

COVID – 19 Update on Family Violence Shelters – The Manitoba family violence emergency shelters remain open during the pandemic and expect a surge in domestic abuse as self-isolation continues.

What Service Providers Need to Know:

As we all work together in these extraordinary times to keep the most vulnerable in our society safe and healthy, there is a need now more than ever to coordinate our actions and have clear information available to front-line workers and those we serve. The Manitoba Association of Women's Shelters (MAWS) would like to ensure that service providers have easy access to the domestic violence sector services. MAWS will provide service providers with a weekly update of what is happening in the sector as emergency plans are created and implemented. Stakeholders working in the sector across the province are invited to send updates/contributions to maws@maws.mb.ca to be included.

Those experiencing violence or abuse in the home should feel safe in reaching out for help even during the pandemic. The message to stay home does not apply if you are experiencing abuse. It may be safer to leave your present situation than to remain in place. Family violence shelters are open and following protocols to keep clients safe during the pandemic.

A central resource where someone with expertise in family violence can provide the connection or navigation support a person requires is available 24/7 through the provincial Domestic Violence Help Line, at 1-877-977-0007, which is supported by the closest shelter in the region you are calling from. Anyone can call the Help Line to get information about services in your community or to access help. Beyond service navigation, the Help Line supports access to person-centered risk assessment, counselling as well as intake to shelter. The Help Line staff help an individual to review their options and determine the best fit for services in the moment.

There is a prevailing myth that the Help Line is only for people if they want shelter services or if they are in immediate danger. Another myth is that an individual must be prepared to leave the abusive relationship in order to receive support. And yet another myth is that you must be female. All of these beliefs are false.

The Help Line provides for service navigation, triage and support and it is open to all genders in all circumstances where domestic abuse is involved. Depending on the need of the person experiencing abuse, the Help Line may offer residential services, non-residential services (assessment and counselling through the shelter but often not in the shelter), or a referral to the closest resource in the community or region. The Help Line also offers a person on the other end of the line who is non-judgemental, supportive and willing to listen. The call is always confidential and no personal information is collected.

If someone is in immediate danger they should call the police (911).

The risk of domestic abuse increases during stressful times as well as when family members are in sustained close contact with one another. Being in constant close quarters may also impede the ability of a person to reach out for help, especially if their privacy is being monitored. Domestic abuse may be perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner, a gang affiliate or pimp, a relative or someone living in the home.

Currently DV shelters are fielding reduced calls and have fewer families in shelter than usual. People may be weighing the risks of staying where they are against the risks of seeking shelter in a communal environment. The Manitoba Association of Women's Shelter (MAWS) is providing daily space availability updates to the Family Violence Prevention Program, End Homelessness Winnipeg and Circling Buffalo for wider distribution to networks. Vacancy changes on a daily basis. Plans for continued staffing, self-isolation and quarantine are being put into place.

Family violence emergency shelters are located across the province in Winnipeg, Selkirk, Steinbach, Winkler, Portage la Prairie, Brandon, Dauphin, The Pas and Thompson.

There are five domestic violence shelters in First Nations communities, each with their own local number. First Nations shelters are accepting only residents who are currently in the community. These shelters are Norway House Cree Nation in Norway House, Mamawehetowin Crisis Centre in Pukatawagan, Fisher River Healing Centre in Koostatak, Wechin Waskigan Crisis Centre in Shamattawa and Nisichawayasihk Women's Shelter in Nelson House.

Summary for Providers:

- Provincial DV shelters are open and although the vacancy rate changes on a daily basis, most shelters currently have available space. MAWS is providing daily bed vacancy across the province.
- The Help Line is always available, 24/7 for questions, support, safety planning and intake to shelter services. (1-877-977-0007). It provides a common access point for service navigation, referral and immediate support.
- Shelters are taking measures to ensure the safety of residents and staff during this pandemic.
- Shelters, with the support of their communities, are preparing for an eventual surge in the need for shelter space as the pandemic continues as well as the need to safely isolate those in need of a safe space if they or their children are infected.
- MAWS will collate a weekly update on service responses, success and challenges from all contributors working in the DV sector.