, entrance(s), circulation, gathering, or programs.**

- **Maximize glazing for staff offices, program support offices and common room doors such as TV rooms, multi-purpose room, children play-area, laundry rooms for improved visibility.**

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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Principle / Objectives</th>
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<th>Evaluation Standard</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consider Anti-Ligature Design</strong></td>
<td>For people experiencing mental health issues and feeling suicidal, anti-ligature design reduces the risk of using the construction or refurbishments to self harm, or in extreme cases, to complete suicide.</td>
<td>Dependant on the project and possible risk, avoid obvious features that could be used to cause harm, making design choices based on the operator’s recommendation. Areas of anti-ligature to consider are: load release (items that release from its fixing if abnormal load is applied), fixed items (a fixed item that is free from points where a cord could be fastened to it) and weaponry (reducing the risk of using an item as a weapon).</td>
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**Consider Anti-Ligature Design**

- For people experiencing mental health issues and feeling suicidal, anti-ligature design reduces the risk of using the construction or refurbishments to self harm, or in extreme cases, to complete suicide.

- Dependant on the project and possible risk, avoid obvious features that could be used to cause harm, making design choices based on the operator’s recommendation. Areas of anti-ligature to consider are: load release (items that release from its fixing if abnormal load is applied), fixed items (a fixed item that is free from points where a cord could be fastened to it) and weaponry (reducing the risk of using an item as a weapon).
SECTION D:

Design Features

6 Common Area Design Features
7 Washrooms
8 Sleeping Accommodations
9 Ancillary & Utility Services
10 Outdoor Spaces
11 Security Features
12 Finishes, Materials & Building Systems
6. Common Area Design Features

For renovation or conversion projects, it is recognized that existing conditions, or user considerations may override the recommendations contained in these guidelines. If such is the case, the functional program shall be reviewed and approved by BC Housing at the schematic or preliminary design stage of the project.

6.1 Reception & Entry

- For second stage housing, the lobby reception area should be sufficiently scaled to the size of the program and the flow of people.
- In transition houses, there should be adequate space for client intake, including those with mobility impairments. This space should provide a seating area.
- The entrance should have a vestibule, and surveillance cameras monitored 24/7 by staff. For transition houses, the staff shall have the ability to control opening / closing of both sets of entry doors from the front office for the visitors. Provide for audible connection and visual screening between front office staff and tenant / visitors before allowing their entry in the vestibule. The design should consider rough-in wiring at the entrance for a future automatic door opener.
- Consider an entry with a driveway that has close access to a door for unloading. This will make unloading of supplies for staff and unloading groceries easier for mothers with children.
- Provide resident-controlled access at the entry ways, without access for the general public.
- The reception office in the transition house should be a secure space, with good staff sight lines to the street, the entrance / vestibule, circulation, gathering, program spaces, and elevators, if provided.
• A meeting room and offices should be close to the front entrance in transition houses and second stage housing. This space can be used for intake purposes or meeting with community service providers without entering the living area or disturbing other residents.

• When transition housing is combined with second stage or long-term rental housing, consider access control, client flow, and security in the design process.

6.2 Communal Spaces & Gathering Places

While communal spaces are more obvious in a single detached transition home where women share the living area, they need to be consciously planned in a housing model with self-contained units. Apartment buildings with self-contained units should have a communal space to allow women to socialize and find support from each other. A larger amenity space with a kitchenette is required for second stage and long-term rental housing. Depending on operator needs and building efficiency, this is typically located on the ground floor. This area will be used for group activities, training, celebrations, and shared meals.

Gathering spaces should be comfortable, full of light and, when possible, have views of nature. Furniture should be comfortable, durable, and easily maintained. Maneuvering space for mobility-impaired individuals and wheelchair accessibility should be considered when determining furniture layout.

Consider creating opportunities for women and children to decorate and personalize the common area. Place cork or magnet boards for hanging art and chalk board or walls for drawing.

Multi-purpose / Amenity Spaces

Flexibility is important in the design of multi-purpose spaces to ensure changing needs (both short- and longterm) are met to avoid functional inadequacy, and to minimize the costs of change. Activity areas should be designed to convert / change to different functions over time, as required, such as to meetings, training or group activities. Refer to BC Housing’s Design Guidelines & Construction Standards for the total allowable common or program space for second-stage housing and long-term rental housing.

A small space will need to be creative with space use. Activity spaces are dependant on the program and space available. The multi-purpose space can be used as a quiet
area when the living space is full. The design should allow staff to exit the room unimpeded either through a second exit or through furniture configuration. The multi-purpose room should have space for:

- TV room with electrical and cable outlets for a wall-mounted large screen TV;
- Multi-use activity / game spaces;
- Library area with options of small sitting / reading areas and larger multi-use activity spaces;
- Exercise space;
- Group meetings and training space; and,
- Storage room or closet for tables, chairs and equipment.

Children Play Areas in Transition Houses

Buildings with children require a play area. This space should be designed to keep the following criteria in mind:

- **Areas for learning, study and schoolwork.** This could be a desk in the family’s private area, or tables for study that are in a quiet part of the facility. The area can be used for study or for arts and crafts.
- **Play areas.** Depending on the size of the project, have multiple small alcoves or child-friendly areas for children to play or have quiet time. Create these spaces close to the different areas their mom could be, and does not necessarily need to be a separate room.
- **Teenagers.** Create an area that is enjoyable for teenagers to spend time. Depending on the program, it could be in the multi-purpose or amenity spaces.

Private Retreat Space in Transition Houses

When single women and women with children are sharing the same space, consider an area that are quiet spaces or adult only spaces without children that can be a quiet retreat for single women or mothers who have an opportunity for alone time. This space can be multi-purpose if needed, possibly used as a meeting room or staff space when not in use.
Computer station and land phone access

Provide at least 2 computer stations with high speed internet connection for resident use. Provide a common phone access.

