

Women Specific Considerations

There are a number of reasons that an older woman may be hesitant to access a shelter. As you review this information, consider how your shelter may take action to mitigate some of these concerns.

- An older woman may have a deep attachment to home, keepsakes, photos, friends and neighbours who may have been part of her life for many years
- An older woman may fear losing a treasured pet, being institutionalized or having her decision-making rights taken away by service providers
- Older women may have been raised within a family philosophy that stressed, 'you made your bed, you lie in it', along with the notion that you don't share your family problems with outsiders
- An older woman may be geographically and socially isolated
- Many older women have mobility problems and have to make special arrangements for transportation
- An older woman may have the inability to communicate in English

Factors that May Impact Shelter Use

Issue	Details	Shelter Considerations
Noise	Older women often need a quiet space away from general chaos	Is it possible to create a quiet space that can allow older woman to retreat from general shelter activity?
Time	Older women may need longer time to explore their options, gain appropriate information and quietly reflect on their situation	How can the case management process be adjusted to allow older women sufficient time to reflect and participate in their own case planning?
Accessibility	Mobility, hearing or sight issues may prevent an older woman from accessing all areas of the site	Are there any areas within your sight that are not easily accessible by those with mobility and other issues? Is there anything that can be done to mitigate this? Are there other places that seniors with these issues can be referred if these issues cannot be easily mitigated?

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Communal Living	Sharing with strangers can be foreign for older women.	<p>Is it possible to limit the number of other people that any older women must share her room with?</p> <p>Is it possible to ensure that older women primarily share with other older women?</p>
	Chores that are part of general shelter participation may be emotionally or physically difficult for older women.	<p>What chores may be most physically appropriate for older women?</p> <p>What conversations should happen with older women before assigning chores within the shelter?</p>
	Other families in the shelter may have specific expectations around how older women will 'grandparent' their children.	What conversations might staff have on intake with both older women and those with children to help manage expectations around the involvement of older women with children?
Language and Culture	Accessing a shelter may not be considered appropriate with the culture of an older woman.	<p>How can your shelter engage with an older woman who is expressing concerns to feel more comfortable accessing the supports of the shelter if needed?</p> <p>If women from particular cultures are more likely to access the shelter, what resources in the community could be accessed to assist in this area?</p>
	Older women may have had little need to use English and may be embarrassed about not being able to communicate well with English-speaking staff.	<p>Are written instructions available in languages of those who regularly access the shelter?</p> <p>Are translation services easily accessible when required?</p>
Other Potential Assistance	Older women may need assistance obtaining and managing their medication and may struggle to ask for help.	How can these issues be addressed in the most welcoming way as soon as possible?
	Older women may be embarrassed about asking strangers for help with personal hygiene.	How can the needs of the older women be met while balancing the expectations of staff work requirements?

Based on: How to Establish Specialized Refuge and Support Services for Older Abused Women
<http://www.bcsth.ca/sites/default/files/publications/BCSTH%20Publication/Women%27s%20Services/Safe%20Homes%20Manual.pdf>