



ALBERTA
REAL ESTATE
FOUNDATION

Enabling Housing Choice Project

Preliminary Research

Report #2:

Housing & Equity

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Enabling Housing Choice Project encompasses all of what we call Alberta, and is the traditional and ancestral territory of many peoples, presently subject to Treaties 6, 7, and 8 including the Blackfoot, Cree, Dene, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux, Stoney Nakoda, and the Tsuu T'ina Nation and the Métis People of Alberta. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit who have lived in and cared for these lands for generations. We are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders who are still with us today and those who have gone before us. We make this acknowledgment as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on and that which we refer to in this research.

RDN is committed to supporting the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action, and believes in the need for meaningful engagement and consent with Indigenous peoples in the community. Colonialism is a current ongoing process, and we need to build our mindfulness of our present participation. As this project specifically touches on development and planning concepts which are built on a colonial system of governance and land use management, we also recognize that we have more work to unpack the systems in which we are upholding and working within.

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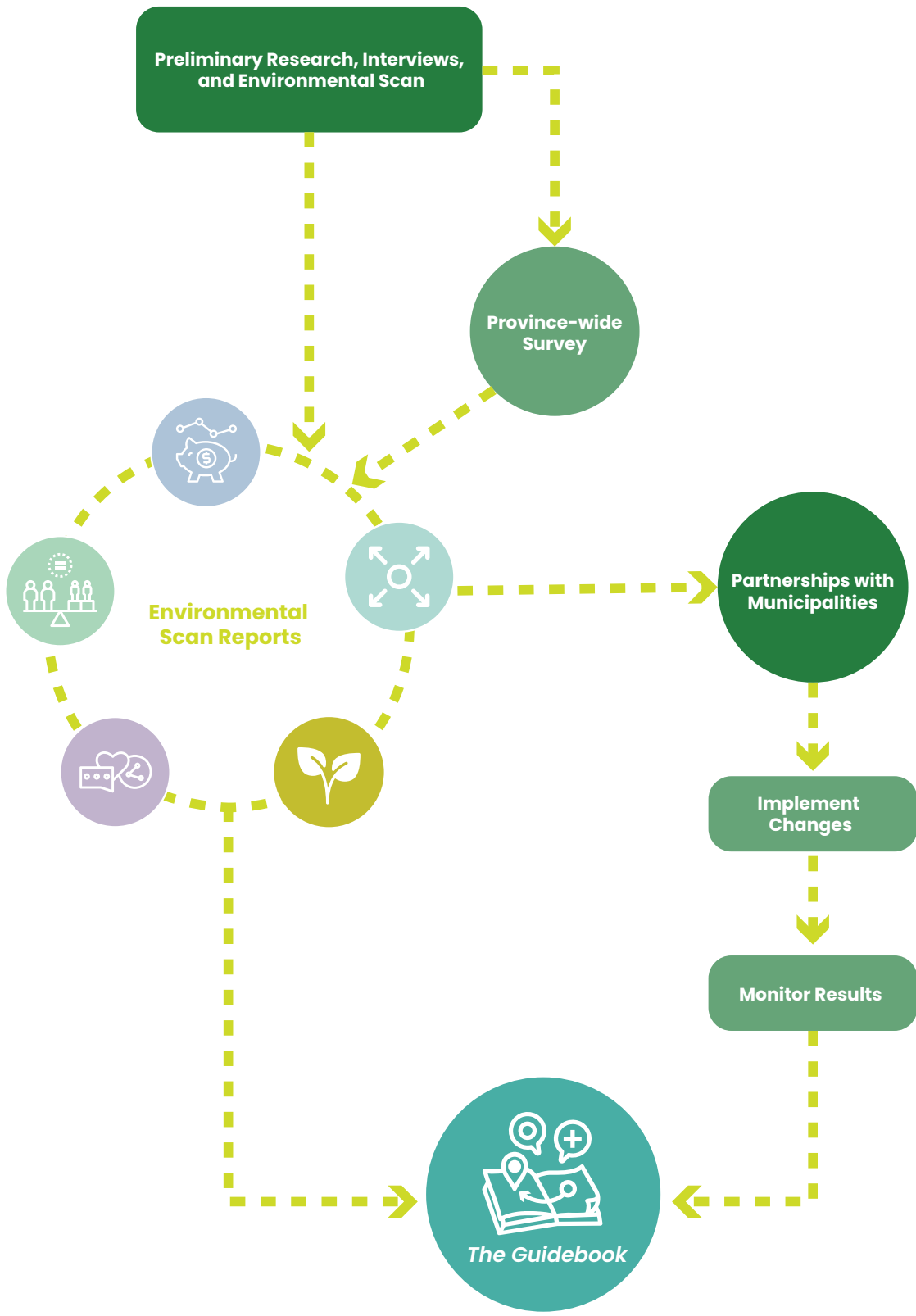
PROJECT CONTEXT

The Enabling Housing Choice Project aims to provide insight on how Albertan municipalities can support growth in their communities and help provide more housing options and choices to their residents through local policy changes and capacity building strategies. In the first stage of our project, we conducted a literature review, subject matter expert interviews, and case studies. We have broken our findings into five main themes in order to make the relevant information more easily accessible.