6.2.1 Flexible Temporary Bed Space for Transition Houses

Where possible, consider providing flexible space for when program demand is high, and there is a need for an overflow area. Transforming living rooms, multi-purpose room or a meeting room may offer opportunities for this type of temporary space. Consider having couches or furniture that is convertible into beds, bedrooms that can add an extra cot or mats on the floor. Consider building extra storage for the bedding or cots.

6.3 Support Services

Safe homes, transition houses, second stage housing, and long-term rental housing provide different levels of support services for women and children. The level of support can change depending on program requirements. It is typical for transition houses to offer robust services onsite, for safe homes and second stage housing to offer support services, and for long-term housing to offer services as needed. Support services include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Transition Houses</th>
<th>Safe Homes</th>
<th>Second Stage Housing</th>
<th>Long-Term Rental Housing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24/7 on-site staffing</td>
<td>☑</td>
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<tr>
<td>Three meals a day</td>
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<td>Personal hygiene supplies</td>
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<td>On-site laundry where facilities exist</td>
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<td>Initial safety assessment &amp; safety planning</td>
<td>☑</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support, advocacy &amp; referrals</td>
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6.3.1 Support Offices
The support staff offices are an important part of a program’s services. Provide at least one support worker’s office in transition houses and second stage housing. Some programs will require a manager office and meeting space. The number of offices could vary according to the size of the program. Design considerations include:

- **Accessibility.** This space should anticipate the increasing age and potential mobility impairment of clients, and at least one space should be sized to handle client’s requiring a wheelchair.

- **Private meeting spaces.** Meeting rooms that can be used for confidential conversations. Blinds on the interior windows allow for visual privacy when required. Partition walls between offices, corridors or adjacent spaces should be rated for sound reduction, and have a sound rating of STC 55. Glazed doors with laminated glass or tempered glass with shatter resistant film on the inside should be provided to improve security. Consider how noise will travel from the offices, including to the street, outdoor space and other parts of the building.

- **Support space close to amenity space.** Locate support service offices close to the amenity space to encourage interactions and opportunities for support between staff and residents. Access to support office should not be through an administrative office.

- **Safety & equality.** To create space that feels safe, minimizing the feeling of power inequality between staff and tenants, consult with the operator regarding the layout of offices. Consider flexibility in furniture layout. Provide similar chairs for everyone to sit on. The design should allow staff to exit the room unimpeded via furniture configuration or a second access.

- **Child-friendly spaces close to staff.** When a parent is meeting with staff, they need to keep an eye on their child. Create visually accessible spaces for a child to be while their mother is in a meeting.

6.3.2 Administrative Office
Office support areas will vary with program size. These spaces should be a minimum 10.5 m² (113 sf) and secure, and have adequate space for desks, lockers, cabinets, staff seating area, files, and office equipment. Telephone, cable, and data outlets should also be provided. The staff washroom should be convenient to the office location.
Office and administration areas will have visual connection to the main entry door, elevator lobby, resident amenity and program areas. Maximize glazing in doors and windows.

6.3.3 Staff Areas
Without private staff areas, staff are not able to take a break away from residents, especially if they are the only staff working and are unable to leave the premises. This can be tough on staff mentally and emotionally, especially when they are providing support for traumatic situations.

Staff Room
In transition houses, provide a small staff room with millwork, a bar fridge, small sink counter, microwave shelf, and lockers. This will create an environment where staff feel appreciated, are able to take breaks and secure their belongings. Where possible provide one wheelchair accessible washroom for staff on main floor.

Access to Program Resources
Create a small area for program resources to be available just outside of the staff offices. A small closet, shelving unit or cupboard could be used. Necessities could include items such as clothing of various sizes, towels, personal hygiene supplies and toiletries. There may be an area with resource information such as pamphlets, program information, applications forms, etc. This allows women to access what they need when staff are not immediately available in a way that is dignified and gives them control over their immediate needs.

Depending on the program, harm reduction supplies should be available in the reception or staff area, including clean needles, access to safe disposal (sharps containers), condoms, etc.
6.4 Food Spaces

The kitchen requirements will be determined by number of residents and type of cooking operations that will take place. It is important to confirm whether food will be prepared in the building or whether these will be prepared elsewhere and kitchen equipment in the building used primarily for reheating. Consult with BC Housing, operator, local health authority and municipalities for requirements.

6.4.1 Safe Home Meals

Most safe homes provide meals, however, the type of food program is dependent on the type of safe home. Some meals are provided for women (in a family home), in other types of safe homes women prepare their own meals, if facilities are available.

6.4.2 Transition Housing Kitchens

The food preparation in transition housing can widely vary depending on program and facility requirements. Food is usually provided 24/7. In order to plan the food space in transition houses, start with the number of residents, the amount of kitchen space available, and identify who is preparing the food. Based on the information gathered, the appropriate type of kitchen can be designed. Food preparation options often include:

- Staff preparing meals in a commercial kitchen;
- Volunteers preparing meals;
- Residents preparing meals for just themselves and their family;
- Residents preparing meals for the whole house; or
- Meals prepared offsite and delivered to the house.

**Staff Preparing Food in a Commercial Kitchen**

In larger transition houses a commercial kitchen may be necessary. A commercial kitchen, when provided, shall have appropriate receiving / loading area and serve three full hot meals a day per resident.

To determine the correct option, size, design, and required equipment for a kitchen, relative to the planned size of the facility and operating budget, a commercial kitchen designer should be engaged early in the process. Review requirements of current codes and the authority having jurisdiction.

