

From: [Harmy Mendoza](#)
To: [Economic and Community Development](#)
Subject: WomanACT Deputation Oct 21 2021
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Attachments: [WomanACT Homelessness Solutions Service Plan Deputation _Oct 21 2021.pdf](#)

Hello,

Please see attached for your records,

Harmy

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WomanACT Deputation | October 21, 2021

Agenda Item EC25.5 – Results of the 2021 Street Needs Assessment and Shelter, Support and Housing Administration’s Homelessness Solutions Service Plan

Good Morning. My name is Harmy Mendoza and I am the Executive Director of the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT). Our mission is to eradicate violence against women and advance gender equity through coordination, education, research and policy. We convene and mobilize communities across Toronto to drive system change for women and we have been doing this work for 30 years.

I am here this morning to ensure that intimate partner violence and hidden homelessness are included in the City’s Homelessness Solutions Service Plan. While we commend the City for engaging the Violence Against Women sector in the Plan’s development, we believe that critical gaps remain in preventing and addressing women’s homelessness.

Housing, homelessness, and violence against women are deeply connected. A lack of access to safe and affordable housing can prevent women from leaving a violent situation, while women often face housing instability or homelessness when fleeing violence. A Canadian survey of 500 women and gender-diverse people experiencing homelessness in 2020-2021 found that more than 75% of respondents reported being a survivor of abuse or trauma.

Women’s homelessness is often considered ‘hidden’ because women are less likely to appear in mainstream shelters, drop-in and public spaces, and other homeless-specific services. Statistics Canada has estimated that 7% of Canadian women have experienced hidden homelessness at some point in their lives. A recent survey conducted by WomanACT found that staying with family or friends was the most common housing option first accessed by women when leaving an abusive relationship.

Our first request is for the City to improve its Street Needs Assessment data collection strategy to better capture intimate partner violence and hidden homelessness. We all know that data is a prerequisite for action. If we do not measure the large number of survivors experiencing hidden homelessness, it is clear that our services will leave these women behind. We know there are challenges to reaching the hidden homelessness population, but innovative outreach strategies and strengthened partnerships with community agencies can drive data collection that better reflects the state of homelessness in our city. Dear Committee members, if we don’t count it, it doesn’t count.

Our second request is for hidden homelessness to be included in the scope of the City’s Homelessness Solutions Service Plan. In order to effectively address homelessness in Toronto, we need to view the issue in way that reflects that unique housing experiences of women and women experiencing violence. It is essential to apply an intersectional gender lens to the City’s Service Plan. This approach will open the door to gender-based homelessness interventions and greater integration with existing VAW supports.

Homelessness is a gendered issue and it needs a gendered response. We hope that the City will use this opportunity to further its commitments to women’s safety and pathways that support women’s housing stability.

Thank you for your time.