This report on Housing and Equity, along with our other four themed reports, can be used by municipalities and communities to help better understand the complexities of housing choice and to help guide the development of equitable policies and strategies. It is important to note that all these themes intersect with each other. A holistic approach to enabling housing choice that considers all of these themes is required to make meaningful change that positively impacts various groups and their unique needs within a community. These preliminary findings will inform the next phases of our project, including the creation of our Guidebook for Enabling Housing Choice.

In this report, we will explore the the relation between housing, policies, and equity by discussing:

- » The cultural barriers to equitable housing choice and diversity;
- » The potential strategies to implement inclusive housing diversity; and
- » The unique obstacles faced by marginalized communities when accessing housing and planning for equity seeking groups.



OVERVIEW

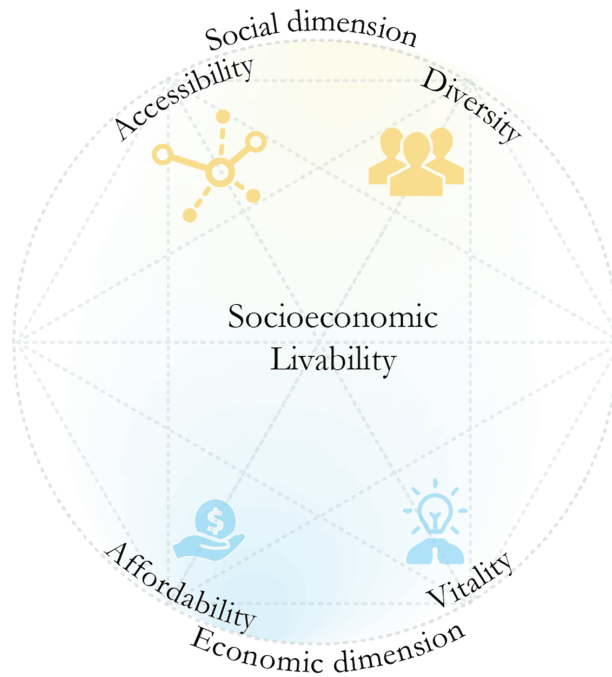
It is a human right to have adequate housing (Un-Habitat, 2014), but more than 1.6 million Canadian households lived in core housing need in 2018 (Statistics Canada, 2020).

“ CORE HOUSING NEED IS DERIVED IN TWO STAGES. THE FIRST IDENTIFIES WHETHER THE HOUSEHOLD IS LIVING IN A DWELLING CONSIDERED UNSUITABLE, INADEQUATE OR UNAFFORDABLE. THE SECOND STAGE ESTABLISHES WHETHER THE HOUSEHOLD HAS AFFORDABLE ACCESS TO SUITABLE AND ADEQUATE ALTERNATIVE HOUSING BY COMPARING THE HOUSEHOLD’S TOTAL INCOME TO AN INCOME THRESHOLD BASED ON LOCAL HOUSING COSTS” (STATISTICS CANADA, 2020).

Adequate and affordable housing means that housing is safe and suitable for its residents, with housing costs being less than or equal to 30% of a household’s total before-tax income (Statistics Canada, 2020). While many Albertans struggle with finding housing that is affordable, adequate, and suitable for their needs, marginalized communities can face additional obstacles. For example, visible minority groups are almost two times as likely to be in core housing need, while over 37% of seniors living alone are in an unaffordable home (Statistics Canada, 2020).

This is partly due to certain policies and regulations that influence housing that does not consider them, as well as broader socio-economic dimensions like accessibility, diversity, affordability, and vitality, as shown in the diagram to the right. Focusing on equity means planning for all residents so that everyone can obtain housing that meets their individual needs.





Social and economic qualities of spatial livability demonstrate the complexity of livability. (Martino et al., 2021)

All of these dimensions of social and economic qualities play into the concept of equity. Equity is a complex matter, and there are multiple nuances that can be applied to it. In general, there are typically two approaches to equity that inform municipal policy. Firstly, municipalities need to ensure their policies do not discriminate against charter protected groups at a minimum (Agrawal et al., 2021). An example of problematic policies can include requiring minimum dwelling sizes, which has been used to exclude lower income people who cannot afford to buy or develop a larger home. Applying an equity perspective and including equity measures can help municipalities move in a positive direction.

“EQUITY MEASURES ARE PROCESSES, SYSTEMS, OR ACTIONS THAT REMOVE INEQUALITIES OR BARRIERS TO INCLUSION AND INCREASE EQUALITY OF OUTCOMES” (CITY OF EDMONTON, 2021).

One way to begin the conversation of equity when developing new plans or regulations is to create a space where staff can explore equity and define it as a team before launching plans with the public or drafting policies. This can help ensure project staff are on the same page prior to communicating with the public. However, before changes can be made for more equitable municipal policy, municipalities must understand the barriers to housing in relation to the inequalities at play.