Kitchens should include a small pantry area for dry goods and cold storage. For easy service and loading dock access, kitchens should ideally be located on the ground floor. If it is
considered a commercial kitchen class 1, there will be specific mechanical supply and exhaust requirements in accordance with NFPA 96. The specific guidelines are found in BC Housing’s Design Guidelines & Construction Standards (Section 4).

**Women Cooking in Shared Kitchen**

A kitchen can become busy places, especially when the schedules of mothers with children require that they prepare and serve meals at the same time while using a shared kitchen. In transition houses where women are using a shared kitchen and are cooking for themselves, it is recommended that when possible:

- Depending on how many units will use the communal kitchen, design multiple work areas, sinks, and cooktops, with separate ovens for simultaneous access, and at least one with wheelchair access.
- Provide ample floor space and countertops. Consider the floor space needed for appliances and for when appliance doors are open.
- Provide commercial dishwasher(s), to quickly sanitize dishes. If a commercial dishwasher is installed in a residential setting, ensure the surrounding flooring and cupboards are made of materials that will not be damaged by the steam levels.
- Provide storage for individuals to use for dry food storage.
- Provide refrigerator(s).
- Some kitchens may require a deep freezer for storage, particularly in smaller communities where they may need to stock up on items or have larger quantities of food donated.
- Symbols and signage to help find and keep things organized.
In buildings with families and children, consider the following:

- incorporating dutch doors into the kitchen design in buildings where having children in the kitchen could be a concern, or in buildings that allow pets. Dutch doors can help keep children and pets out of the kitchen during the meal preparation time while still providing parents with sight lines to see their children in the next room.

- having a small children’s play area close to or adjacent to the kitchen. This will allow mothers to watch their children while preparing the meal.

**Common Dining Area**

When living in abusive situations, meal times are often chaotic. In transition housing, having a peaceful atmosphere where women are in control of their dining experience can be a redemptive experience. Dining room seating should be sized to accommodate a minimum of 75% of the residents in one sitting, and larger programs may need to have multiple sittings.

Provisions should be made for a small countertop area, and a microwave for program users to heat up food. Storage should be available for larger items such as high chairs and booster seats. Provide a small fridge in common dining area for residents when food is prepared in commercial kitchen by staff.

**6.4.3 Second Stage & Long-Term Rental Housing - Kitchens in Self Contained Units**

Self-contained kitchens shall be provided in all second stage and long-term rental housing buildings. Refer to BC Housing’s [Design Guidelines & Construction Standards](https://www.bchousing.gov.bc.ca) for kitchen requirements in self-contained units.

**Amenity Kitchenette**

Amenity spaces are important communal spaces in buildings with self-contained units. The amenity kitchenette is not intended for commercial cooking purposes. The specific requirements for amenity kitchenette are found in the BC Housing Design Guidelines & Construction Standards.

The amenity kitchenette will be provided with minimum length of 2.4 m (8'-0") of upper and base cabinet, microwave outlet and shelf, and double bowl stainless steel sink, 0.41 m$^3$ (14.5
ft³) refrigerator, 760 mm (2'-6") residential electric range and residential range hood; and dishwasher (confirm with the operator if it is required).

6.5 Laundry Facilities

Laundry facilities should be available to residents in transition houses, second stage housing, and long-term rental housing. For safe homes, it is dependent on the type and location.

Consider ease of access when designing laundry facilities. Provide a wheelchair accessible common laundry room that is conveniently located for residents, especially mothers with young children. Ideally it is adjacent to the common amenity space within natural surveillance view of staff and residents. Refer to the BC Housing Design Guidelines & Construction Standards (Section 1) for the common laundry requirements.

The ratio of laundry equipment needed is:

- **Women with children facilities:** One pair of washer and dryer for every 7 residents.
- **Women only facilities:** One pair of washer dryer for every 10 residents.

Laundry rooms should include:

- At least one pair side-by-side, front loaded, on pedestals, with controls and operating mechanisms at accessible height for wheelchair accessible residents. Provide a clear floor area of at least 750mm x 1,200mm (2'-6" x 4'-0") in front of each appliance and laundry sink.
- Commercial grade washers and dryers should be considered.
- A counter for folding clean laundry.
- A small seating area.
- An accessible height sink with open knee space underneath.
- Consider a small children’s area to occupy little ones while their mom is doing laundry.
- Maximize glazing on the door for improved visibility.
- Proper ventilation to avoid moisture problems.
- A location that is close to exterior walls to minimize the length of dryer duct runs.
- Non-slip flooring with cove base, floor drains with trap primer.
- Doorways, millwork heights, location of outlets and type of laundry equipment must be suitable for use those with mobility or visual impairments.
**Staff Laundry**

In transition houses or safe homes where the operator provides the linen and clothing items, a separate staff laundry room should be considered for staff use. Provided one pair of commercial grade washer / dryer at a minimum, on raised platforms.

A stainless steel laundry sink, shelves, and significant countertop space (minimum 2.4 m or 7.8 ft) should be provided for folding clean laundry.

### 6.6 Indoor Storage

Types of storage should mainly consist of the following:

**Client Storage:** Many women who have fled their home may have many belongings with them. Adequate and secure storage space is a requirement especially for transition house facility, including space for suitcases, strollers, and bikes. This space may be created within the building but may also be provided in outdoor areas.

**Staff Storage:** Provide a conveniently located area for staff to store furniture, mattresses, cots, maintenance materials, equipment, linen, clothing, tenant files, and other miscellaneous items.

