Clearing the Path to Recovery

A Framework for Acting on Structural Factors Impeding Women's Substance Use Treatment and Recovery

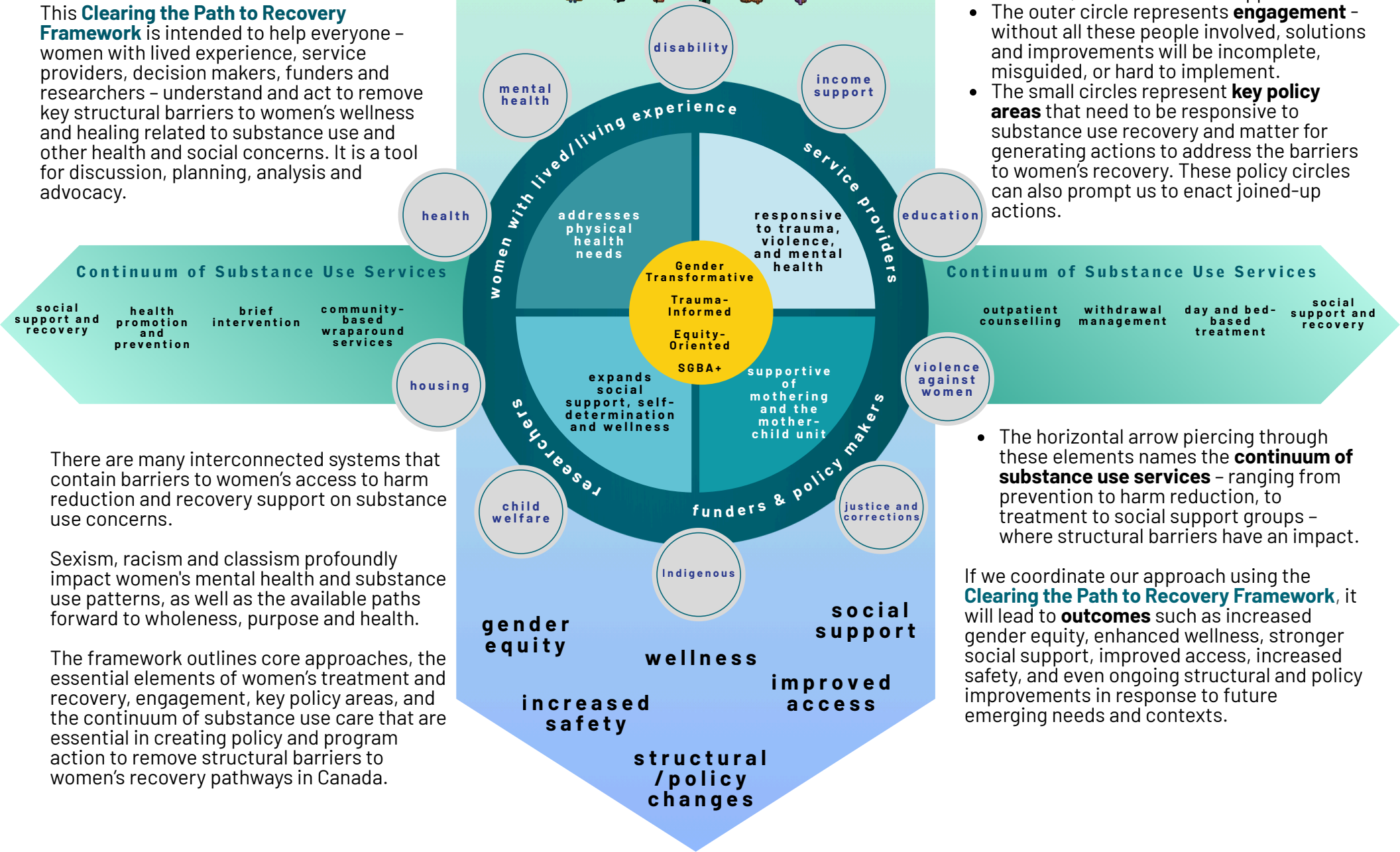
This **Clearing the Path to Recovery Framework** is intended to help everyone – women with lived experience, service providers, decision makers, funders and researchers – understand and act to remove key structural barriers to women's wellness and healing related to substance use and other health and social concerns. It is a tool for discussion, planning, analysis and advocacy.

