# Policy Brief 4:
## Faith-Based Models as System Partners (Not Charity Substitutes)

**Core message:** Faith-centered, culturally situated models like Nisa Homes fill critical gaps the system cannot, especially for women experiencing Islamophobia, spiritual abuse, and immigration precarity. They should be funded and recognized as evidence-based system partners, not treated as informal charity.

## Issue

As public systems struggle with capacity, specialization, and trust deficits, culturally grounded organizations often deliver the most accessible entry points for equity-deserving communities. Yet funding models frequently assume faith-based services are supplementary, privately funded, and short-term, creating instability for programs that are demonstrably meeting public needs.

## Evidence from the Nisa Homes report

- Nisa Homes expanded from one home (2015) to a national network (10 sites across six provinces) and serves over 1,500 women and children annually, alongside major growth in remote supports.
- Demand rose notably following COVID-19 and spikes in Islamophobic incidents; staff report clients fear seeking help elsewhere "because I'm Muslim."
- Nisa Homes provides a multi-pillar model (shelter, casework, mental health, children's programming, helpline, prevention education) but faces constraints linked to reliance on donations and short-term grants.
- The project's Community of Practice produced sector consensus that faith-based organizations fill critical gaps and need sustainable government funding and policy recognition.

## Policy Problem

When culturally grounded shelters are funded primarily through philanthropy, system capacity becomes uneven and geographically inconsistent. This also reinforces inequity: communities most affected by Islamophobia and migration precarity are asked to "self-fund" essential safety infrastructure that benefits the broader public system.

# Policy Recommendations

1. Create dedicated, sustained funding streams for culturally and spiritually responsive shelters under provincial housing/GBV portfolios and within federal National Housing Strategy programming.
2. Commission faith-based models as service-delivery partners through multi-year agreements (with clear outcomes and accountability), rather than episodic grants.
3. Recognize culturally situated shelters in coordinated access and referral systems, ensuring they are integrated into local homelessness/GBV networks (not parallel to them).
4. Fund knowledge mobilization and training capacity so organizations like Nisa Homes can support system-wide improvement (e.g., training on Islamophobia, spiritual abuse, and culturally safe shelter practices).

# Implementation Considerations

- Protect mission integrity: partnership agreements should not require faith-based organizations to dilute culturally situated practices that are central to safety (e.g., women-only space, dietary needs, spiritual supports).
- Support data and evaluation capacity so outcomes can be tracked over time without overburdening frontline staff (aligns with Nisa's stated data-system priorities).

- Plan for geographic equity: fund both physical sites and remote supports in regions without dedicated culturally grounded shelters.

## Success Metrics

- Increased availability of culturally safe shelter beds and culturally safe follow-up supports.
- Reduced turn-aways and reduced delays in help-seeking among Muslim women.
- More consistent outcomes across regions (less “postcode lottery” access).
- Multi-year funding stability for culturally grounded providers and improved staff retention.

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- *Based on research developed in collaboration with Nisa Homes, the Women’s National Housing & Homelessness Network, the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, and Wilfrid Laurier University.*

- *Source: Faith-Centered Shelter Models and Muslim Women’s Pathways to Housing Justice in Canada: The Case of Nisa Homes. Read the full research report.”*