CULTURAL BARRIERS TO HOUSING DIVERSITY

Policy can play a major role in both enabling and prohibiting housing development. There is a history of Land Use Bylaws being used as a discriminatory tool at different levels in Alberta, creating both racial and economic barriers. In this section we will discuss cultural barriers affecting discriminatory policies that hinder housing choice.

Zoning is a method municipalities often use to divide land into separate uses, state where buildings can go, and explain how buildings can look. Discriminatory policies can be seen in practices such as exclusionary zoning which sets “particularly high standards for what is permitted in residential areas, thereby making them inaccessible for some social groups” (Skelton, 2012, p. 4).

For example, creating Land Use Bylaws that require minimum house sizes on a single parcel can limit smaller homes from being developed. This is a method of social engineering that discourages low-income people from building more modest homes and displaces them from certain areas in a community. Exclusionary zoning often prioritizes certain privileged groups living in single-detached homes (Doberstein et al., 2016).

As seen in the Housing Wheel Model to the right, housing needs can differ between individuals and can change at different points of an individual’s life (CMHC, 2019). There is no set housing path or goal that works for everyone in society. There are common misconceptions that housing other than a single-detached home is for lower income individuals. This is not always the case as many times groups such as young individuals, temporary workers, or seniors prefer other forms of housing because they do not want to be bound by the maintenance of detached housing, prefer smaller housing footprints, or prefer a different lifestyle. When there are different forms of housing, there are more options for residents to choose what works best for them. This can help create a more equitable and inclusive housing market.



The Wheelhouse Model (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2019)

IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE HOUSING CHOICES

Municipalities can work to implement a diversity of housing options to help break down some of the barriers faced by marginalized groups when accessing housing. Zoning and land use policies can be a major tool in reducing barriers and increasing housing choice. Zoning is the main tool that each municipality uses to regulate land uses. It is directed by the goals and objectives laid out in a community's Municipal Development Plan, which guides development and strategies from a high level perspective. Because of its prescriptive nature, zoning can be a way to prioritize different things, like setting density minimums in an area or separating land uses. It can play a role in both inhibiting or promoting certain types of development.

SOME WAYS THAT ZONING CAN BE USED TO BROADEN HOUSING OPTIONS AND PROMOTE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ARE:

- » Allowing gentle density increases, which can receive less community pushback relative to more significant increases in density;
- » Treating all residential uses as a universal term that applies to any form of development that is residential, without distinguishing different types of residential housing (such as differentiating affordable housing from market housing); and,
- » Encouraging intensification and redevelopment and prioritizing Main Street revitalization.



GENTLE DENSITY

Housing options can be increased by creating more accessible and affordable typologies (ACT, 2011). Oftentimes, existing residents oppose more accessible and affordable housing forms, such as higher density development in their neighbourhood. One way to combat this is to implement gentle density, or promoting certain types of development.



GENTLE DENSITY IS ADDITIONAL DENSITY THAT HAS A MINIMAL IMPACT ON A NEIGHBORHOOD WHILE PROVIDING FOR ADDITIONAL HOUSING OPTIONS SUCH AS SECONDARY SUITES, BACKYARD SUITES, AND INTERNAL CONVERSIONS IN EXISTING SINGLE-UNIT HOMES" (CITY OF HALIFAX, 2021).

Often, there are already secondary dwellings on a site zoned for a single-detached home like garden suites, which are dwellings with their own living space, typically in the backyard of single-detached homes, semi-detached homes, or row houses. However, these secondary suites may not be apparent because they are often illegal suites constructed without development permits from the municipality. Municipalities can work to not only permit secondary suites within their zoning regulations but promote them as a way to provide more housing options within existing neighbourhoods.

Although gentle density can aid in implementing higher density housing in moderation, depending on a community's housing situation, there may not be the time to prioritize incremental density changes over rapid action to address serious housing needs. Urgent action is required for many municipalities to help their vulnerable populations.

TREATING RESIDENTIAL TYPES AS EQUALS

Another way to improve housing options could be to treat more diverse residential development typologies as equals. Currently in Alberta, many Land Use Bylaws make distinctions between different types of housing, and allow different forms of housing in different areas. For example, many zones may only allow single-detached residential units, while not allowing more dense forms of housing development. An alternative to this approach is to classify all residential as a single use, and apply regulations on densities in different zones. This approach highlights that housing is housing no matter what type of housing it is, which may open up barriers for different forms of housing to be established, creating more inclusivity for the housing market.

An example of this is seen with the Municipal District of Lesser Slave River, who recently underwent a Land Use Bylaw renewal to open up their uses and reduce the number of zones. In this process they simplified residential uses into just two categories: Residential Serviced (RS) and Residential Unserviced (RUS). The difference between these two zones

is related to the type of servicing, whether there is municipal water and wastewater services to the parcel, but does not affect the type of housing allowed.

