ALLIANCE TO END
HOMELESSNESS
IN THE CAPITAL REGION

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA: IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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CRD

Making a difference...together

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Supportive Housing Impact Assessment

Supportive housing in North America emerged from intersecting social, medical, and policy developments over several decades. For supportive housing to be successful, collaboration across all levels of government, healthcare, the social services sector, and the involvement of each and every one of us is needed.

This report is a supportive housing resource and is designed to provide information on guidelines, impact, and best practices. Further, this resource is designed to support conversations and encourage collaboration and dialogue in support of developing appropriate, safe, affordable housing throughout the region.

> When Vancouver Mayor Ken Sim said that he wanted to freeze development of new supportive housing in the city, what kind of housing did you picture? A quiet apartment building? A modest house on a tree-lined street? Was the sidewalk clean, with neighbours coming and going, saying hello? That probably wasn't what you imagined — but it should have been. Because, often, that's exactly what supportive housing is (Burrows & Greening, 2025).

As new research and updates to existing practices become available, this resource will be updated to reflect current knowledge and practice.

The Alliance to End Homelessness in the Capital Region

The Alliance to End Homelessness in the Capital Region (AEHCR) started in 2008 as the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (GVCEH) with a mission to end homelessness in the Capital Region. The AEHCR consists of local housing, health & social service providers, non-profit organizations, all levels of government, businesses, post-secondary institutions, the faith community, people with lived & living experiences of homelessness, and members of the general public. This diverse membership, referred to as the Alliance Partners, comes together to collectively address the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness in the Capital Region.

Our Vision:

A region, a province, and a country where everyone has a safe place to call home.

Our Mission:

To ensure experiences of homelessness in the Capital Region by 2030 are rare, brief, and non-recurring and that housing and supports are culturally adaptive, creative, caring, and person centered.

Indigenous Acknowledgement

The territory that we now refer to as the Capital Regional District has a long and storied history as the traditional territory of the Lkwungen (Lekwungen) and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples, and the Schian'exw (Beecher Bay), T'Sou-ke (Sooke), Elwha Klallam, and Makah First Nations.

We acknowledge and thank these peoples and communities for their continued stewardship, care, and leadership of these lands.

The disproportionate representation of unhoused, homeless, or precariously housed individuals from the Indigenous community points to deficiencies in the system to address the long-standing trauma.

The Alliance to End Homelessness in the Capital Region stands in solidarity with all the Nations to redress the colonial legacy that these lands and her people continue to endure.

Supportive Housing: A Short History

While the concept of supportive housing dates to 19th-century charitable initiatives, formal supportive housing in North America arose 1960s when care for individuals with mental illnesses shifted from psychiatric hospitals to community-based settings after the federal government encouraged policies to "deinstitutionalize" persons with mental illness. Though insufficient in number, several models of group homes and supervised residences were developed. In the 1980s, economic forces, the conversion and demolition of many inner-city SROs and a large reduction in federal housing subsidies saw an emergence of the "new homeless" for example, mothers with young children, veterans, and migrant farm workers (Glauber, 1996).

The origins of supportive housing in Canada are rooted in grassroots initiatives and policy shifts spanning the 1970s to 1990s, shaped by evolving approaches to mental health, addiction, and homelessness.

1970s: Early Foundations in Toronto

Toronto's Houselink pioneered supportive housing principles in the 1970s by prioritizing stable housing for individuals with mental health and addiction challenges, rejecting preconditions for tenancy. This model emerged alongside deinstitutionalization trends, though it lacked the structured services seen in later programs.

1990s: Vancouver's Radical Experimentation

Liz Evans' Portland Hotel Society (1991)

In Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, nurse Liz Evans began housing marginalized individuals with complex needs (e.g., untreated mental illness, substance use, HIV/AIDS) at the Portland Hotel. Her approach—offering unconditional housing without sobriety or treatment mandates— prefigured the term "Housing First." Evans observed that stability reduced drug use and mental health crises, demonstrating housing's role as a foundation for recovery.

While New York's Pathways to Housing (1992) popularized "Housing First" globally, Evans' work in Vancouver independently developed similar principles, emphasizing harm reduction and tenant autonomy.

Policy Formalization (2000s–2010s)

Toronto scaled supportive housing by relocating homeless individuals into private or social housing with voluntary supports through Streets to Homes (2005).

At Home/Chez Soi Initiative (2009–2013), funded by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, tested Housing First across five cities, generating robust evidence for its effectiveness with diverse populations, including Indigenous peoples and youth.

These efforts redefined homelessness interventions in Canada, shifting from conditional "staircase" models to rights-based housing access integrated with healthcare and social services.

What is Supportive Housing?

According to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2022), supportive housing lies on the housing continuum as one of the housing options available to Canadians.

