



**Inaugural Conference of the National Women's Shelter Network**  
**September 5-8, Miami**  
**NWSN Media Advisory- Call for Action**

We are facing a public health crisis in growing numbers of people experiencing homelessness in our country. In the wake of the pandemic and decades of failed social and public policies, homelessness is reaching epic levels across our nation, impacting most severely women and children. The women's shelters and programs gathered today in the National Women's Shelter Network Inaugural Conference live and breathe this crisis every day, and we are asking for help from our nation's leaders.

At last count, over 1.2 Million women<sup>1</sup> and 2.5 Million children<sup>2</sup> experience homelessness in our country - every year. At least one in every 30 children will experience homelessness,<sup>3</sup> the majority of whom are under the tender age of 6 years old<sup>4</sup>, in single, female headed households.<sup>5</sup> It may seem inconceivable but homelessness has become normative for the children of our country - in the richest and arguably most powerful nation in the world.

---

<sup>1</sup>The combined number of reported women who enter shelters, both homeless (222,970) in addition to domestic violence shelters (927,405) in addition to unsheltered women (74,826) equals 1,225,198. See "Number of People Using Domestic Violence Shelters by State." DomesticShelters.org. Accessed August 28, 2023. Many women on the streets are never counted, as regular point in time counts are well recognized as understating the true count of unsheltered persons; this is particularly so for women experiencing homelessness whose very survival hinges on their invisibility.

<https://www.domesticshelters.org/data-center/state-reports-and-rankings/people-using-domestic-violence-shelters-by-state>; see also "State of Homelessness: 2023 Edition." National Alliance to End Homelessness, May 23, 2023. <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness/>.

<sup>2</sup> National Center on Family Homelessness. American Institutes for Research. (2018, September 27). <https://www.air.org/center/national-center-family-homelessness>.

<sup>3</sup> "Homelessness in America." School on Wheels, June 26, 2023. <https://schoolonwheels.org/homelessness-in-america/#:~:text=One%20in%20every%2030%20American.annually%20in%20the%20United%20States>.

<sup>4</sup> "The State of America's Children 2020 - Housing and Homelessness." Children's Defense Fund, February 18, 2020. <https://www.childrensdefense.org/policy/resources/soac-2020-housing/>.

<sup>5</sup> "Homelessness in America: Focus on Families with Children ." United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, September 2018. [https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/Homeslessness\\_in\\_America\\_Families\\_with\\_Children.pdf](https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Homeslessness_in_America_Families_with_Children.pdf).

Gender-based violence is a lead cause of homelessness for women<sup>6</sup> and their children, but there are other important contributing factors, not the least of which is a persistent lack of affordable housing. Rents are still on the rise and most cities are unaffordable based on the most recent data available.<sup>7</sup> Miami has not escaped this crisis - Miami is the 3rd most “severely rent burdened” city in the United States for renters with median incomes, ahead of New York and Los Angeles.<sup>8</sup> A new study from Florida Atlantic University, reported that the average renter in 11 cities around the country, including Miami, must make at least \$100,000 to avoid being classified as “rent burdened,” meaning renters are spending more than 30% of their income on rent, leaving that much less for food, health care, transportation and life’s other necessities.<sup>9</sup> Rents are continuing to rise.<sup>10</sup>

With the tremendous shortage of affordable housing across the U.S., it should come as no surprise to anyone that shelters, like ourselves, are facing overwhelming demand. According to a recent report, the U.S. has seen a record increase in people experiencing homelessness this year, up 11% from 2022, and this is the largest increase since the government started tracking comparable numbers in 2007, based on preliminary figures from the nation’s latest Point in Time Counts.<sup>11</sup> Point in time counts

---

<sup>6</sup> Crawford, Chandra. “New Federal Policy Proposals Will Hurt Survivors of Domestic Violence.” National Alliance to End Homelessness, October 23, 2019.

<https://endhomelessness.org/blog/new-federal-policy-proposals-will-hurt-survivors-of-domestic-violence/>.

<sup>7</sup> “A monthly NerdWallet rent-to-income ratio analysis of 225 cities in the U.S. finds that, based on the most recent data, 65% of rents on the market were equal to or above the recommended 30% [of gross income] ratio in March.” See, Helhoski, Anna. “Rents Are Still on the Rise – These Are the Most and Least Affordable Cities for Renters.” MarketWatch, April 24, 2023.

<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/rents-are-still-on-the-rise-these-are-the-most-and-least-affordable-cities-for-renter-s-38fb5743>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. “Severely rent burdened” means rent is 50% or more of renter’s gross income.

<sup>9</sup> Glanzer, Joshua. “Report: Average Renter In Much of U.S. Needs \$100,000 Salary.” Florida Atlantic University, June 5, 2023. <https://www.fau.edu/newsdesk/articles/april2023-rental-numbers>.; See also, “The average renter across in the U.S. needs to make at least \$81,000 annually to avoid being rent burdened” found in “Waller, Weeks and Johnson Rental Index.” Florida Atlantic University, July 2023.

<https://business.fau.edu/executive-education/overvalued-rental-markets/index.php>.