The chart below shows the permitted used for the Residential Serviced zone, highlighting the diversity of housing types allowed including single-detached dwellings, semi-detached dwellings, group homes, guest houses, garage suites, and garden suites. Because of this zoning change, Lesser Slave River was able to create a more inclusive zoning bylaw and encourage housing diversity.

PERMITTED USES

7.1.2 The following uses* shall be permitted, with or without conditions, provided the application complies with the regulations in this district and this [Bylaw](#):

- » Accessory Building(s) to Permitted Uses
- » Bed and Breakfast Establishment – *up to three (3) guest rooms*
- » Community Garden
- » Community Supported Agriculture
- » Dwelling, Semi-Detached
- » Dwelling, Single-Detached
- » Garage Suite
- » Group Home – *up to six (6) persons*
- » Guest House
- » Hobby Greenhouse
- » Home Occupation – *up to three (3) employees on-site*
- » Public Utilities
- » Recreational Vehicle – Park Model
- » Secondary Suite

Permitted Uses for Lesser Slave River's Residential Serviced Zone (M.D. of Lesser Slave River, 2021).

INFILL, REDEVELOPMENT AND REVITALIZATION

Housing and land development costs are informed by both the costs to build housing as well as the costs to service said housing with amenities, infrastructure, and services. By using existing infrastructure, intensification and redevelopment effectively uses existing land and services which in turn contributes to housing affordability (ACT, 2011). Instead of segregating land uses, intensification - often called infill - and redevelopment can be done through thoughtful consideration of good design and regulations.



INTENSIFICATION IS DEVELOPMENT THAT ALLOWS FOR MORE PEOPLE TO CONNECT, WORK AND PLAY WITHIN THE EXISTING URBAN BOUNDARY. IT HAPPENS WHEN WE RE-DEVELOP, EXPAND AND/OR RE-PURPOSE EXISTING AREAS, BUILDINGS OR VACANT LANDS” (BUILDING BARRIE, 2018).

Segregating land uses can also become costly, as this segregation may force people to travel far to various places to have their basic needs met. If there is more infill and increased density in an area, people can make better use of public transportation and existing infrastructure.



PLANNING FOR EQUITY SEEKING GROUPS

There are a variety of dynamics at play when looking to increase diverse and equitable housing choices within a community. Focusing on those most affected by housing policies due to societal discrimination and barriers is required when working to enable equitable housing choices. No ‘one policy fits all’ approach can be applied to marginalized groups and where they live; they all have different obstacles and experiences. However, our goal is to provide knowledge and a starting point to enable equity focused discussions and policy changes in Albertan communities. Intersectionality is important to note because although there are groups of people going through the same experiences, they can still be battling different barriers.

HOUSING FOR IMMIGRANTS, REFUGEES & NEWCOMERS

Context

There are different classes of immigrants, and depending on the classification of immigrant type, some have more or less difficulty finding housing. Many newcomers often face displacement from their culture, environment, and their overall way of life when moving from their home countries. Refugees face additional barriers, particularly financially, because they are escaping from war, persecution, or natural disaster instead of leaving on their own accord. Many immigrants and refugees find themselves feeling isolated and face barriers in finding housing appropriate for their needs.

Actions

Supporting smaller multi-sectional corporations, such as businesses, nonprofits, and landlords, and encouraging collaboration can provide newcomers with the resources they need to find housing and settle well in Canada. There may be instances where local businesses and landlords wish to aid in newcomer resettlement; however, they may not have the knowledge, tools, or financial means to do so. Many faith based organizations desire to help immigrants and refugees rebuild their lives in Canada, but their resources and expertise can only be expanded so far (Rose. 2019). These smaller groups are able to form trusting relationships with newcomers because of their size, having more opportunities to interact with one another; thus, if municipalities can help foster the knowledge and resources they need, newcomers can get the help they need with the people they trust.

An example of a successful partnership can be seen with the Resettlement Assistance Program. The Resettlement Assistant Program is a contribution program helping newcomers from all over Canada which provides income support and assistance for a range of essential services (Government of Alberta, 2022). There are challenges with



landlords rejecting and discriminating against newcomers because of their immigrant and refugee status. However, because the Resettlement Assistance Program had cultivated relations with local landlords over time, they often “make special accommodations” (Rose, 2019, p. 11), such as waiving credit checks for new immigrant and refugee tenants. Through this partnership, newcomers are able to have access to an inventory of affordable and adequate housing (Rose, 2019). When collaborating with other groups, municipalities can build more capacity and work together to make housing equitable for immigrants and refugees.

HOUSING FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Context

Each Indigenous community is unique and faces challenges in housing due to the actions of oppressive colonial government legislation, processes, and regulations in Canada. The challenges to housing related problems are deeply intertwined with the “histories of colonization of Indigenous peoples in Canada” and the continued marginalization of Indigenous peoples through existing systemic and institutionalized barriers (NWAC, 2019, p. 2).