Supportive housing offers individuals a place to live that is safe, secure, and home-like with 24/7 support and access to essential services such as health care and community resources. Support services often provided at a supportive housing site may include meals, housekeeping, and social and recreational activities. Supportive housing is designed to maximize independence, privacy and dignity for the individuals living there (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2022).

The 'housing continuum' is a concept used to describe the broad range of housing options available to help a range of households in different tenures to access affordable and appropriate housing. The concept enables to move away from a one-size-fits-all strategy, towards 'the range of housing options available to different households on a continuum.' The housing continuum includes homelessness, shelters and transitional housing, community housing, affordable rental, market rental, and homeownership. (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2022)

Supportive Housing: A Federal Definition

The federal government of Canada does not appear to have a single, standardized definition for supportive housing. However, supportive housing is generally described within federal initiatives like the National Housing Strategy and the Housing First approach as housing that combines affordable units with on-site or coordinated supports. These supports are designed to help individuals maintain housing stability and improve their quality of life, particularly for vulnerable populations such as those experiencing chronic homelessness.

Supportive Housing: A British Columbia Definition

In British Columbia, affordable housing programs include supportive housing, subsidized housing, and non-market rental housing. While each of these programs provides one type of housing in what is termed the housing continuum.

BC Housing defines supportive housing as housing which offers subsidized rentals (where rent is based on income) paired with on-site services for individuals at risk of or are currently experiencing homelessness. This includes vulnerable groups such as those with mental health and substance use challenges and people with disabilities (BC Housing, n.d). As well, in some supportive housing sites, operators use practices such as guest management policies and wellness checks to ensure housing is safe for tenants and staff. (BC Housing & British Columbia Ministry of Housing, 2024, January). Further, supportive housing provides stable accommodation for individuals experiencing homelessness, enabling them to rebuild their lives. (British Columbia Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs, 2019; BC Housing, 2022).

Additionally, BC Housing (2024) considers that a rental unit which is located on residential property that is operated by a supportive housing operator, is occupied by a tenant who has

been assessed by the operator as someone who is experiencing or at risk of homelessness and would benefit from housing stability support, has at least one tenant in the unit who has housing stability supports provided on-site by the operator accessible to them, and is not provided on a temporary basis to be a supportive housing rental unit.

Supportive housing has two distinct yet overlapping objectives; to provide a social supports as well as clinical supports. While there is overlap between these two objectives, a specific supportive housing will generally focus on one or the other objective, with non-profit organizations such as Pacifica and Our Place (Olympic Vista, Camas Gardens) operating housing that focuses on social supports and Island Health (McCauley Lodge) focusing on housing that has a clinical focus.

Under the BC Assessment's supportive housing property valuation regulation (Supportive Housing Property Valuation Regulation. BC Reg. 208/2008)[1], supportive housing is considered *class 3 – supportive housing*, allowing for reduced assessed values for eligible properties. Along with this eligibility, supportive housing operators prioritize stability for vulnerable groups and are required to provide health funding, long term housing stays[2], and onsite supports such as mental health services and life skills training.

While often considered a type of supportive housing, transitional temporary housing, the intermediate step between emergency crisis shelters and permanent housing designed to provide a safe and secure environment, will not be included in this supportive housing impact review. As transitional housing is temporary, it is not treated as supportive housing under British Columbia provincial law.

Supportive Housing: An Indigenous Definition

The Dual Model of Indigenous Housing is a Culturally Supportive Housing model that includes traditional foods, plants and medicines, Elder support, cultural activities, traditional healing practices, building community, family reunification, and Indigenous harm reduction programming for alcohol and substance use. Programming strengthens Indigenous self-identity, builds a sense of place, family, community and purpose (Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness, https://acehsociety.com/culturally-supportive-housing/).

It must be noted that, in British Columbia, there is a lack of information on Indigenous supportive housing in terms of guidelines, as well as impact of the Indigenous supportive housing in communities around the province. This is much needed research that is critically important and indispensable to undertake.

As changes occur in the homelessness serving and homelessness serving sector adjacent organizations the definitions for supportive housing will likely evolve.

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[1] It should be noted that any information provided by BC Assessment that is different from BC legislation, the legislation prevails.
[2] Long term health stays are defined as housing stays that are equal to, or greater than, 90 days.

Guidelines for Supportive Housing

Supportive housing guidelines in BC are shaped by legislative frameworks, operational standards, and collaborative partnerships. These guidelines include classification and valuation and are governed by the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA), the Residential Tenancy Regulation (RTR), and BC Assessment's supportive housing property valuation regulation. These guidelines address eligibility for supportive housing, tenancy regulations, and operational requirements and are to be followed by all .

While there has been confusion in the housing sector regarding supportive housing and there are some differences in the definition of supportive housing in different municipalities in the CRD; all housing designated as supportive via the RTR and BC Assessment must follow the regulations outlined in the RTA and RTR.