**Donation Storage & Distribution:** Many operators provide clean, donated clothing for residents, diapers / toys for children. A space for storage and distribution is best provided on the ground floor. Fittings should include clothing hangers, and shelving for folded goods. A countertop, floor space, as well as a separate space for receiving and sorting clothing and other items (preferably with vehicle parking access) are desirable. Consider a storage space for infrequently accessed storage (e.g. seasonal donations). In larger buildings, this space can be provided within a basement, and may be associated with underground parking.
7. Washrooms

After leaving an abusive situation, it can be important for women to exercise privacy and lock a door, especially in the washroom. Ensuring there is a sufficient number of washrooms that provide women with privacy can reduce stress and increase dignity. Having ample washroom space will support families as they go through their morning and evening routines, and provide single women with a peaceful space, especially in a busy transition house.

For additional washroom design considerations for parents with children see the above section, Designed for Parenting.

7.1 Safe Home & Transition House Washrooms

In safe homes and transition houses, the best practice is to provide private washrooms for each family or person. The advantage of private or semi-private washrooms should be weighed against available space, operations and maintenance costs, as well as possible security problems that may arise.

When private washrooms in individual units are not possible, such as in a single detached home, prioritize adding additional washrooms during a renovation to increase the number of shared washrooms. Provide a minimum of one individual 3-piece washroom for 4 people to share.

7.1.1 Individual Common Washrooms

Individual common washrooms are recommended to create separate spaces for different washroom functions. By separating the toilet room from the sink or the shower from the rest of the washroom, multiple people can get ready for the day at the same time. The door locks should be secure, and have a safety mechanism that allows staff or emergency responders to open from the outside. Provide a minimum of one wheelchair accessible common washroom. Provide a minimum of one 3-piece washroom for each four people to share.

All common washrooms should have:

- The ceiling, wall tiles or paneling, and ventilation covers should be securely affixed to eliminate spaces for concealing or discarding syringes or other items.
• Washrooms should include resilient, non-slip sheet flooring with flash cove base and floor drains.

• Provide general washroom accessories, including paper towels, soap, toilet tissue and dispensers, clothes hooks, safety mirrors, towel grab bars, feminine product disposal bins. Be thoughtful to balance the need for durable products and while still ensuring it is a home-like environment that has a residential feel. Avoid accessories that are institutional or restrict women’s autonomy such as soap dispensers that are affixed to the wall or lockable toilet paper dispensers.

• Sufficient mechanical ventilation and exhaust should be provided.

7.2 Second Stage & Long-Term Rental Housing Washrooms

Washrooms in self-contained units require a three-piece washroom. The sink, toilet with bolt down lid, one-piece pre-fabricated shower unit with rod and curtain, medicine cabinet with mirror, solidly-backed towel bar, paper towel holder, and robe hook. Consider a combination of showers and bathtubs in different suites, as appropriate for the program. For renovation of existing buildings, the choice of showers or bathtubs should be based on specific project requirements.

7.3 Washroom(s) for Staff

Provision should be made for a separate ground floor staff washroom(s), close to reception or administrative support spaces. The staff washroom should be designed with non-slip flooring, a floor drain, toilet, sink, vanity, and common washroom accessories, such as a toilet paper holder, soap dispenser, and towel dispenser.
8. Sleeping Accommodations

A secure and healthy sleeping accommodation provides women and children with a sense of safety and well-being. The design of women’s private space and sleeping accommodations is an opportunity to empower women, giving them dignity, autonomy and control over their own space. Private sleeping space allows women the option of interacting with others when they choose, building their skills of living on their own, and facilitates the healing process.

8.1 Transition Houses & Safe Homes

The best practice is to have private bedrooms (preferred with a private washroom inside the bedroom) for each women and each family. A private space increases the feeling of security, as women can lock their door and control who enters their space. In their own private space, mothers are able to maintain their own routines with their children, and keeping outside stimulation to a minimum.

Guidelines for bedrooms include:

- Locate sleeping areas in calm part of the building and out of visual range of the entrance.
- Allow access to the windows, closet, both sides and the foot of the bed.
- Each bedroom will have a window to allow natural ventilation and daylight.
- For larger families that require bigger or multiple sleeping areas, design for interconnecting units, with a lockable door between two units that can be opened to expand into one larger unit, if necessary.
- For pet friendly bedrooms, ensure there is adequate room for a pet crate and easy to clean materials (such as flooring).
- For considerations of cooling systems in bedrooms, see the ‘Building Systems’ section.

When a transition house or a safe home is located in a residential building, it is important to consider temperature control. Many residential homes were not designed to support a high volume of people.

8.2 Second Stage & Long-Term Rental Housing

Both second stage housing and long-term rental housing will have self-contained units that follow the. BC Housing Design Guidelines & Construction Standards. Residential units could be studios, one-bedroom to four-bedroom units.
8.3 Minimum Floor Area

The following table outlines the minimum floor area for each type of bedroom, depending on the housing program type. These bedroom areas do not include bathroom square footage and allow adequate room for closets and storage of personal items.

In some situations, depending on the size and availability of rooms, children may share a room and in Transition Housing and Safe Homes, a parent may share a bedroom with children. Programs for mothers with small children may need additional bedroom space for cots or a crib.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bedroom Type</th>
<th>Safe Homes &amp; Transition Houses</th>
<th>Second Stage Housing &amp; Long-Term Rental Housing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Single Bed</td>
<td>10.2 m² (110 ft²)</td>
<td>8.5 m² (92 ft²)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Single Beds</td>
<td>13.9 m² (150 ft²)</td>
<td>11.15 m² (120 ft²)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Single Beds</td>
<td>17.7 m² (190 ft²)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. Ancillary & Utility Services

9.1 Janitorial Rooms

A janitorial room should be provided on the ground floor with a minimum 2.8 m² (30 ft²) in area, and include slip-resistant resilient floor, floor-mounted mop sink, shelves, mop brackets, floor drain and wall-mounted faucet, with provision for a hose end. In large projects, provide this room close to elevators with sufficient mechanical ventilation as required by code.

