

Priority Housing for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence Policy

Effective Date: September 4, 2026



1. Purpose

The Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency (NSPHA or the Agency) Priority Housing for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence Policy prioritizes access to public housing for people who are experiencing gender-based violence and need to leave their home to find safe and affordable housing.

Gender-Based violence (GBV) occurs when harmful actions are directed at someone because of their gender, gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender. It can include:

- Verbal, emotional, spiritual, sexual, physical, mental or financial abuse
- Domestic or family violence
- Intimate partner violence
- Sexual violence or sex trafficking
- Criminal harassment or coercive control

The Priority Housing for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) Policy outlines how NSPHA prioritizes eligible applicants and tenants, including transfer requests. It supports timely access to safe housing while ensuring decisions are fair, consistent and transparent.

2. Scope

This policy applies to public housing applicants and current tenants who are seeking safe and stable public housing because they are experiencing gender-based violence.

This policy sets out:

- Eligibility criteria and how to request priority access
- How NSPHA will work with the household to identify safe location considerations
- Waitlist placement and how housing offers are made
- What it means to accept or refuse an offer, and what happens next
- How to request an appeal if you disagree with a decision

This policy provides clear, consistent direction to assess and process GBV-related priority access requests, including new applications and tenant transfer requests.

3. Definitions

- **Accepted Offer:** When an applicant accepts a suitable housing offer within the required timeframe.
- **Applicant:** Any person who applies to live in public housing, including a current tenant who applies to transfer to another public housing unit.
- **Applied Date:** The date an applicant submits a complete application or transfer request to NSPHA. The applied date remains the same throughout the applicant's time on the waitlist regardless of any changes to their application, including:
 - Changes to property selections
 - Changes to household composition or client type
 - Pausing or placing the application on inactive status

The applied date does not carry forward to a future application after a cancellation.

- **Complete Application/Transfer Request:** A signed application or transfer request where all required sections are completed and any required documentation is attached. In the case of paper applications, applicants must also include their property selections.
- **Eligible Applicant:** An applicant who meets the applicable public housing eligibility or transfer criteria.
- **Gender-based violence:** Gender-based violence occurs when harmful actions are directed at someone because of their gender, gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender.
- **General Applicant:** An eligible applicant that does not have priority status.
- **Housing Offer:** An offer made to an eligible applicant to live in a public housing unit.
- **National Occupancy Standard (NOS):** The standard developed by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) that provides guidance on bedroom requirements based on household size, relationships, age and gender.

- **Priority Applicant:** An eligible applicant that has received priority status based on a referral from a qualified professional. These applicants will be placed ahead of general applicants on the waitlist.
- **Qualified Professional:** A person authorized under NSPHA's Priority Access Policy to verify or refer an Applicant for Priority Access.
- **Refusal/ Refused Offer:** When an applicant declines a suitable housing offer or does not respond to a housing offer within the required timeframe, unless an exception applies.
- **Suitable Unit:** A public housing unit that meets the household's documented size, accessibility, safety and medical needs.
- **Tenant:** Any individual who has signed a lease agreement with NSPHA. A tenant is legally responsible for:
 - Paying rent as outlined in the lease
 - Complying with all lease terms and conditions
 - Ensuring all occupants and guests follow the lease rules and do not cause damage or disruption

Where multiple individuals have signed the lease, all are jointly and equally responsible for fulfilling its terms. In this policy, the term "tenant" refers to any or all such individuals.
- **Transfer Request:** An application from a current tenant to move from one public housing unit to another.
- **Withdrawn Offer:** A housing offer that NSPHA cancels because the unit is determined to be unsuitable or because another exception applies. A withdrawn offer is not considered a refusal.

4. Policy

A. Priority Access to Housing for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence

- i. NSPHA provides priority access to housing for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) when making housing offers.
- ii. Gender-based violence refers to harmful actions directed at someone because of their gender, gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender.
- iii. Instances of gender-based violence may include a single act of violence, or several acts that form a pattern of abuse.
- iv. GBV may be committed by a family member, a current or former partner, or someone known or unknown to the survivor and includes:
 - a) Verbal, emotional, spiritual, sexual, physical, mental or financial abuse
 - b) Domestic or family violence
 - c) Intimate partner violence
 - d) Sexual violence or sex trafficking
 - e) Criminal harassment or coercive control

B. Eligibility for Priority Status (GBV)

- i. Applicants are eligible for priority status due to gender-based violence when:
 - a) They have experienced gender-based violence that impacts their ability to live safely in their current or most recent home; and
 - b) They meet the public housing eligibility or transfer requirements, as applicable.