In 2024, the RTR was amended to include a definition of supportive housing units. A unit is considered to be supportive housing if it is (i) located on residential property, (ii) operated by a supportive housing operator, (iii) occupied by a tenant assessed by the housing operator to be experiencing/at risk of homelessness and would benefit from supportive housing, (iv) has at least one tenant who has accessible housing stability support, and (v) is not temporary. This definition precludes inclusion of transitional housing. The RTR amendment also included exemptions to the RTA including enforcement of quiet enjoyment (sections 28), landlord entry (sections 29) and guest restrictions (sections 30(1)(b), whereby a supportive housing operator is able to enter a resident's unit and enforce guest restrictions while not under regulations to provide quiet enjoyment [am. B.C. Regs. 249/2008; 278/2016, Sch., s. 2; 3/2024, s. 2.]. These exemptions are an attempt to balance tenant need with operational flexibility for organizations. Prior to February 2024, supportive housing operators were not able to enforce restrictive guest policies or enact wellness checks as these were prohibited under the RTA.

With the amendments to the RTR (2024), supportive housing operators can now conduct wellness checks and establish guest management policies. The wellness checks conducted, and guest management policies are expected to align with key principles/standards outlined in BC Housing's Operational Standards for Guest Management & Wellness Check Policies (2024) (BCH Operational Standards). The key principles outlined by BC Housing include (i) promoting a safe environment for the wellbeing of tenants and staff, (ii) upholding human rights through rights-based policies, (iii) using an equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging lens, (iv) ensuring policies are transparent, and (v) providing policies and processes for tenant feedback and complaint resolution for the supportive housing guest management and wellness check policies in place.

While supportive housing operators do not need to implement guest restriction policies, BC Housing requires a written guest management policy for supportive housing tenants and guests. The written guest policy is to establish parameters to support a safe and inclusive environment and set clear expectations for tenants and their guests. The guest management policy needs to provide for the comfort and security of everyone in the building and include methods to mitigate disruptive and harmful guest behaviour. Further, all tenants should be made aware of the guest management policies that are in place. To facilitate the creation of these policies a

limited list of measures is provided in the BC Operational Standards guide that supportive housing providers may draw from to create their guest management policies, including additional direction on the what the measure might contain.

BC Housing also requires a written wellness check policy. The wellness checks are expected to be used to confirm the health and wellbeing of the tenant. As such, the policy created should focus on the health and wellbeing of the supportive housing tenants and set clear expectations for wellness checks. The policy should also use non-judgemental language. The wellness check policy should be provided to all tenants upon move in. Wellness check policies created should respect the privacy rights and confidentiality of the tenant. Of note for BC Housing funded buildings with 24/7 supports, regular health and wellness checks for tenants must be conducted and include escalation procedures if a tenant has not been seen or heard from for an extended period not exceeding 48 hours, according to service agreement rules (BC Housing, 2020). The BC Operational Standards guide provides a examples of considerations providers should make when creating or revising wellness check policies.

Following the update to the RTR, the Province of British Columbia provided a residential policy guideline (Guideline 46, 2024) that further clarifies how the RTA applies to different types of housing. This guideline further clarifies the RTR definition of supportive housing. For example, Residential Tenancy Policy Guideline 46 (British Columbia Ministry of Housing, 2024) lists criteria regarding accessible housing stability support with examples. This guideline also provides information that supports the public and the RTB in determination of unit type that may be of use when the RTB is resolving tenant/landlord/housing organization disputes. Generally, the RTB does not resolve disputes that are related to quiet enjoyment, landlord entry for wellness checks and guest restrictions (policies). While all supportive housing falls under the RTA and includes the RTR amendments, some supportive housing operators may use a program agreement to outline program expectations and available services. Such program agreements do not exclude or override RTA requirements.

The 2024 amendments to the RTR were designed to clarify the definition of supportive housing and amend the RTA so that housing operators would have the ability to enforce guest policies and provide wellness checks. These changes have not been without controversy. There continues to be lack of precision when it comes to housing not being temporary, with ministry spokesperson Liam Butler stating that what counts as temporary will be decided on an individual basis. Further, some have argued that the "changes mean staff can confidently implement certain measures without the fear of possible legal challenges" (Skrypnek, 2024, February 21). However, supportive housing tenants no longer have the ability for dispute resolution if they feel the guest management or wellness check policies are untenable, potentially leading to feelings that they are not respected.

The Supportive Housing Framework

In addition to British Columbia Ministry of Housing and BC Housing guidelines and legislation in British Columbia, the British Columbia Ministry of Housing and BC Housing developed a framework (2024) with a set of guiding principles and key program elements, and roles and

responsibilities for BC Housing and supportive housing operators and their staff. The framework is intended to be used to "streamline existing social housing programs to improve administrative consistency and efficiency" (BC Housing, 2024, January, p.2). While the framework is to be used by supportive housing operators who receive funding through funding streams identified through the Supportive Housing Program Framework[3], supportive housing operators outside this network are not precluded from using the framework.