9.2 Mechanical & Electrical Rooms

Mechanical and electrical rooms should be located as close as possible to the entry point for utilities to allow for efficient distribution, including space and access for servicing. Locate the rooms so that service technicians are not required to walk through common areas which could risk client confidentiality. Early in the design stage, consider the room location in the building, access, clearance, future replacement of equipment, structural requirements, noise transmission and construction. Mechanical room door width must be 915 mm (3'-0") at a minimum, 1015 mm to 1067 mm (3'-4" to 3'-6") is preferred and shall have adequately primed floor drains. Refer to the BC Housing Design Guidelines & Construction Standards (Section 1) for details.

9.3 Receiving & Loading Dock

If a commercial kitchen is provided in the transition house facility, an easy access for transporting food supplies from the street to the kitchen should be considered, based on the confidentiality of the building within the neighbourhood. The consultant, with the operator, is required at early design stage, to decide if the facility is to be kept confidential and blended with neighbourhood.

9.4 Garbage & Recycling

A contained, easily accessible and covered exterior area is needed for regular garbage and recycling pick-up. It should be conveniently located for ease of access for pick-up and in a location that does not compromise the safety and security of residents and staff. For larger buildings, it will ideally be constructed with a high impact concrete
floor and walls, hose bib and a floor drain or slopes to sanitary drain. This space should have adequate room to house a garbage skip, recycling bins. If required, mechanical ventilation could be included for odour control.

9.5 Heat Treatment Room

The provision of a heat treatment room is a consideration and will be project-specific. Buildings may need to provide a heat treatment (or bed bug treatment) room within their facilities, or in an outside area to prevent and manage bed bug infestations for resident’s belongings or furnishings. See the BC Housing Design Guidelines & Construction Standards (Section 4) for further specifications for this type of space.
10. Outdoor Spaces

Outdoor space provides the opportunity for a range of important functions including providing a safe and secure space for women and children to spend time outdoors. Interior courtyards, areas screened by the building or wall / fencing, should be considered.

Outdoor spaces can include:

10.1 Children Outdoor Play Space

Provide adequate and secure play space for children. Play areas should include:

• **Natural spaces.** Provide access to natural spaces where children can connect with nature, with access to trees, and live creatures. Create pathways through the yard instead of one single expanse of concrete.

• **Open spaces.** Open fenced spaces where children can run freely and release energy. Consider creating pathways through the yard instead of one single expanse of concrete.

• **Play structures and space for adventure.** Outdoor play areas that strengthen children’s power of imagination while providing an environment for play.
• **Sight lines**: Locate play spaces so they are overlooked by common facilities such as the living room in transition houses, or multi-purpose / amenity room, common dining space, etc. Sight lines should allow staff to see women (especially at night) either directly or via security camera. Women should be able to observe the area, and ensure that it is secure before going outside.

### 10.2 Outdoor Amenity Space

Consider a weather-protected area - an awning, gazebo, or similar - for outdoor seating. The area should be within staff sight lines and sight lines of the children’s play area. This area should be universally accessible from the main building, provide seating that is universally designed and promotes positive social interaction.

### 10.3 Smoking Areas

Provide an adequately-lit weather protected outdoor smoking space that is a comfortable distance from children’s play areas, adjacent doors, operable windows, intake louvers, and outdoor gathering spaces. A smoking area must comply with provincial legislation, or local authorities having jurisdiction. Where there is a conflict, the more stringent legislation will apply.
10.4 Community Gardens

Garden space and access to nature can be therapeutic for women and children. Create outdoor spaces that women and children can participate in, interact with, and enjoy.

Where required by the operator, a common garden area can be provided for the residents to have the experience of planting and producing food, as well as for therapeutic effects. Provide raised beds to facilitate access for residents with wheelchair or restricted movement.

10.5 Secure Outdoor Storage

Many residents require secure outdoor storage space for strollers, and bicycles. Some programs will require outdoor storage space for carts. If not within the building, this storage can also be used for gardening tools, lawnmowers, chairs, etc.

10.6 Fencing

A secure perimeter for the facility will be important. This will involve a balance between a fence that is secure and deters easy access but is also not oppressive for the residents and the neighbours. Consider landscaping outside of fences.

10.7 Pet Areas

Consider providing kennels with outdoor access for pets. Keep regional weather conditions in mind, and if needed, consider an insulated or heated outdoor kennel. The kennels should provide a safe place for dogs in the winter and the summer. Consider a fenced-in dog run to separate the dog area from the rest of the outdoor space.

10.8 Adequate Parking for Staff, Residents & Visitors

Municipalities usually recognize parking needs for the building will be limited, depending on the building location, size, neighbourhood area and staffing levels. In accordance with municipal requirements, for a large building site, parking for staff and visitors will need to be provided. The area should be secure, well lit, and subject to security camera surveillance. Where applicable, ensure a snow plow can navigate the parking lot and there is a location to pile the snow.
When confidentiality is important, provide parking for women that is not visible from the street. This could be parking that is in front of the building if there is a gate that closes, or landscaping blocking the cars from view. Other options are underground parking or creating parking spaces in the back yard, accessible from the alleyway.

Safety needs to be considered, with clear sight lines from the building to the parking lot. This allows staff to ensure tenants and staff reach their car safely during times of high-alert.

10.9 Bicycle Parking

Provide exterior bicycle parking racks, at a minimum, and additional bicycle parking as required by the operator and the municipality.
11. Security Features

Safety and security are the most important design factors for transition houses, safe homes, and second stage housing residents, staff, and visitors. These factors must be matched by, and integrated with, operational policies.

11.1 Security System

Building security system design should correspond with operational capacity and staffing levels. Security measures may include access control, camera surveillance systems, security alarms, intercom system, emergency call buttons, etc., and be based on a facility risk assessment, and an operator’s requirements.