Housing insecurity is even more prevalent among Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals because of gender-based discrimination and violence. Although many problems are intertwined with housing insecurity for Indigenous women, three main factors contribute to the housing-related issues: colonization, patriarchal systems, and the effects of intergenerational trauma. Policies focusing on housing solutions lack the awareness of “Indigenous ways of knowing” and take on eurocentric concepts that “neglect the uniqueness of Indigenous peoples’ housing needs” (NWAC, 2019, p. 10). Because of the intersectionality of this problem, any solutions that seek to address housing insecurity for Indigenous women should recognize “the complex social, historical, economic, and legislative issues that contribute to these experiences” (NWAC, 2019, p. 2).

Indigenous peoples struggle with homelessness due to complex issues stemming from a variety of dimensions, including historical displacement, spiritual disconnection, cultural disintegration and loss, and harm escape and evasion (NWAC, 2019). Indigenous communities are still affected by the Indian Act since they cannot hold any securities on the reserve land, which causes a scarcity of jobs and a depleted economy. Much of the intergenerational trauma is also not understood as many people who are homeless have suffered from sexual or physical abuse.

Actions

Indigenous experiences are unique from eurocentric views and unique to each Indigenous individual; thus, opening the conversation to understand the culture and perspectives would allow municipalities to comprehend what is needed in the housing policies for Indigenous peoples. There are constitutional responsibilities that need to be performed because the marginalization of Indigenous people starts from the practice of institutionalized policies and colonial practices (NWAC, 2019). Understanding that this challenge is intersectional will help in creating equitable solutions.

Municipalities must create relationships with their Indigenous communities to properly address these problems. Many First Nation communities are reluctant to speak with municipalities because they are concerned that their issues will not be heard and will be offloaded to other levels of government. However, Indigenous communities want to be a part of the regional economy. To help foster this relationship, municipalities need to understand that the relationship building is a commitment and they will need help through an Indigenous-led process. Three main agreements that can be implemented between municipalities and Indigenous communities can be regional economy plans, service agreements, and land use planning agreements. Through these agreements, municipalities can start to build the trust and respect needed with Indigenous communities to move towards more equitable housing.



Chiefs of the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations gathered at Edmonton's City Hall with Mayor Don Iveson to commemorate Treaty 6 Recognition Day (Alberta Native News, 2014).

HOUSING FOR SENIORS

Context

Municipal policies need to support residents at various stages of their lives to ensure residents have choices that meet their diverse and changing needs. This is a major consideration of the concept of aging in place, which is about creating inclusive communities that accommodate anyone's needs regardless of age, ability, and income. Implementing aging in place can allow seniors to remain "living in their community, with some level of independence, rather than in residential care" (Wiles et al., 2011, p. 357). Seniors may not need the assistance of a senior centre and only desire to downsize because of mobility limitations (IDEA, 2022). Establishing a diversity of housing and care options available in a community can allow senior populations to stay within their communities, even as their needs change.

Actions

A community that has an adequate supply and distribution of assisted living facilities and smaller housing units can help retain senior couples or individuals in a community. Communities must try to create age-friendly neighbourhoods that allow for safe and diverse transportation options, including walking and transit, and access to services because these infrastructures and services will be used by everyone (CMHC, 2020). Additionally, aging in place enhances location efficiency which is



THE DELIBERATE PLACEMENT OF HOMES, JOBS, SHOPPING, ENTERTAINMENT, PARKS AND OTHER AMENITIES CLOSE TO TRANSIT STATIONS TO PROMOTE WALKING, BIKING AND TRANSIT USE" (LAW INSIDER, 2022).

Because aging in place encourages access to different amenities, transportation, and housing, location efficiency is heightened which means communities can use resources more effectively and live in a more sustainable way.

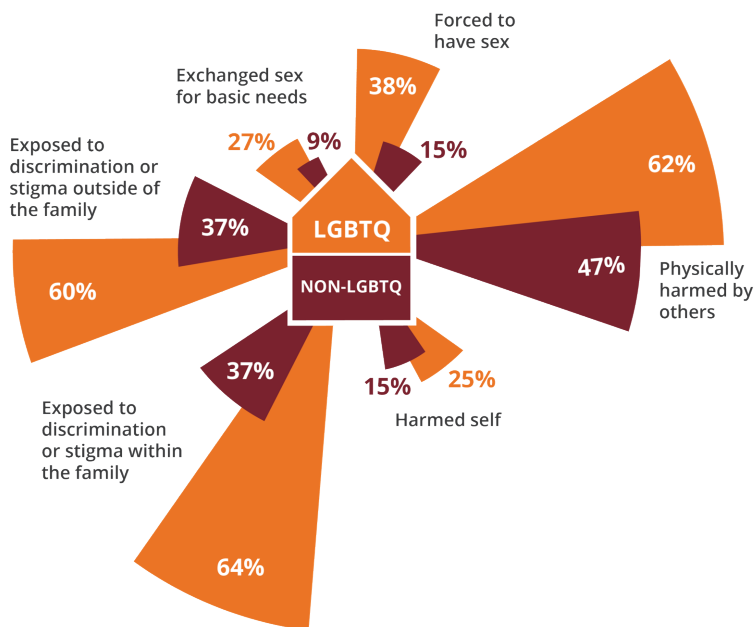
It is important to provide housing options for seniors because 30% of Canadian seniors are at "risk of becoming socially isolated" (Government of Alberta, 2022) which can be damaging to their physical and mental health. Ensuring housing policies support the concept of aging in place can help communities retain and attract youth and middle aged folks as well. This has externalized benefits, as it can help keep families together, increase community ties, and allow seniors to keep their social supports (Wiles et al., 2011).