The guiding principles outlined in the framework include:

- Establishing supportive housing in communities with demonstrated need
- Resident-focused accessible housing and supports
- Transparent and accountable operations with reliable record keeping and a monitoring system
- Resident-focused services with support services that may be provided on-site or off-site
- A welcoming, safe and secure service environment where the health and safety of staff and residents is of highest importance
- An increase of affordable rental housing options
- Supportive housing that is financially, physically and environmentally sustainable
- Project partners who collaborate to improve program effectiveness

The key program elements for the framework focus on resident eligibility, rent, support services and operating and support services subsidies.

- Resident eligibility includes assessment of income and age. While the primary target population for supportive housing are adults, the eligibility requirements are flexible so that families and youth may also be housed provided appropriate approvals, accommodation and support services are available and are consistent with the supportive housing operator's mandate.
- A rent-geared to income (RGI) model is used to determine rent payments. Alternately, a flat rate that is appropriate to the target population in the community may also be used to determine rent payments. The support services provided should support residents get and maintain stable housing.
- Financial aid for the difference between the total approved operating expenses and revenues may be provided through a BC Housing operating subsidy

Roles and responsibilities for both BC Housing and supportive housing operators are provided in the framework. Housing operators are responsible for supportive housing management (property and resident), complying with guidelines, program standards and performance standards outlined in their operator agreement, resident record keeping, submitting reports and data, training and managing staff, provision of a service mandate, partnership development, and

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[3] Funding streams from British Columbia provincial and Canada federal sources included are the Provincial Homelessness Initiative (PHI Phase I, Phase II, SROs, MOUs), Rapid Response to Homelessness (RRH), Building BC: Supportive Housing Fund (SHF), Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI), Homelessness Action Plan (HAP and HAP Enhanced), and Complex Care Housing (CCH). The funding streams are outlined in Appendices 1 through 6 (Supportive Housing: Program Framework, 2024, January)

informing BC housing about critical incidents. For BC Housing roles and responsibilities see the Supportive Housing: Program Framework (2024, January, p. 6).

There is a reporting and review process for supportive housing operators who are funded through the included funding streams and includes several tools to collect qualitative and quantitative information. Information collected supports understanding of supportive housing provider's operational needs, allows for monitoring program success, assists with identification of emerging needs among people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, and aids in future program planning.

What are the Community Impacts of Supportive Housing

Research, impact studies, and evaluations have shown that supportive housing in British Columbia has had, and continues to have, significant positive impacts on residents and communities, particularly through the use of a housing-first approach where stable accommodation and wraparound services for residents are combined.

Supportive Housing Benefits

Supportive housing in British Columbia demonstrates significant positive impacts across individual well-being, community dynamics, and public systems, including economic benefits.

Supportive Housing: Residents' Benefits

The greatest benefits to supportive housing residents are well-being, with marked health and quality of life improvements, and stability. Further, supportive housing residents also benefit from employment and education leading to increased economic and social mobility. While most impacts are positive, health challenges for supportive housing residents are also present.

Positive impacts, with citations, include:

Resident Well-being and Stability.

Housing retention/Housing Stability

Up to 95% of residents in BC Housing-funded supportive housing remained housed after six months

89% still housed after one year
- BC Housing (2022)
- British Columbia Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs (2019, September 10)
- Vancity Community Foundation (n.d.)

94% of residents remain housed after six months in modular supportive housing
95% of BC Housing-funded residents maintaining housing for at least six months
81% housed for over a year.
This stability provides a foundation for addressing other challenges.
- BC Housing (2022)
- British Columbia Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs (2019, September 10)
- Vancity Community Foundation (n.d.)

Health improvements

On-site services reduce stigma and barriers to care for marginalized populations, such as people who use drugs or alcohol

  o MacKinnon, et al. (2022)

Supportive housing residents have 32% lower health costs compared to people experiencing homelessness

  o Vancity Community Foundation (n.d.)

56% reported better physical health

44% experienced fewer hospital admissions

39% saw progress in managing substance use issues

  o BC Housing (2022)
  o British Columbia Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs (2019, September 10)

44% improved mental health after six months

  o British Columbia Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs (2019, September 10)

Programs combining housing with intensive support services, such as Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams, have shown better outcomes in reducing addiction severity and improving mental health compared to traditional case management.

  o Johnston Consulting (2013)

39% saw progress in managing substance use issues

  o BC Housing (2022)
  o British Columbia Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs (2019, September 10)

40% of residents with substance use issues reported improvements six months after moving in, while 35% maintained stability (not worsening)

  o BC Housing (2022)

Evidence on reducing substance use through supportive housing is mixed. Some studies show a decline in alcohol use and hard drug consumption among participants, particularly when programs integrate harm reduction strategies.