There are many interconnected systems that contain barriers to women's access to harm reduction and recovery support on substance use concerns.

Sexism, racism and classism profoundly impact women's mental health and substance use patterns, as well as the available paths forward to wholeness, purpose and health.

The framework outlines core approaches, the essential elements of women's treatment and recovery, engagement, key policy areas, and the continuum of substance use care that are essential in creating policy and program action to remove structural barriers to women's recovery pathways in Canada.





The Framework Diagram Explained:

- At the centre there are **four key approaches** that we must use and evolve to hone the analyses of social and structural determinants of women's recovery.
- Surrounding these key approaches are **four elements of women's recovery** services that are essential for offering gender-informed, women-centred support.
- The outer circle represents **engagement** – without all these people involved, solutions and improvements will be incomplete, misguided, or hard to implement.
- The small circles represent **key policy areas** that need to be responsive to substance use recovery and matter for generating actions to address the barriers to women's recovery. These policy circles can also prompt us to enact joined-up actions.
- The horizontal arrow piercing through these elements names the **continuum of substance use services** – ranging from prevention to harm reduction, to treatment to social support groups – where structural barriers have an impact.

If we coordinate our approach using the **Clearing the Path to Recovery Framework**, it will lead to **outcomes** such as increased gender equity, enhanced wellness, stronger social support, improved access, increased safety, and even ongoing structural and policy improvements in response to future emerging needs and contexts.

Using the Clearing the Path to Recovery Framework as a Tool for Action

Below are some examples of how the core approaches, essential elements, and co-ordinated engagement can be applied to create policy and program action to remove structural barriers to women's recovery pathways in Canada.

Place focus on the mother-child unit

All too often child welfare and women's recovery are considered separately, creating programs and policies that set women and children on different pathways, supported by different departments, and using different principles. Approaches that serve women across the continuum of support and treatment, which facilitate the health and recovery of the mother without fear of apprehension or loss of custody are required as standard approaches.

Joined-up effort between sectors, departments, and government ministries is needed. This joined up work can be manifested in co-planning with families and coordinated policy that supports early attachment, and combats the racism and colonialism that has resulted in the over-representation of Indigenous mothers in the child welfare system.

Link housing, income security, food security and substance use support

Provision of basic income needs is an important step in removing income-related, housing, or food security barriers to wellness and recovery. Considering these policies in relation to each other, along with community supports is needed.

Supportive housing for women and families - that includes treatment, health care and recovery support is direly needed. For example, the Housing First model has shown how supportive services can be brought to people where they live, as an alternative to requiring abstinence as a condition for housing.

For women with substance use problems, the provision of housing assistance can support a health improvement and recovery path that offers stability for accessing treatment and recovery pathways, without loss of housing, friends, or child custody.

Value women's health, create integrated approaches

Sexism is evident in the overmedicalization of women experiencing depression and anxiety, the stigma aimed at women with substance use concerns, and a lack of systemic attention to the complex overlaps of gender-based violence and substance use.

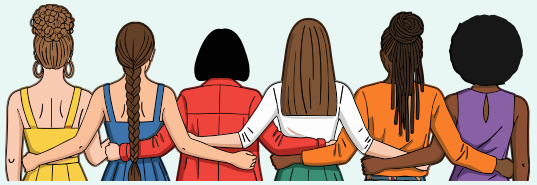
Sexism also contributes to a dearth of funding for women's health research and care, insufficient recovery and treatment options for women, and a lack of wraparound programming. The lack of integration of services addressing the overlapping issues affecting women who use substances ultimately can be traced back to the undervaluing of women's health. Addressing these root causes is increasingly important in order to reconstruct systems of response and form options to women seeking recovery.

Promote a social model of health and women's empowerment

The provision of community in all of its forms is a collective responsibility, but easily aided by good planning and sound policy. Adopting a social model of health is a step to removing the barriers to recovery that stem from isolation by providing a social safety net for women.

Support by governments and foundations for local community centres, women's resource centres, immigrant and refugee organizations, community kitchens, supportive housing, empowerment groups and Indigenous agencies is key to providing prevention and recovery routes for women with substance use concerns.

To learn more, see the Framework report



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