HOUSING FOR LGBTQ2S+ COMMUNITIES

Context

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and two-spirit (LGBTQ2S+) individuals have historically been overlooked and discriminated against in regards to housing. In its 2017 report, the National Housing Strategy (NHS) identified: “LGBTQ2S+ people as one of the twelve ‘vulnerable groups’ that experience barriers to finding and maintaining adequate housing in Canada” (McDowell, 2021, p. 9). A significant barrier to housing for LGBTQ2S+ individuals is discrimination. Although progress has been made to create a more inclusive culture regarding the LGBTQ2S+ community, homophobia and transphobia are still prevalent and directly impact their ability to obtain stable housing (McDowell, 2021). Many queer individuals find themselves ‘closeting’ themselves in order to avoid renter or homeowner discrimination which comes at the expense of their own well-being and mental health.

LGBTQ2S+ Canadians also have been overrepresented in the homelessness population, particularly with LGBTQ2+ youth, in which nearly 1 out of every 3 homeless youth identify as LGBTQ2+ (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2019). Part of the disproportionate percentage of homeless LGBTQ2+ youth is because many are forced to leave their homes after ‘coming out’ to their families, then face discrimination finding housing, work, or education (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2019).



Graphic statistically shows the difference of what LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth face during homelessness (Morton et al., 2018).

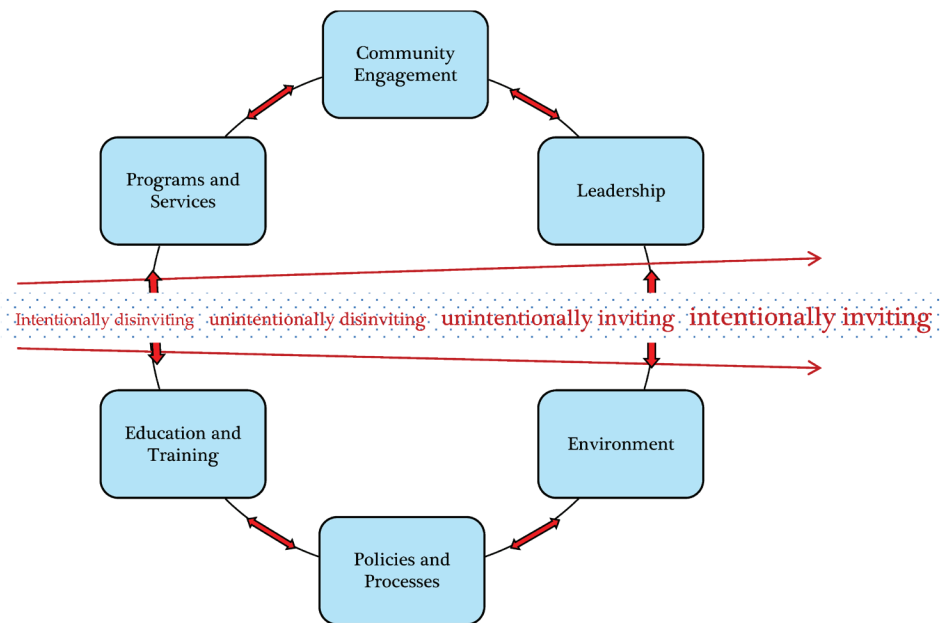
LGBTQ2S+ adults face additional challenges as they move to later stages of their lives. Canada has a history of limited legal protections related to sexual orientation and gender identity, so many older LGBTQ2S+ adults avoid senior housing programs because of the lived systematic discrimination and harassment they have faced (Redden et al., 2021). Although Canada has added policies regarding LGBTQ2S+ populations

and their housing needs, older LGBTQ2S+ adults still fear discrimination and rejection of housing because of past norms and legislation. Many LGBTQ2S+ individuals feel unsafe when seeking out long-term care or assisted living facilities. It is important to note that LGBTQ2S+ seniors still face the same barriers as any other senior, with the added barriers and fears caused by discrimination of the community.

Actions

To create more equitable housing policies for LGBTQ2S+ individuals, municipalities can collaborate with housing providers to incorporate anti-discriminatory practices supported by actions to create spaces of safety and inclusion. Many times LGBTQ2S+ residents feel as though anti-discriminatory policies in place are often not reinforced by housing providers (Redden et al., 2021). These practices should be supported by actions like training and policy enforcement so that it is clear discriminatory attitudes are not accepted.