When planning these systems, it is advisable to engage security experts at an early design stage to assess the types of technology available, and possible locations for installation in consultation with operational staff.

Some key considerations for safety and security include, but are not limited to:

- Good exterior lighting for entrances and outside spaces, including motion lights where appropriate.
- In transition houses and safe homes, a solid front door (no glazing) to protect from unwanted entry.
- Provide panic door hardware in the crash bar for fire exit doors.
- For transition houses, consider having the reception or staff area at the main entrance.
- For staff supervision, ensure good sight lines for all building spaces that involve outdoor areas, entrance(s), circulation, gathering, and amenity spaces.
- Maximum glazing in all common area doors and staff office doors to improve security.
- Elevators, stairwells, and hallways should be well lit.
- In multi-story buildings, the operator may wish to restrict floor access if different programs are served within one building.
- Resilient, non-slip floors in critical areas, such as entrances, washrooms, and kitchens.
- Secure storage and / or lockers for resident's belongings.
• At a minimum, provide cameras at main entry points into the building, including all exit and entry doors. In larger projects, all common hallways, staircase, elevator, exterior parking area, common rooms, and any exterior storage areas.

• Depending on the program, consider if residents should be able to use remote access to video surveillance of the front door, and see who is outside before exiting the building.

• Access for program users is to be designed with consolidation of maintenance and ease of operation. For example: card readers, electric strikes, or suitable locksets where required, with consideration of maintenance and ease of operation.

• In order to respond to emergencies, installation of emergency call buttons in staff rooms, reception and support workers offices can be considered.

• Ensure that emergency alerts are accessible for people with different needs (e.g. strobe light alarms for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing).

### 11.2 Guest Access

Based on the program’s policy for guest access, develop appropriate security measures to enforce it. This could mean a locked front door, with a buzzer for anyone who wants to enter, or no entry for guests unless accompanied by a resident or staff member.

In transition houses, an intercom should be outside, close to the front entry door, for visitors to communicate with the reception office.

### 11.3 Privacy for Buildings & Grounds

• **Privacy setbacks.** When considering the setbacks and location of the building on the property, provide optimum privacy for residents, while making good use of the land available.

• **Window privacy and ground floor windows.** If there is no privacy from the street to the building, consider creating privacy with the windows. This can be done through landscaping, blinds or curtains, window film or exterior window privacy screens. Pay attention to the ground floor windows, especially when it contains women’s bedrooms.

• **Limited access (curtilage security):** Consider limiting physical or visual access to the property through landscaping (bushes or trees), fencing, gates, etc.

### 11.4 Safety for Staff

It is important to create a safe environment for staff, designing a safe space for them within which to work with appropriate safety measures. Considerations include:
• **Panic buttons.** Consider placing panic buttons in appropriate places for staff (or to be carried by staff) to call for help when needed.

• **Maximize glazing in windows.** In reception area for transition houses, the window glass should be tempered glass with a shatter resistant film on the inside to prevent exposure from glass dust / shards in the event of impact. Include maximize glazing in all common area doors and staff offices for improved visibility.

• **Staff room / Panic room.** If appropriate, the staff room can double as a panic room in an emergency situation. Ensure there is a method of communication from the room to local police and a secure lock from the inside.
12. Finishes, Materials & Building Systems

12.1 Materials & Finishing

Material selection and finishes should reflect client type, durability, ease of maintenance, and local availability. Material choices can create a homelike environment and reduce the opportunity for vandalism or abuse. Refer to the BC Housing Design Guidelines & Construction Standards (Section 1 and 4) for detailed requirements of interior and exterior finishes. A few highlights include:

- **Flooring.** Provide minimum 2.0 mm (0.080”) thick homogeneous resilient sheet flooring throughout with 19 mm x 89 mm (3/4” x 3 1/2”) painted solid wood in tenants suites and 19 mm x 140 mm (3/4” x 5 1/2”) in common areas. Provide a slip-resistant resilient safety flooring sloped to a claimable floor drain with minimum 2.0 mm (0.080”) thickness and complete with flash cove wall base in wheelchair unit bathrooms, common wet location areas such as common bathrooms, laundry, commercial kitchen areas, pantry and janitorial closet. Provide a floor drain in the mechanical room. Low maintenance, no-wax, and non-glare finishes are required.

- **Doors.** For renovation and conversion projects, the configuration of existing doors, and opener sizes, should be reviewed to ensure they meet current Building Code requirements. All exterior doors, interior common area doors, suite entry and service room doors should have clear openings of 900 mm (3’-0”) with level or roll-over thresholds for accessibility, and lever handles for ease of operation. Refer to the BC Housing Design Guidelines & Construction Standards (Section 1) for details.

- **Glazing.** Maximize glazing for doors in all common areas, staff offices, support services and exit stairs for improved visibility and, as permitted by the Building Code, to enhance security.

- **Windows.** Utilize awning or casement, high performance with low solar heat gain coefficient windows, and consider security when determining size, location, and style. For renovation projects, review the configuration of existing windows, opener sizes, and sill heights to ensure they meet current Building Code requirements and increase ventilation rates. When design permits, provide windows in stairways and corridors to introduce natural lighting. Consider children’s safety when choosing how the windows will open and close. Confirm the type of window...
coverings with the operator. In determining whether windows should open, consider ventilation needs and consult with the operator about program needs. Some security systems prevent windows from being opened.

- **Hardware.** For all doors, windows and millwork, hardware should be easily operable by those with limited strength and dexterity. Commercial grade lever door handles are to be installed throughout. The design team should consult with the operator and maintenance personnel before choosing the access controls.