<sup>10</sup> “Home Rents Continue to Rise in Q2 2023: 89% of U.S. Cities Experienced Year-Over-Year Rent Increases.” MarketWatch, July 13, 2023.

<https://www.marketwatch.com/press-release/home-rents-continue-to-rise-in-q2-2023-89-of-u-s-cities-experienced-year-over-year-rent-increases-4e394bb8>.

<sup>11</sup> Kamp, Jon, and Shannon Najmabadi. “WSJ News Exclusive | More Americans Are Ending up Homeless-at-A Record Rate.” The Wall Street Journal, August 14, 2023.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/homelessness-increasing-united-states-housing-costs-e1990ac7>.

are widely regarded as undercounts, particularly so for women whose very survival hinges on being invisible.

For those of us who live and breathe this reality on the ground every day, the latest reports confirm what we already know. The numbers of women and children in need and desperate pleas for help are rising. Homelessness has reached epic proportions and is a national public health crisis affecting nearly every community in America. Shelters all across our country are struggling to keep doors open, put food on the table and provide the trauma-informed supportive services that women and children need. We are the first and last resort, the final safety net from the streets, for countless vulnerable women and children in communities across our country, and we need help.

Existing public policies have failed to address, and in many cases contribute, to the systemic, root causes of homelessness, including the lack of truly affordable housing, rising costs of living, insufficient wage growth, barriers to health care, and insufficient child care and after school care, which burden women in particular. Pandemic and economic stressors have exacerbated gender based violence, causing many women and children to lose or flee their homes or worse still, remain in abusive living situations to keep a roof over their heads. While homelessness is traumatic for everyone, it is especially so for women and children, who are at greater risk of further violence, victimization and even death on the streets.

In the wake of the pandemic, our failure over many decades to provide meaningful comprehensive solutions to ending and preventing homelessness has left vulnerable women and children paying the price. Unprecedented numbers are flooding our nation's fragile and grossly under-resourced shelter systems. The vital role of women's homeless shelters in addressing homelessness has been overlooked, under-resourced, and largely de-funded at the Federal level for more than a decade. Fractured or

---

nonexistent efforts at state and local levels, some of whom resort to trying to criminalize persons struggling to survive, have clearly failed to solve this national problem.

While we recognize and applaud the value of Housing First principles and Rapid Re-Housing rental subsidies championed at the Federal level, they must never be to the exclusion of funding women's homeless shelters and programs. Anyone who does this work on the ground knows it is not actually housing first but shelter first and there is nothing rapid about rehousing in the absence of readily available, truly affordable, housing. Trauma-informed, safe, supportive shelter is as essential to the lives, safety and dignity of women and children in transition as food, health care, child care, education and a home.

Immediate action to end and prevent homelessness is vital because lives are at stake. Women's homeless shelters have gathered for this Inaugural Conference of the National Women's Shelter Network to advance best practices for sheltering women and children, shine a light on this growing public health crisis, and demand action for effective solutions. Now over 175 shelters strong and growing, the NWSN is calling on our leaders at all levels of government, business, finance and philanthropy in communities across our nation to take action.

Here is what we are asking for to end and prevent homelessness:

- 1) **Funding for women's homeless shelters and shelter programs tailored to meet the gender specific needs of women and their children, recognizing gender-based violence and related trauma is a lead cause of homelessness for women and children**, including funding for the basic operation of shelters and safe havens, basic human services (such as food, clothing, toiletries and supplies), enriched supportive services such as resource coordination and case management, gender-based violence survivor and mental health counseling, early assessments of children's developmental progress, well being and trauma

histories and child and family therapies, LGBTQ+ supports, substance use disorder counseling and recovery supports, job readiness training and employment assistance, educational supports and programming for all ages, therapeutic enrichment programs, life skills education, and linkages to wide ranging community resources. **Enriched supportive services empower women and children to heal, reclaim their lives and build the foundation for safer, brighter futures.**

- 2) **Funding for capital repairs and improvements for shelters and safe havens for women and their children to build the facilities and organizational capacity of programs to serve women and children of all ages and abilities,** in trauma informed, universally accessible, healthful, environmentally sensitive, child friendly, and welcoming environments, offering privacy, dignity, and suitable to their special needs, and to establish shelters and safe havens for women and children experiencing homelessness in communities that have none **so that no woman or child will be forced to survive on the street or remain in abusive circumstances, risking further harm or death.** More trauma informed, supportive shelter capacity is needed nationwide.
- 3) **Readily available, truly affordable, permanent housing for those with extremely low income, both public and private, with vouchers, subsidies and programs that limit rent to one-third of an individual's or family's income, so that they can afford to put food on the table, care for their children, cover utilities, medical expenses, transportation and other basic costs of living, to remain stably housed.** With an estimated deficit of more than one million truly affordable housing units across the country, the result of decades of failed housing policies at all levels of government, the spigot on new market tax credit financing should be wide open, zoning restrictions lifted, development and construction incentives implemented (e.g., increased

permissible density and FAR, long term tax property relief, sales tax exemptions for building and development, public infrastructure provided, expedited permitting, among others), and creative public housing options for the most vulnerable (e.g., our elders, youth, and women and children with high special needs).