Housing programs for LGBTQ2S+ individuals should also be flexible and responsive and partake in aging in place principles so that individuals can stay with their support systems since there is a “general distrust of social supports” (McDowell, 2021, p. 16) within the LGBTQ2+ community. Often, the discrimination LGBTQ2+ individuals face becomes acts of violence against them even within government systems such as accessing shelters, policing, or mental health services (McDowell, 2021). If there are systematic anti-discriminatory policies and practices in place, LGBTQ2S+ individuals may feel like they can rely on housing programs and find the housing they need that is safe and affordable.



Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, non-binary, and intersex (2SLGBTQ+) home care access and equity framework (Daley et al., 2020).

HOUSING FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Context

There is a lack of housing choice in many communities, and even more so for people with disabilities.



A DISABILITY IS ANY CONDITION OF THE BODY OR MIND (IMPAIRMENT) THAT MAKES IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE PERSON WITH THE CONDITION TO DO CERTAIN ACTIVITIES (ACTIVITY LIMITATION) AND INTERACT WITH THE WORLD AROUND THEM (PARTICIPATION RESTRICTIONS)” (CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, 2022).

There are many different types of disabilities, such as those that impair a person’s vision, movement, communication, et cetera. Disabilities come with many complexities as people with the same disabilities can be affected in different ways.

The Alberta Building Code is based on minimum standards, not ideal accessibility measures, as many of the policies are made when necessary and not premeditated (Voice of Albertans with Disabilities, 2019). This can be extremely limiting when considering income and affordability, as nearly 70,000 individuals in Alberta are living on the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped program (AISH) (Fletcher, 2020). A part of the problem lies in that developers often do not have the knowledge to build accessible homes nor is this a priority (Imrie, 2005). Additionally, many municipalities across Alberta struggle to alleviate accessibility barriers because of a lack of financial resources or difficulty with aging infrastructure (Voice of Albertans with Disabilities, 2019).

Actions

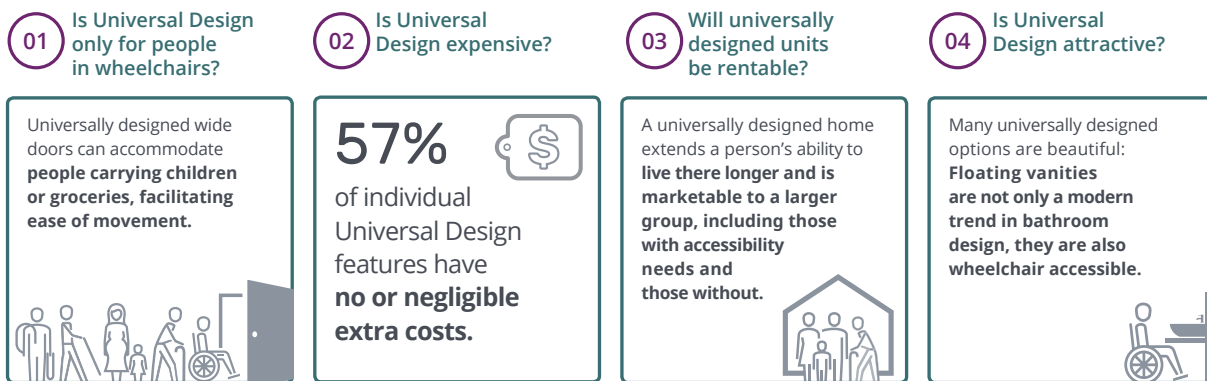
Municipalities can go one step further than simply requiring compliance to the minimum codes. For example, the Alberta Building Code’s barrier free code requirements for bathrooms are specifically designed for public washrooms (Tse, 2017). Instead, the code should also make specific policies for residential bathrooms. This could include policies such as a requirement for residential bathrooms to have a turning diameter of 1500mm, or greater would considerably help the bathroom be more wheelchair accessible (Tse, 2017). Because many municipalities enable policies for people with disabilities as they see the problem occur, it is difficult to find wheelchair accessible housing, and when there is, there is a minimal choice in the type and location of housing.

Larger municipalities are able to implement bigger changes because of their larger capacities, like the City of Edmonton that implemented their Accessibility for People with Disabilities Policy in 2019 (City of Edmonton, 2019). However, there is still a lot of work to be done regarding accessibility housing in Alberta. The City of Vancouver (2022) has

their own policies, including an Accessibility Task Force which gives them the authority to enforce accessibility measures. Vancouver’s Accessibility Task Force meets regularly to work on their accessibility strategy to make their infrastructure, facilities, and services more accessible and inclusive for everyone. Bringing together municipalities, disability networks, and builders is key in creating guidelines for inclusive housing.

Municipalities must move away from believing specialized housing is adequate only for people with disabilities but instead create housing that is accessible for everyone. There needs to be more discussion on the ‘right to housing,’ especially for more vulnerable populations, because housing is a human right (Un-Habitat, 2014). This can start with awareness and education but must be elaborated into policy, especially policy that is more objective, like stating that a percentage of a certain number of units need to be accessible. This provides clear direction for decision makers and developers and puts importance on accessibility and the vulnerable people in the community.