Harm reduction approaches embedded in supportive housing are more likely to engage individuals with severe addictions but may not lead to complete cessation of substance use

  o Justice in Aging, National Alliance to End Homelessness, National Low Income Housing Coalition, & SPLC Action Fund (n.d.)

Permanent housing provides a foundation for long-term recovery from substance use and mental health challenges

  o Peng, et al. (2020)

Quality of life

84% noted enhanced overall well-being

76% of modular housing residents reported improved overall well-being,

  o BC Housing (2022)
  o Vancity Community Foundation (n.d.)

82% reported positive interactions with neighbours

  o BC Housing (2022)
  o British Columbia Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs (2019, September 10)
  o CMHC (2020, November 23)

76% of modular housing residents reported improved overall well-being

  o BC Housing (2022) Community Benefits of Supportive Housing
  o Vancity Community Foundation (n.d.)

Lower Corrections Rates
    Supportive housing residents have 32% lower correctional institution costs compared to
    people experiencing homelessness
        o Vancity Community Foundation (n.d.)

Employment and education (gains in economic and social mobility)
    43% of residents gained improved access to employment opportunities, while others
    pursued education or life-skills training (e.g., cooking, hygiene, and budgeting)
    Residents also report increased access to income
        o BC Housing (2018i)
        o BC Housing (2022)

   Resident Challenges.

Health Barriers
    72% of tenants reported their health needs were not adequately addressed in Kelowna
    supportive housing sites
        o BC Housing (2018d)
    Tenants reported transportation challenges to off-site healthcare facilities
    Tenants reported stigma from healthcare providers
        o Gibson, et al. (2023)
        o Szeto (2023, April 21)
    Although supportive housing can provide stability, it does not universally mitigate overdose
    risks
        o BC Housing (2022) Community Benefits of Supportive Housing

Disruptions
    Violence and disruptions in supportive housing is closely linked to guests in supportive
    housing
    • (BC Housing & British Columbia Ministry of Housing, 2024, January)

Supportive Housing: Community Benefits

There are multiple benefits for communities with supportive housing. Among these are reduced
public service costs, community integration and acceptance, contributions from supportive
housing residents and staff, investment in community, and potential increases in property values
and neighbourhood safety.

Positive impacts, with citations, include:

Reduced public service costs (cost effectiveness)
    Residents in supportive housing have 32% lower health and correctional costs compared to
    those experiencing homelessness
    Are 64% less likely to require ambulance services
        o BC Housing (2022) Community Benefits of Supportive Housing
        o Eberle, M., Kraus, D., Pomeroy, S. & Hulchanski, D. (2001, February)
        o Vancity Community Foundation (n.d.)
    Long-term studies note reduced reliance on emergency services
        o Gibson, et al. (2023)

- o   Vancity Community Foundation (n.d.)

Providing supportive housing costs less than addressing homelessness through emergency health and public safety services. Annual costs for unhoused individuals with mental illness average $55,000 in healthcare/corrections, compared to $37,000 for those in supportive housing
- o   BC Housing (2022) Community Benefits of Supportive Housing
- o   Eberle, et al. (2001, February).

Community Integration and Acceptance

83% of residents report positive neighbourhood interactions

77% had pre-existing neighbourhood connections, foster organic community integration and social cohesion

Community Advisory Committees often dissolve post-implementation due to fewer concerns/infrequent issues, reflecting neighbourhood acceptance
- o   BC Housing (2022) Community Benefits of Supportive Housing
- o   Community Benefits of Supportive Housing, CMHC (2020, November 23)

The presence of supportive housing can lead to increased awareness among neighbours about how to address concerns, promoting a collaborative approach to community safety
- o   BC Housing (2022) Community Benefits of Supportive Housing

Well-planned supportive housing blends into neighbourhoods and, over time, is associated with increased community acceptance and reduced stigma
- o   Vancity Community Foundation (n.d.)
- o   British Columbia Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs (2019, September 10)

Supportive Housing Resident Contributions

Clean Teams and resident volunteer programs mitigate neighbourhood concerns (e.g., drug paraphernalia)

Residents contribute to the local economy by spending at nearby businesses such as convenience stores, pharmacies, and restaurants

The construction and operation of supportive housing create local jobs; for every new residential unit built, an estimated 2 to 2.5 new jobs are created

Every dollar invested in supportive housing generates $4 to $5 in social and economic value for the community
- o   BC Housing (2022) Community Benefits of Supportive Housing

Supportive Housing Staff Contributions

Supportive housing staff and residents are often active in revitalizing and caring for their communities, contributing to neighbourhood safety and well-being
- o   BC Housing (2022) Community Benefits of Supportive Housing

Investment in Community

Every dollar invested in supportive housing generates $4 to $5 in social and economic value for the community
- o   BC Housing (2022) Community Benefits of Supportive Housing

Property Values and Neighbourhood Safety

A 2019 study of 13 BC supportive housing sites found that property values in 10 of the 13 areas either kept pace with or surpassed those in surrounding neighbourhoods, countering concerns about negative impacts on property values

Supportive housing directly reduces visible homelessness in communities, as residents are no longer homeless once housed

- o BC Housing (2022) Community Benefits of Supportive Housing
- o British Columbia Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs (2019, September 10)

Supportive Housing: Systemic Benefits

Supportive housing also provides systemic benefits for communities. These systemic benefits include a reduced strain on emergency shelters and hospitals, reductions in the number of individuals experiencing homelessness, increases in social return on investment, and government cost savings at all levels of government.

