

WELCOME CENTRE 

shelter for women & families

SISTERHOOD, SUPPORT, SHELTER AND SAFETY.

OUR PERSPECTIVE ON THE HOUSING CRISIS AND INCOME INEQUALITY IN WINDSOR-ESSEX COUNTY

The Welcome Centre Shelter for Women and Families provides emergency shelter and support services to self-identified women+, families, and children experiencing homelessness. The organization applies a gendered and intersectional feminist lens to examine inequality and its impact on the housing market.

Windsor-Essex has long faced challenges for women. Historically, it was ranked as one of the worst communities in Canada for women's overall quality of life. Although this research is no longer conducted, significant barriers for women and families persist in our community.

The Impacts

The challenges of inequality in Windsor-Essex are evident in the housing crisis and income disparities:

- **24,000 self-identified women** in Essex County were living in low income at the time of the 2021 Census, compared to approximately **22,000 men**.
- A **21% gap** exists in overall after-tax median incomes between self-identified women and men in Essex County, making inequality and the housing crisis distinctly gendered issues. [\[1\]](#)

Rising housing costs exacerbate these challenges. From 2018 to 2023:

- **Average rents** in Essex County increased by **27%**.
- Rental turnover rates dropped from nearly **20%** to **11%**, leaving fewer units available—at significantly higher costs. [\[2\]](#)

This trend has deeply affected the women and families the Welcome Centre serves. With a median income gap of **\$14,400** between men and women, single women and mothers face significant challenges in affording rising housing costs. This financial disparity often forces women into difficult situations, such as remaining in unsafe or inadequate housing or being unable to leave situations involving intimate partner violence.

These same barriers also impact the Welcome Centre's capacity to assist women and families. Despite relocating and expanding its facilities, the Centre regularly operates at full capacity. From 2023-2024 the **average length of stay** has increased by **21%** for single women and a **54%** increase for families, as finding suitable, affordable housing becomes increasingly difficult.[\[3\]](#)

The Solutions

The housing crisis and growing inequality disproportionately affect women and their families. Addressing these challenges requires targeted and systemic actions:

1. Increase Affordable Housing Stock

The solution to the housing crisis starts with building more housing—and ensuring it is affordable. For many families, one-bedroom apartments are simply inadequate. Larger, family-friendly rental options are essential to meet the needs of women and families.

2. Expand Non-Profit Housing Models

The private sector alone cannot meet the demand for affordable housing. Non-profit housing models must be expanded and supported through significant investment. The return on this investment is clear: a recent study found that for every **\$1 spent on housing homeless families, nearly \$7 was generated in savings or additional revenue.** [4]

3. Develop Transitional Housing Options

For women and families, transitional housing is often critical for bridging the gap between shelters and permanent homes. While plans for transitional housing at the future H4 Homeless Hub are promising, the facility is years away. Additionally, though a value-add to the community, it has little suitability as a site for women and no suitability as a site for high needs families. Tailored transitional housing closer to schools, healthcare, and community supports is urgently needed.

54%

Increase in average length of stay for families in 2024

Subsidized/affordable housing move-outs **decreased 60% for singles and 75% for families**, becoming less than 5% of moveouts in 2024 for singles and 2% of moveouts for families.

Citations

[1] Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0103-01 Low-income status by age and gender: Canada, provinces and territories, census divisions and census subdivisions.

<https://doi.org/10.25318/9810010301-eng>

[2] Calculated from CMHC Housing Market Survey

[3] Calculated from HIFIS Data by Welcome Centre Staff

[4] Constellation Consulting Goup (2023) Social Return on Investment (SROI) Analysis of Inn from the Cold. <https://innfromthecold.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Inn-from-the-Cold-SROI-Report-05-15-2023.pdf>

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