- **Drywall & Paint.** Walls and ceilings in common and sleeping areas should be finished with painted gypsum board. Suspended ceiling tiles should be avoided in tenant units and common washrooms. All exposed walls in a commercial kitchen and communal kitchen (if required) should have fiberglass reinforced panels (FRP).

- **Infestation Control.** To prevent insects and bed bugs from getting behind baseboards and walls, provide a continuous bead of sealant along:
  - The joint between the finished floor and the bottom of the wall sheathing; and
  - The top edge and underside of the baseboard.

For existing buildings, diatomaceous earth can also be used as a natural pesticide behind baseboards and walls.

- **Millwork.** It is recommended that commercial kitchen, washroom, and common laundry cabinetry be located on legs so wet floors do not degrade the product. For commercial kitchen finishes requirements refer to the BC Housing Design Guidelines & Construction Standards (Section 4).

### 12.2 Building Systems

In addition to considering a building’s energy requirements, mechanical and electrical system design should optimize reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, and the total life-cycle costs of the building and consider passive design strategies as outlined in, the BC Housing Design Guidelines & Construction Standards (Section 2 – Energy and Environmental Design).

#### 12.2.1 Mechanical Systems

- A central boiler and storage tank system for domestic hot water and electrical baseboard for heating is the preferred option for multi-unit projects due to maintenance accessibility and serviceability.

- Hot water temperature must not exceed 49°C (120°F) at points of use by residents. Hot water storage tank shall not be below 60°C (140°F) to
control the propagation of Legionella bacteria. Provide hot water distribution to common kitchen areas and for janitor sinks at 60°C (140°F).

- Pressure balance valves with temperature limit stops for residential showers, and temperature limit stops only for faucets is acceptable, as a minimum requirement. The shower valves and faucets shall be set to maximum hot water temperature of 49°C (120°F).

- Indoor air quality is important, and must be considered when designing mechanical and ventilation systems. The minimum ventilation rates within the units are provided in the BC Housing [Design Guidelines & Construction Standards](#).

- Special attention shall be paid to summer overheating of residential suites. For buildings that do not incorporate full mechanical cooling for residential suites, the building modelling shall demonstrate compliance with ASHRAE Standard 55-2010 “Thermal Environmental Conditions for Human Occupancy” in accordance with the requirements of the City of Vancouver Energy Modelling Guidelines. Consult with transition house operators about the need for mechanical cooling on the various floors. In response to safety issues, the windows may not be able to open, and dependant on the security system (when armed, some security systems do not allow windows to be opened) and air conditioning should be considered.


- Choice of plumbing fixtures, shower heads, water closets, light fixtures, and sprinkler heads should consider ease of maintenance, durability, supplier availability, and consistency of the application within the facility.

12.2.2 Electrical Systems

- Adjustable lighting levels will enhance efficiency. In transition houses, where multi-bed configuration is considered, light fixtures should be adjustable, and controlled by individual users.

- A fire detection, fire alarm system, and fire safety plan should be prepared, as required by the BC Building Code and local authorities having jurisdiction. Fire alarms, with flashing strobe lights for residents with hearing impairments, are also required.

- In areas susceptible to damage, all equipment and wiring devices (including light fixtures, pull stations, exit lights, etc.) should be protected by wire guards or polycarbonate boxes. These locations include storage, janitorial, mechanical, electrical, and similar places.

- Depending on the size of the facility, new designs may consider incorporating an emergency back-up generator. Locations that experience greater power outages should also consider generators.
• Provide well designed exterior lighting.

12.2.3 Elevator Requirements
The elevator design shall meet the current standards for operation, reliability, performance, safety, accessibility and to reasonable standards of cleanliness and appearance.

In renovation projects, a stair lift should be installed as a last resort to improve accessibility. Most women cannot use the lift independently and it adds additional workload and strain on staff.

The location, type, number, size and speed of elevators shall be determined using elevator analysis calculations and simulation techniques. Refer to the BC Housing Design Guidelines & Construction Standards for the design criteria to confirm the elevator requirements for the project. Other elevator requirements include:

• Elevator controls and buttons are to be heavy duty for durability to withstand abuse.
• Elevators should be close to areas of active occupancies to make them visible from the building entry and the front reception office (if applicable).
• Signage to the elevator should be clearly visible.
• The elevator should be barrier free design, and fully accessible.

12.2.4 Building Envelope
• Wherever possible, use passive design strategies and a better performing building envelope in preference to use of complex and difficult to operate and maintain HVAC systems.
• Conform to the Provincial Energy Step Code.
• Detailing of the building envelope should minimize thermal bridging.
• Detailing of the building envelope components should enhance airtightness and minimize uncontrolled air and moisture exchange between the exterior and interior. All buildings need to be tested to determine Envelope Air Leakage Rates as airtightness of the building is critical to its performance. Airtightness of suites is to be tested and reported to demonstrate compliance with a suite-level air-leakage target as tested to ASTME 779 or equivalent standard.
• Refer to the BC Housing Design Guidelines & Construction Standards (Section 1) for additional information and design guides.

12.2.5 System Requirements Within Renovation Projects
When a single detached home is renovated to create a space for Safe Home or Transition House programs, the electrical, plumbing, gas lines, fire sprinklers, and mechanical systems...
need to be reviewed. The systems need to work for the number of residents, staff and for the installed appliances. If the renovation involves the installation of commercial appliances in the kitchen or laundry room, there often needs to be an upgrade to electrical systems and issues of condensation need to be considered.

12.3 Building Systems Commissioning

All BC Housing funded and financed projects, including both new development and renovation / capital projects, require commissioning. The level and depth of commissioning required for the project will be determined by the size and complexity of the project itself and by the needs of the operator’s project requirements.