Positive impacts, with citations, include:

Reduced strain on emergency shelters and hospitals

Decreases hospital admissions by 44%

Reduces lengths of stay by 50% compared to shelter users

- o Victoria Tuesday, September 10, 2019
- o CMHC (2020, November 23) Community Benefits of Supportive Housing
- o Sts. Joachim and Ann Care Service (2024, July 1)

Supportive housing reduces viral loads by 22% and mortality by 37%, directly lowering transmission risks and improving population health metrics for vulnerable groups like those living with HIV

- o Peng, et al. (2020)

Increased stability and reduced experiences of homelessness

Supportive housing directly reduces homelessness by providing permanent housing with wraparound services. Residents show progress in accessing mental health support, education, and life skills.

- o BC Housing (2022) Community Benefits of Supportive Housing
- o Vancity Community Foundation (n.d.)

Supportive housing helps stabilize vulnerable populations, including those experiencing homelessness, women, children, youth, people with disabilities, and Indigenous peoples

- o BCH (2018a)
- o BC Housing (2021) BCH 2021/22 – 2023/24 Service Plan

Social Return on Investment (SROI)

For every dollar invested in supportive housing in British Columbia, approximately four to five dollars in social and economic value is created

This value is realized through reduced reliance on emergency health, justice, and social services, as well as improved well-being and stability for residents

- o BC Housing (2022) Community Benefits of Supportive Housing
- o BCH (2018a)
- o BCH (2018b)
- o BCH (2018d)

Government Cost Savings (savings provide opportunities for municipalities to fund preventive health initiatives)

Approximately 50% of the economic value generated by supportive housing returns to government through cost reallocations, primarily due to decreased use of emergency services, hospitals, justice, and child welfare systems
- BCH (2018a)
- BCH (2018b)

Residents' improved health, reduced interactions with law enforcement, and less frequent use of shelters and crisis services provide cost savings for the British Columbia government
- BCH (2018a)
- BCH (2018b)
- Eberle, M., Kraus, D., Pomeroy, S. & Hulchanski, D. (2001, February)

Supportive Housing: Challenges

Supportive housing is not without its challenges despite its critical role in addressing homelessness. There are regional disparities in service provision for supportive housing residents. Some communities are under-resourced and lack sufficient supportive housing. As well, wrap-around service support may be inadequate, lacking integrated healthcare, mental health support, or culturally appropriate services, particularly for Indigenous communities. Further, opposition to supportive housing projects persists due to public perception to misconceptions linking supportive housing to crime, despite evidence of reduced emergency calls. There are also coordination gaps as non-profit supportive housing operators face pressure to deliver "high-level care" with limited resources and staff burnout, generally leading to reduced care quality. Additionally, funding remains inadequate relative to the number of supportive housing units needed when considering the scale of homelessness in British Columbia.

Supportive Housing Scalability

Pilot projects indicate that building supportive housing is scalable. Modular housing projects that were built in Vancouver and Surrey provide scalable templates that are ready for use (BC Housing, 2022; British Columbia Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs, 2019, September 10)

The total number of supportive housing projects completed in British Columbia in the past five years is unavailable. However, there is some good news as 882 supportive housing units have been built between 2023 and 2024 (BC Ministry of Housing, 2024).

Future Requirements for Supportive Housing

Despite positive outcomes for supportive housing, this type of housing still remains a small proportion of the overall housing stock. For example, in Metro Vancouver only about two to three percent of all housing stock available is supportive housing, with similar percentages in other municipalities in British Columbia. Such low percentages highlight the need for more permanent, well-designed supportive housing units to meet the ongoing demand and replace temporary or inadequate accommodation.

While the impacts demonstrated are positive, it must be noted that there has been little research into the impact of supportive housing in British Columbia, with the majority conducted by BC Housing on the housing sites it funds. The majority of this research was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, limited research for the impact of supportive housing was located for housing that was not funded by BC Housing.

The 2021-2024 BC Housing service plan includes

> [m]easuring the percentage of homeless individuals accessing supportive housing and remaining housed six months after placement [to enable] BC Housing to monitor and assess the performance outcomes of programs and initiatives intended to break the cycle of homelessness. The longer an individual is housed, the greater the likelihood they will remain housed (BC Housing, 2021, p. 10).