Exceptions for Tenant Transfers

- ii. When a tenant is eligible for priority status, NSPHA will waive standard transfer requirements that could prevent the tenant from meeting eligibility, including:
 - a) 24-month residency requirement: Tenants are not required to have lived in public housing for 24 months to apply for a priority transfer related to gender-based violence.
 - b) Arrears or outstanding balances: Tenants with arrears or other outstanding balances may apply for a priority transfer, provided they enter and maintain a repayment plan.

C. Referral Process

Referral Form

- i. To apply for priority status due to gender-based violence, an applicant must work with a qualified referring professional to complete and submit a [*Priority Referral: Gender-Based Violence*](#) form.
 - a) The qualified professionals list includes:
 - Elder/ Community Leader
 - Lawyer or legal advocate
 - Medical professional
 - Police Office/ Law Enforcement
 - Psychologist or Counsellor
 - Support or Social Worker
 - Transition House Worker
 - Other qualified professionals providing similar support to the applicant as the professionals listed above.
 - b) Professional referrals cannot be completed by an applicant's friend, neighbour or relative.

Safety Planning

- ii. The applicant and referring professional should use the *Priority Referral: Gender-Based Violence* form to document any housing-related or safety needs, including identifying areas/locations where the household cannot safely live.
- iii. Applicants may remove a household member from their application or transfer request directly on the *Priority Referral: Gender-Based Violence* form.

Active Applications or Transfer Requests

- iv. Applicants must either have an active application or submit a new application form with their referral.
- v. Current tenants must either have an active transfer request or submit a transfer request application with their referral.

D. Waitlist Placement

- i. Approved referrals will be added to the waitlist with priority status. The applicant will receive written confirmation of the decision.

- ii. All priority placements are chronological, based on the date NSPHA receives the completed *Priority Referral: Gender Based Violence* form.
- iii. Applicants will be placed on waitlists for all properties in locations identified as safe, based on the information provided in the referral form.
- iv. Applicants who wish to be placed on waitlists outside their area must notify NSPHA by phone, email or the [Applicant Portal](#).

E. Housing Offers

- i. When a suitable unit becomes available and the applicant is next on the waitlist, NSPHA will make a housing offer.
- ii. To maintain priority status, applicants must accept the first suitable unit offered.

Accepting an Offer

- iii. Applicants may accept the housing offer by contacting NSPHA by phone, email or in person.
- iv. When the applicant accepts a housing offer, NSPHA will provide written confirmation and work with the applicant to arrange lease signing as described in the Lease Preparation and Signing Policy.

Refusing an Offer

- v. SGBV applicants who refuse a suitable housing offer will lose priority status but remain on the waitlist based on their applied date.
 - a) A subsequent refusal of a suitable housing offer will result in cancellation of the application.
 - b) After refusing, current tenants will have their transfer eligibility reassessed:
 - If the tenant still meets transfer requirements, the tenant will remain on the waitlist.
 - If the tenant does not meet transfer requirements, the transfer request will be cancelled.
 - NSPHA will notify the tenant of the outcome of the reassessment outcome in writing using a provided method of contact.

F. Reapplication Timelines for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence

- i. Applicants who lost priority status due to a refusal may reapply for priority status by submitting a *Priority Referral: Gender Based Violence* form immediately after losing priority status.

- ii. Applicants whose previous application was cancelled due to a refusal may submit a new application and the *Priority Referral: Gender Based Violence* form immediately after cancellation.

G. Appeals

- i. An appeal is a formal request by an applicant or tenant to review a decision made by NSPHA.
- ii. If an applicant or tenant disagrees with the decision related to their request for priority status or a transfer, they may request a review through the appeal process.
- iii. NSPHA will review and respond to all appeals in accordance with its Appeal Policy and Procedures, which is available on the NSPHA website.

5. Policy History

5.1. Effective Date

This policy came into effect on September 4, 2026.