Policy Brief 2:

Closing the Post-Shelter Support Gap (3 Months Is Not Enough)

Core message: Transitional shelter stays and short follow-up windows are mismatched to the real timelines of housing access, trauma recovery, family law, and immigration processes. Without longer-term, culturally safe post-shelter supports, women face predictable setbacks and a return to instability.

Issue

Shelters are designed for immediate crisis response, but women exiting GBV and homelessness often face extended periods of vulnerability: navigating unaffordable rental markets, rebuilding income, securing childcare, and managing court, custody, and mental health needs. When supports end too soon, progress made in shelter can unravel.

Evidence from the Nisa Homes report

- Nisa Homes' current model includes three months of post-shelter follow-up casework (a program developed during the pandemic), yet staff report that many women reach out six or seven months later still needing help.
- Twelve respondents reported feeling 'not prepared at all' for independent living when leaving Nisa Homes; others felt only 'somewhat prepared'.
- Time to stable housing often exceeded shelter timelines: 12 respondents reported taking more than six months to secure housing after leaving Nisa Homes, and seven were still searching at the time of the survey.
- Post-exit barriers were overwhelmingly structural: financial instability (60%), lack of affordable housing (56%), and difficulty finding employment (36%).

Policy problem

System performance measures often prioritize "throughput" (moving clients out quickly) rather than durable stability. This creates perverse incentives: short stays, time-limited follow-up, and fragmented referrals, despite the reality that housing, legal, and immigration timelines routinely exceed 3–6 months.

Policy Recommendations

1. Fund 12-month post-shelter case management as a standard benefit for survivors exiting GBV/homelessness shelters (with extensions based on need), including remote/hybrid options.
2. Create "bridge" supports that follow the person, not the bed: portable rent supplements, priority access to childcare subsidies, and transportation supports for employment and legal appointments.
3. Integrate housing navigation with trauma recovery by funding culturally aligned mental health supports during the first year post-exit (not only during shelter stay).
4. Measure success as stability, not speed: adopt outcomes like sustained housing at 6/12/24 months, safety from violence, and well-being indicators.

Implementation considerations

- Build a "step-down" continuum (transitional → supportive housing → independent housing with follow-up), recognizing different readiness levels.
- Ensure post-shelter supports are culturally safe (e.g., language access, faith-sensitive counseling) so follow-up does not become another barrier.
- Use data systems that track longer-term outcomes across programs while protecting survivor privacy.

Success metrics

- Housing retention at 6, 12, and 24 months post-exit.
- Reduced returns to shelter and reduced reliance on motels/temporary arrangements.
- Increased income stability (employment, benefits access) within 12 months.
- Improved client-reported well-being and reduced isolation.

- *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."*