- 4) **Long term/permanent residences with embedded, trauma-informed, mental health care and supportive services, as needed, for those with severe and persistent mental illness or other special needs who need assistance with daily living activities to achieve a meaningful quality of life**, too many of whom die on our streets today, sited in the communities they call home. Such supportive permanent housing, as all housing, should be trauma informed, providing enriched supportive services, and assuring the highest possible level of freedom and autonomy, consistent with a person's special needs.
- 5) **Barrier free access to health and mental health care supportive services in shelters**, as needed, including basic and specialty health and mental health care, psychiatric care, medications, medical supports, and substance use disorder treatment for women and children at risk of and/or experiencing homelessness. Too many barriers, from transportation and cost to juggling competing imperatives, stand in the way of accessing needed health and mental health care, diminishing successful transitions and quality of life for those in transition. Enriched supportive services are needed onsite at shelters and in the community **to ensure successful transitions and long term stability**.
- 6) **High quality, extended hours, affordable early education, childcare and after school programs and services** for women and their children experiencing and/or at risk of homelessness to assist mothers in securing greater financial self-sufficiency and stability, both ending and preventing homelessness.

**Extended hours are vital to ensure mothers can provide for their families and achieve long term stability.**

- 7) **Long term, post-shelter exit, enriched supportive services**, as needed, for women and children who have successfully transitioned from homelessness to secure hard-earned successes and **to help them remain stably housed, address special needs and circumstances, and prevent cycling in and out of shelters.**

We are strongest when every woman and child, everyone in our country, has housing and, in times of transition, trauma informed, supportive shelter, to realize their potential. The solutions to ending homelessness in our country are an engine of economic prosperity, creating more jobs in the finance, construction and housing industry, the fields of early child care and after school care, health care and mental health care, education, career building, and social services. A robust safety net for the most vulnerable all across our country will generate enormous savings in caring for those who now are cycling in and out of systems, hospitals, law enforcement and our justice systems. We can break the cycle of homelessness and poverty in our country by investing in women and children in need and we will save lives.

The National Women's Shelter Network aims to transform the trauma of homelessness into windows of opportunity. We need the help of our nation's leaders at all levels of government, Federal, State and Local, business, corporate, financial and philanthropic and our communities - because it takes a village.

---



The above outlines the most pressing needs facing women and children experiencing homelessness. For more information, please contact us. Thank you.

For more information, contact:

Constance Collins, President and Executive Director

National Women's Shelter Network, LLC

217 NW 15th Street, Miami, FL 33136

[constance@thenwsn.org](mailto:constance@thenwsn.org)

305-613-1573

<https://nationalwomensshelternetwork.org/>

### **Background on the National Women's Shelter Network:**

Formed during the pandemic in response to the public health crisis of homelessness, the National Women's Shelter Network is a growing community of women's homeless shelters and shelter programs who have joined together to advance the status of women and children experiencing homelessness and bring an end to and prevent homelessness in our country. We stand at the intersection of gender-based violence and homelessness, recognizing the women and children we serve are too often victims of violence and complex trauma struggling to survive. We envision a world of racial, social and gender equity, free of violence against women and children. The NWSN is committed to: elevating the voices of women and children with lived experience; showcasing best practices, innovation, research and information sharing; identifying gaps and needs and informing public and social policies; and raising awareness of and resources for the special needs of women and children experiencing homelessness and





the shelters that serve them. We envision a world of racial, social and gender equity, free of violence against women and children, where every woman and child will have a safe home, and in times of transition, a trauma-informed safe haven with deep protective factors, to assure they can heal, grow, thrive and blossom into who they are meant to be. We recognize that the solutions to ending homelessness are founded in equity for women and children and an engine of social and economic prosperity for all. Learn more at [www.thenwsn.org](http://www.thenwsn.org)

**The National Women's Shelter Network is an initiative of the Lotus House Women's Shelter:**

By way of background, Lotus House is the largest women's homeless shelter in the nation, sheltering over 500 women, youth and children experiencing homelessness every night from across Miami-Dade County, Florida. Lotus House has sheltered over 10,000 women, youth and children since opening its doors over 18 years ago, with over 80% successfully exiting the shelter system - that makes us an expert on the intersections between homelessness and gender-based violence. Designed as a trauma-informed national model, Lotus House provides emergency shelter with comprehensive supportive services, serving high special needs women, youth and children experiencing homelessness, who are among the most vulnerable and marginalized members of our community. Nearly all of the women, youth and children we serve have life long histories of gender based violence, sexual abuse and other crime victimization. Recognizing the fragility of those who enter our doors and multitude of barriers to successful transition out of homelessness, Lotus House addresses the gender specific needs of women, youth and children by providing enriched, trauma-informed, supportive services, educational support, job readiness and other tools and resources, including deep protective factors for children, to help break the



cycles of violence, abuse, victimization and poverty which lead to homelessness. <https://lotushouse.org/> Two years ago, in furtherance of its commitment to bring much needed awareness to the special needs of women and children experiencing homelessness, Lotus House led the initiative to establish the National Women's Shelter Network. It is the host of the NWSN Inaugural Conference.