This statement suggests that there is upcoming research into the impact of supportive housing. Future reporting on the impact of supportive housing will benefit from this additional information.

Supportive Housing Impact

Research on supportive housing in British Columbia demonstrates significant economic benefits by reducing public service costs, creating jobs, stimulating local economies, and improving the lives of vulnerable residents. Supportive housing residents experience greater housing stability, improved health and well-being, and better social integration. It not only addresses homelessness but also generates a high social and economic return for the province and its communities and is a critical intervention for improving health outcomes among marginalized groups in British Columbia. By addressing homelessness as a root cause of health crises, supportive housing shifts systems from reactive emergency care to cost-effective prevention, while improving population health outcomes.

However, the supply of supportive housing remains limited, highlighting the need for continued investment and expansion. Ongoing investment and innovation are required to address the persistent and continuing gaps in care for those who are tenuously housed and/or experiencing homelessness.

Best Practices for Supportive Housing

Best practices for supportive housing are two-fold, including both building supportive housing and operating supportive housing. Best practices for building supportive housing rely on several factors such as conducting a needs assessment, involving individuals with lived and living experience in the design of the building, finding a sustainable source of funding to complete the building, and engaging the community to create community acceptance of the project. Best practices for operating supportive housing include factors such as provision of appropriate wrap around supports for residents, creating a healthy living environment, and supporting and prioritizing community integration.

Best Practices for Creating Supportive Housing

Start with a Needs Assessment

Needs assessments provide information on the demand for units, services and programs, as well as an understanding of the individuals who require support services. The needs assessment can also provide information on the types of support services that are required and could include life skills, mental health counseling, crisis intervention, home maintenance, and opportunities for community involvement. The needs assessment can provide information that leads to a more in depth understanding of the vulnerable population that will access the supportive housing, as well as a greater understanding of individuals that make up that population.

A needs assessment also highlights the need for mobilizing existing partnerships and creating new partnerships to ensure that the support services required are available. Further, required support services gaps are exposed at a stage when finding solutions is not as difficult.

Specific Design Considerations for Indigenous Culturally Supportive Housing

Architectural design of Indigenous culturally supportive housing should contain local materials and be adaptable to climate change. It should also include flexible communal space such as open kitchens. Ceremonial spaces should be integrated into the design of the housing, with dedicated spaces for smudging, prayer, or land-based healing practices.

Indigenous culturally supportive housing should be a community-centred process, with community participatory approaches such as Nunavik's Inuit-led duplex designs (Rachelson, et al. 2019).

Create Relationships

Involve a variety of different partners and collaborators to ensure

- resources and multi-disciplinary support teams to support holistic care are available
- there is community capacity and resources to deliver the needed supportive housing services, including cultural and social programming and physical resources
- the supportive housing built is well-constructed, safe, accessible, and promotes social inclusion, affordability, and tenant dignity
- local community is consulted as this supports better community integration and acceptance between community members and supportive housing residents and staff

Partnerships between different levels of government, housing authorities, and social service providers help ensure the necessary resources are available at the right time, in the right manor. Creating partnerships with and involving local community helps ensure that fears in community are allayed, promoting integration and acceptance.

Funding

Higher and more consistent funding for supportive housing at government levels is needed to maintain on-site supports. As well, social assistance rates should be increased to improve

housing affordability for individuals accessing supportive housing (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2024, January 16).

Design Considerations for Community Acceptance

- Honor neighbourhood character by designing supportive housing projects to blend with the neighbourhood using compatible materials, spacing, and height limits.
- Protect and enhance privacy and security for residents and neighbours by enhancing privacy and security by applying Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles, including setbacks, screening, lighting, and passive surveillance, all while maintaining a welcoming design.
- Create on-site gathering spaces for supportive housing residents by incorporating a variety of shared amenities, such as playgrounds, daycare, and communal spaces, into the site plan based on the needs of residents. Provide whole community access to some/many/all of these spaces.
- Incorporate community amenities, like cafes, community art, or retail spaces, into the building design to encourage engagement and provide work opportunities,
- Ensure adequate parking for residents, including vehicles, bicycles, and mobility aids, to prevent street congestion and minimize impact on neighbours
  Adapted from British Columbia Housing, 2019.

Consider Neighbourhood Design

Brent Toderian, a former Vancouver chief city planner, provided a set of key factors for great neighbourhoods (Toderian, 2019).

Key Factors of a Great Neighbourhood.

1. **Accessibility**
   Meets all the basic needs of residents within a short distance. Key services like grocery stores, parks, and community amenities should be easily reachable on foot or by bike.
2. **Space for Movement and Health**
   Encourage active living. Provide easy access to places for walking, recreation, and social gatherings, promoting physical health and mobility.
3. **Diversity and Inclusion**
   Embraces people from a variety of backgrounds and economic statuses. True diversity is celebrated, not just tolerated.
4. **Green and Sustainable Design**
   Designed to reduce its carbon footprint through features like walkability, bikeability, and energy-efficient infrastructure, which together reduce reliance on fossil fuels and lower emissions.
- **Unique Character and Identity**
   Has a distinct personality that makes it memorable. Whether through its heritage, vibrant social scene, or unique features.