The consultant team will be responsible for ensuring that the contract documents are in accordance with the operator’s project requirements, basis of design, meet BC Housing Design Guidelines & Construction Standards, building code, by-law requirements and authorities having jurisdiction, and outlining the commissioning requirements and process for all building systems and integration of systems.

The general contractor is ultimately responsible for ensuring that all building systems and integration of the systems are operating and functioning as intended in the contract documents regardless a third-party commissioning is initiated by the operator or BC Housing. Follow BC Housing Building Commissioning Guidelines for a 3rd party independent commissioning hired by the operator or BC Housing.
APPENDIX 1:
Examples of Design Concepts
Transition House Concept Drawing

Six bedroom, single story for women and children with support and outreach services. Note that some of the programming space is not typically included in WTHSP, and is an example of co-location with additional programming.
Second Stage Housing Concept Drawing

Second Stage Housing with 27 apartments, four floors that has a mix of units. There is programming space on the main floor, and women and children stay from six months to two years. Note that some of the programming space is not typically included in WTHSP, and is an example of co-location with additional programming.
Second Stage Housing Concept Drawing

Second Stage housing with 18 apartment style units on three floors with bachelor suites, one-bedroom, two-bedroom and three-bedroom units. Programming space is on the main floor, and women and children stay up to 18 months.
APPENDIX 2:
Sources of Information
BC Housing Documents

- BC Housing Design Guidelines and Construction Standards 2018
- BC Housing Modular Design Guidelines
- Building Knowledge: Research Summaries, Understanding Safe Homes in BC
- Review of Women’s Transition Housing and Supports Program
- Shelter Design Guidelines
- Understanding Women’s Safe Home Programs in BC
- Understanding Women’s Second Stage Housing Programs in BC
- Women’s Transition Housing: Women’s Transition Housing and Supports Program Framework

Other sources of information

- A Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence by the University of Alberta
- Accessible Housing by Design by CMHC
- Away from Violence: Guidelines for Setting up and Running a Women’s Refuge by WAVE and Austrian Women’s Shelter Network
- BC Healthy Communities (website), http://bchealthycommunities.ca
- Bridging the Divide: Building Safe Shelters for Women and Families in BC by Shawn Bayes and Alison Brewin for Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver
- C.A.R.E Handbook (about housing and pets) by the BC Society of Transition Houses
- Child-Oriented Architecture from the Perspective of Environmental Psychology by Aral Anbari and Hossein Soltanzadeh
- Creating a Halal-Friendly Kitchen by Foodservice Express
- CTV: St. Paul’s Hospital Opens Aboriginal Sacred Space by Rachel Bergen 2013
- Culturally Driven Violence Against Women by Aruna Papp form the Frontier Centre for Public Policy
• Effective Practices in Sheltering Women Leaving Violence in Intimate Relationships by Leslie M. Tutty for YWCA Canada
• Enough and Yet Not Enough: Manual on Domestic Violence Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities by WSCACV
• Finding Safe Spaces: Historical Trauma, Housing Status and HIV Vulnerability Among Young Aboriginal People Who Use Illicit Drugs by Kate Jongbloed
• Housing that Works: Planning & Design Solutions from Women Who Have Experienced Homelessness on Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside by Lani Brunn
• Intimate Partner Violence Against Immigrant and Refugee Women by Violence Against Women Learning Network
• Mapping VAW Shelters and Transition Houses from Women’s Shelters Canada
• Model Protocol on Service Animals in Domestic Violence Shelters by WSCADV
• Pet Safety and Women: Options for Women with Pets Leaving Abusive Situations by OAITH
• Possessions in the Homeless Shelter Experience: The Built Environment’s Potential Role in Self-restoration by Jill Pable
• Promising Practices Across Canada for Housing Women who are Older and Fleeing Abuse by Atira
• Promising Responses to Women’s Housing Needs by Women’s Shelters Canada
• Reducing Barriers to Support for Women Fleeing Violence by BC Society of Transition Houses
• Review of Trends, Policies, Practices and Implications of Scattered Site Housing by Steve Barnes for the Wellesley Institute
• Rural Disparity in Domestic Violence Prevalence and Access to Resources by Corinne Pee-Asa, et al
• Safety from Domestic Violence Literature Review by Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters
• Shelter Access Toolkit: Increasing Shelter Access to LGBTQ Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence by New York State LGBTQ Intimate Partner Violence Network
• Shelter for Women and Girls at Risk of or Survivors of Violence by United Nations Women and Canadian Network of Women’s Shelters & Transition Houses
• Shelter Voices 2018 by Women’s Shelters Canada
• Smudging Document by Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance
• Suggestions for Designing and Building Muslim Houses by Dr. Spahic Omer from IslamiCity
• The CENTRAL Hub Model: Strategies and Innovations Used by Rural Women’s Shelters in Canada to Strengthen Service Delivery and Support Women by Tara Mantler, et al, for Brandon University and Rural Development Institute
• The Ontario Rural Woman Abuse Study: Final Report by Lorri Biesenthal and Lynne Dee Sproule, et al, for the Department of Justice Canada
• Transitioning Our Shelters: A Guide to Making Homeless Shelters Safe for Transgender People by Lisa Mottet and John M. Ohle for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute and National Coalition for the Homeless
• Trauma-Informed Building Design by Nadia Rachel (website), https://therapeuticdesign.wordpress.com/2016/05/24/trauma-informed-building-design/
• Trauma-Informed Design: Healing and Recovery in Second-Stage Housing by Naomi Duddridge
• Violence Against Women and Their Children in BC: 33 Years of Recommendations by Linda Light for The Ending Violence Association of BC
• Violence Against Women in Canada: Effective Approaches and Resources by Marika Morris for MATCH International
• Violence in the Lives of Muslim Girls and Women in Canada by Krista Melanie Riley