

# MONTREAL WOMEN'S RIGHT TO HOUSING: WE'RE WORKING ON IT, ARE YOU?



WELCOMING



SAFE



UNIVERSAL ACCESS



AFFORDABLE



HEALTHY

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The right to housing is a major concern for Montreal women's groups. For this reason, the Table des groupes de femmes de Montréal (TGFM) published an initial report on the subject in 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic and the housing crisis motivated us to update that report. Over the past year, we surveyed 59 women's groups and mixed-gender organizations through a questionnaire, focus groups and one-on-one meetings and analysed a series of documents. This report focuses on three themes used to explore issues that limit women's right to housing in Montreal and the actions undertaken by grassroots organizations. The report provides concrete recommendations and resources that allow for further reading.

## FINDING ADEQUATE HOUSING IN THE MIDDLE OF A CRISIS

The housing crisis is not over. It continues to have an outside effect on Montreal women, whose housing needs and challenges have only increased with the pandemic. The issues are related to:

- rent increases and shortages in affordable housing;
- the many prejudices that feed into discrimination and competition in the rental market;
- undersized and unsafe housing that threatens women's health and safety;
- the lack of accessible and adapted housing, which limits the autonomy of women living with a disability;
- increases in evictions and landlord repossessions of units, as well as difficulties exercising their rights;
- harassment from landlords or neighbours, which threatens tenant's security at home.



## SUPPORTING WOMEN IN NEED THROUGHOUT THE CRISES



Lockdowns left many women trapped in abusive and violent situations. Public health measures upended the strategies used by women experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The pandemic and housing crisis also created significant barriers to accessing resources for support. Women who could access services were more exhausted than usual and dealing with fraying mental health. The lack of space in women's shelters, already a problem before the pandemic, only intensified since March 2020. Many women were forced to turn to resources that did not meet their needs or stay in places where they felt unsafe.

Organizations have been supporting more and more women experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The pandemic and the housing crisis have intensified women's needs and made it more complicated to reach them and support them with their next steps. This context has also had significant repercussions on working conditions, even with access to emergency funding.

## ACCESS TO SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY HOUSING

Organizations' wait lists are a testament to the lack of social and community housing in Montreal. Its scarcity increases crowding in interim housing and emergency shelters. In addition to the lack of available spaces, these groups have identified obstacles to accessing these limited spaces and sources of exclusion:

- a lack of knowledge about existing and available housing options for women;
- lengthy and intensive allocation procedures;
- eligibility criteria and organizations' rules and regulations;
- a lack of resources for those with complicated living situations.



There is no magic bullet: support is needed to develop a diverse range of housing resources and permanent, accessible and inclusive housing units that offer different levels of support to respond to Montreal women's varied needs.

Women's groups are organizing to develop these projects. It is just as necessary to fund community support as it is to support housing construction and associated community spaces. Groups have had enough of trading off on housing design, environment and available on-site services.

There is still a great deal of work to be done to ensure women's right to housing in Montreal. Organizations on the ground have been working hard, especially over the past several months. Our governments must recognize the right to housing for all women in Montreal, starting with adopting concrete yet ambitious measures to offer adequate housing and support to women who are experiencing difficulties and increase the number of social and community housing units. These efforts should allow Montreal women to choose the living environment that best suits their needs.

The Table des groupes de femmes de Montréal (TGFM) is a regional round table founded in March of 1996. Its mission is to promote and defend women's rights from a feminist perspective of gender equality and equality among women. The Table's membership of more than fifty groups, primarily local women's groups and women's committees from unions or community and social groups, is one of its great strengths. The plural and multi-sector characteristics of its membership allow the Table to access a diversity of experiences, concerns and analyses.

La TGFM et its membership operate in an unceded Indigenous territory. *Tiohtià:ke* is the traditional name for the island of Montreal. The Kanien'kehá:ka nation is recognized as the guardian of the island and the waters surrounding it, which has historically been a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, a diverse Indigenous population lives there alongside other peoples.



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