Adapted from Toderian, 2019.

Best Practices for Operating Supportive Housing

Specific Considerations for Indigenous Culturally Supportive Housing

Indigenous culturally supportive housing must prioritize Indigenous ownership, management, and governance to ensure alignment with cultural values and self-determination.

Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Design, and Non-Discriminatory Approach

Supportive housing operators should ensure that housing and supports are available to all eligible residents regardless of ethno-cultural background, disability, mental health status, gender identity, or sexual orientation. Supportive housing operators should also apply gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) principles to address intersecting identity factors (e.g., race, Indigeneity, disability) and create respectful environments. As well, there should be specific focus on First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and urban Indigenous populations that includes culturally safe practices which are integrated into service delivery.

Supportive housing operators should provide experiential peers to assist tenants transitioning from homelessness with emotional support, resource navigation, and in-home assistance.

Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered Approach

On-site services environments should be non-judgmental to meet residents where they are, without requiring sobriety or compliance as preconditions, and provide respectful and welcoming access to support services they need (e.g., mental health support, addiction services and community programs).

Supportive Housing residents care should be person-centred, allowing residents to define their own goals with staff support, allowing them to preserve their dignity and personal agency.

Safety protocols are in place to ensure gender-based violence dynamics and secure environments for marginalized groups, including 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, are provided.

Safety and Security

Supportive housing operators should have, implement and enforce safety protocols, including safe access, privacy, gender-specific spaces where possible, secure sleeping areas, and clear guest management policies.

Safety protocols provided should be reviewed regularly.

Further, supportive housing should be well-maintained housing and include timely repairs to ensure the environment has been "accident proofed" is free from threats to residents or staff.

Resident Focused Support Services

Supportive housing operators should provide on-site or linked support services tailored to residents' needs, encourage independence, and ensure a welcoming, secure environment with appropriate safety measures and privacy.

Supportive housing operators should provide residents with choice in where and with whom they live.

There should also be a focus on medication adherence and preventive care as it reduces long-term complications for supportive housing residents.

Support services provided should be flexible and adaptive to meet residents' changing needs, including accessibility accommodations for physical disabilities and cognitive challenges. As well, these supports should promote independence through dignity-focused support, helping residents build capabilities for stable living.

Access to social networks, employment opportunities, and essential services are provided and encouraged as they combat social exclusion and isolation.

Residents' Rights and Transparent Policies

Residents should have the right to choose services, supports and programs they want to engage in and when they want to engage.

All supportive housing policies affecting residents should be provided to residents, written and verbally if needed. These include, but are not limited to, guest policies and policies for conducting wellness checks.

Residents' tenancy rights should be upheld through transparent policies, complaint procedures, and adherence to the Residential Tenancy Act.

Staff Training and Communication

Supportive housing staff are provided training that includes cultural competency and anti-discrimination practices to ensure staff serve the diverse needs of residents effectively.

Supportive housing staff training is included in staff onboarding and allow for continuous improvement through coaching and mentoring opportunities.

Supportive housing operators should establish clear roles, responsibilities, and communication strategies, including regular meetings and documented protocols for staff.

Integrated and Coordinated Services and Supports

Supportive Housing services and supports should be coordinated across systems, involving collaboration between housing providers, community agencies and government partners.

Funding

Thought should be given to establish a dedicated supportive housing stream to provide operating funding at the beginning of a development for supportive housing organizations that operate housing for Canada's most vulnerable individuals (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2024, January 16).

Rent-geared-to-income (RGI) models, with subsidies ensuring affordability for low-income households should be prioritized.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Coordinated access to ensure equitable access to supportive housing should be implemented, connecting those most in need of housing to appropriate housing that meets their needs and include supportive housing. Coordinated access should not put a burden on applicants, such that applicants should be able to submit a single form to access supportive housing appropriate to their needs.

Policies and practices should be regularly reviewed and updated based on feedback, monitoring, and evolving resident needs.

Regular monitoring, performance reviews, and reporting should be performed to ensure accountability and service quality. This includes program, service provision, and staff reviews and evaluation.

The Benefits of Best Practices for Supportive Housing

There are many benefits to implementing best practices at supportive housing sites. Implementing the best practices provided can reduce homelessness. They may also improve housing stability, decreasing returns to homelessness.

Supportive housing residents' benefits from best practice implementation include, and are not limited to, enhanced physical and mental health outcomes, greater independence, employment possibilities and opportunities, social inclusion, and integration into community.

Community benefits from implementing best practices include, and are not limited to, lower public costs, strengthened community safety, and long-term cost efficiencies.

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