

Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Violence Against Women Services



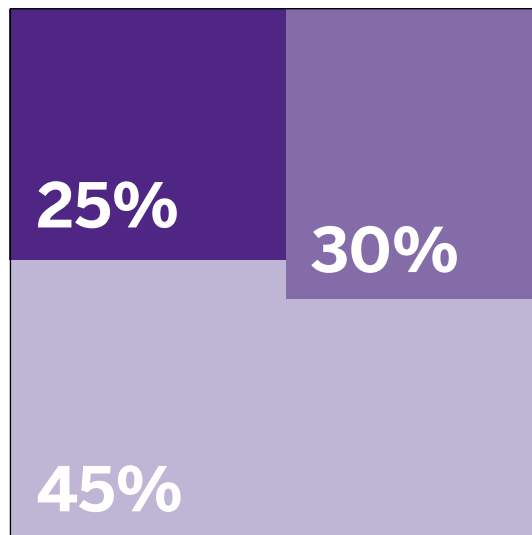
SHELTER SPACE ANALYSIS

WHAT WE DID

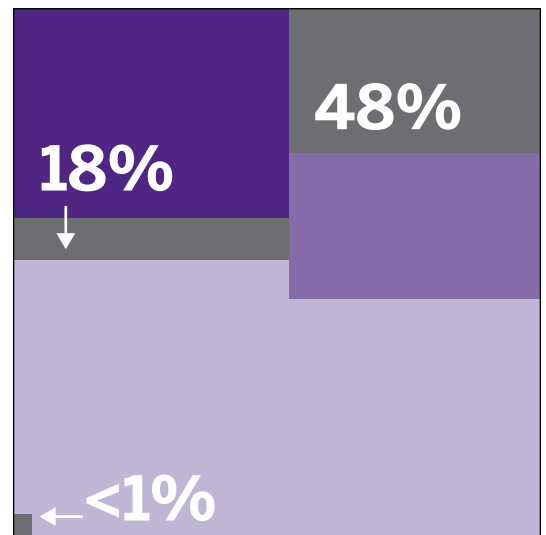
We analyzed floor plans from 15 Ontario women’s shelters, and related COVID-19 protocols, to determine how physical distancing and service restrictions affected space use, and related impacts on service delivery.

WHAT WE FOUND

Most shelters saw significant reductions in their primary (e.g., bedrooms, bathrooms) and secondary (e.g., community areas) spaces, with an average of 27% of overall floor area lost. The loss of primary space was due to the existing physical layout of shelter bedrooms and their relationships to bathrooms, because most public health mandates required a shift to a one bedroom per bathroom model. Secondary space loss was mainly due to the combination of staff working from home and closing on-site offices, and distancing restrictions leading to closures of kitchens, dining areas, and community living spaces.



AVERAGE SHELTER SPACE BEFORE COVID-19



AVERAGE SHELTER SPACE DURING COVID-19

- primary space (bed/bath)
- secondary space (common areas/offices)
- tertiary space (storage/halls)
- closed

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

For New Builds:

1. Build at least one single bedroom with an adjoining bathroom that could serve as a quarantine unit.
2. Build a commercial kitchen separate from the communal kitchen that would ensure a chef/cook position within the shelter and make it easier for single-serving meal preparation.

For Renovations:

3. Build as many new bathrooms as possible within the budget. This would ensure more flexibility and fewer room closures by reducing the ratio of bedrooms to bathrooms.
4. Build an outdoor space with cover and seating that could be used for face-to-face counseling and informal visits as weather allows.

For Immediate Workarounds:

5. Place tape on the floors and/or move furniture around to provide visual cues for physical distancing.
6. Combine adjoining rooms instead of closing one to create larger spaces for women and families who need to quarantine.

For more information:

- <https://gtvincubator.uwo.ca/vawservicespandemic/>
- McLean, I., Wathen, C.N. and the VAW Services in a Pandemic Research Team. (2020). *Shelter Spaces and Pandemic Response: A Best Practices Handbook for Flexible Space Planning*. Western University, London ON. Available [here](#).
- McLean, I., Wathen, C.N., and the Violence Against Women Services in a Pandemic Research Team. (2022). Planning Shelter Service Spaces and Structures for Resilience: A Spatial Analysis of Women's Shelters During COVID-19. *International Journal on Homelessness*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.5206/ijoh.2022.1.13627>