Municipalities and housing providers must understand the different degrees of accessible housing. VISIBLE housing is housing that is designed with “basic accessibility features that provide easy access on the main level for everyone” (VisitAble Housing Canada, 2022). This includes a no-step entrance, having a washroom on the main floor, and wider hallways (CMCH, 2016). Barrier free design are standards that allow for “proper and safe access and use of buildings, facilities, and open areas” (Tse, 2017, p. 11). This aids in creating more accessible places; however, universal design is the best concept for creating holistically accessible housing. “Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability” (National Disability Authority, 2022). When housing is created for people with disabilities, housing is created for everyone.



Combating common questions about Universal Design, this diagram demonstrates the viability and feasibility of this concept (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2019).

CASE STUDY

To see how equity is implemented in action, we explored the City of Edmonton's Zoning Bylaw Renewal Initiative and its focus on equity. Taking advantage of creating a new bylaw, The City of Edmonton decided to properly address the unique needs of all their citizens by analyzing their zoning bylaw through an equity perspective. By looking at Edmonton, we are able to understand the processes on how to make municipal bylaws more socially aware and equitable in a variety of communities across Alberta.

EDMONTON'S ZONING BYLAW UNDER THE PERSPECTIVE OF EQUITY

Around 2018, the City of Edmonton started its work on creating a new Zoning Bylaw to support the goals of its City Plan (Municipal Development Plan). Initially, the project was looking at increasing flexibility and efficiency. At a later date, the project was chosen as a pilot to apply the Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) perspective to ensure new regulations, policies and processes have minimal discriminatory or exclusionary elements (City of Edmonton, 2021).



THE GOAL OF GBA+ ENSURES THAT GENDER AND OTHER DIVERSITY CHARACTERISTICS ARE PROPERLY CONSIDERED IN ALL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS AND POLICIES THAT AFFECT CITIZENS" (CITY OF EDMONTON, 2017, P. 2).

The City of Edmonton was one of the first Canadian municipalities to explicitly apply an equity perspective to its zoning bylaw renewal process. Edmonton has also acted to reduce barriers to development and increase equity through zoning changes within its current bylaw, including:

- » Removing parking requirements;
- » Removing single-detached housing only zoning; and
- » Enabling supportive housing in commercial areas.

In order to ensure redrafted bylaws reflect equity, the City of Edmonton secured processes that support planners and policy writers to challenge their own biases and preconceived notions. To do this, planners were asked to document their policy and regulation writing process to see what inequities were or were not considered in their drafted changes (Agrawal et al., 2021). This helped ensure there was a paper trail for

how decisions were made. To identify inequities that zoning creates, the City partnered with the University of Alberta to create an Equity Toolkit that details how to ensure equity is a main consideration when developing a new bylaw. This toolkit provides several recommendations on how to reduce discriminatory and exclusionary policies.



GBA+ and Equity Toolkit Structure (City of Edmonton, 2021)

The City of Edmonton worked to flesh out ideas prior to city wide public engagement. It first held discussion papers to inform interested parties on some of the elements they are considering to include in the new zoning bylaw (City of Edmonton, 2021). After this, they held engagement sessions with key stakeholders to gain feedback on the 'big moves' of the project. Using an equity perspective, the City of Edmonton is currently planning its city with social inequities in mind to create equity measures so that the city would provide opportunities for everyone. It is important to note that this work is ongoing as of the writing of this paper, so the specific details on how the new zoning framework will look are still not publicly known.

NEXT STEPS

Opening ways to implement housing choice within municipal policies is a key way to start creating more equitable and inclusive communities. When people have the choice to pick the type of housing that fits their needs best, the complex and unique barriers faced by various groups may be reduced. Finding ways to broaden housing choices can include gentle density initiations, enabling development of underutilized land, encouraging intensification and Main Street development. These can all help a community creatively and rightfully increase housing affordability and choice.

There are many marginalized groups, and municipalities must be aware that there is no 'one policy fits all' approach, and work to create holistic policy changes that capture this complexity. Municipalities should consult with different groups to understand the various obstacles and needs they experience when tackling the housing crisis. If a municipality can start the conversation and include marginalized communities in the housing conversation, communities can practice more inclusive planning and create housing options for everyone.

Creating an equitable community is a complex but necessary task. While changing policies and land use plans to have an increased focus on equity would significantly impact communities, understanding marginalized groups and acknowledging their needs is essential in creating non-discriminatory policies to help in the housing challenges they may face. Safe and equitable communities consist of a mix of people of different ages, incomes, sexualities, origins, ethnicities, and abilities living together.



GET INVOLVED

Our Sustainable Housing Initiative (SHI) Enabling Housing Choice Project team is working to support communities across Alberta to create innovative and transformative local policies that promote housing diversity, access and choice. If you are interested in learning more about the project, current partnership opportunities, and research, please get in touch by contacting us here at housingchoice@ruraldevelopment.ca or by visiting our [webpage](#).



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