



Purpose of the Note

Older lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, queer, and two-spirit (LGBTQ2S) Canadians face barriers to safe, affordable, and affirming housing. To address these barriers, LGBTQ2S individuals need to be meaningfully engaged in housing policy, program development and evaluation.

The purpose of this briefing note is to address the gaps in meaningful engagement of LGBTQ2S Canadians in housing policy and programming. The recommendations in this policy brief are aimed at advancing the unique housing needs of older LGBTQ2S Canadians under the National Housing Strategy.

About the MacEachen Institute

The MacEachen Institute for Public Policy and Governance at Dalhousie University is a nationally focused, non-partisan, interdisciplinary institute designed to support the development of progressive public policy and to encourage greater citizen engagement.

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Meaningful Engagement of LGBTQ2S Canadians in Housing Policy and Programming Issues

Key Observations and Recommendations

- Older LGBTQ2S Canadians face unique barriers to adequate housing.
- Little is known about best policies and programs to address these barriers to adequate *and* LGBTQ2S-affirming housing in the Canadian context.
- Meaningful engagement of LGBTQ2S Canadians in housing policy and programming decision making is paramount to developing, implementing and evaluating effective responses to their housing needs.

Methods

With funding support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), we undertook a one-year housing study with our national research team. This study consisted of three parts: (a) an international scoping review of existing housing policies, programs and interventions aimed at LGBTQ2S populations, (b) a national online housing survey, and (c) focus group discussions to identify the housing needs of older LGBTQ2S Canadians and potential solutions to address the issues identified.

A total of 970 participants responded to the online survey, including housing service providers and LGBTQ2S Canadians. In addition, focus group discussions were held in five Canadian cities (Nanaimo, Calgary, Winnipeg, Ottawa, and Halifax) with a total of 52 participants.

Survey findings

A number of key housing policy and programming issues emerged from the survey data including: 1) the need for training of housing providers and landlords on the housing needs and rights of LGBTQ2S tenants and residents, 2) the need to collect confidential data from tenants and residents on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, 3) the need to address gaps in housing policies, procedures, laws and regulations as they relate to LGBTQ2S tenants and residents, and 4) the need to explore intergenerational housing approaches such as home sharing and cooperatives for LGBTQ2S Canadians, among others.

Focus group findings

Fifty-two focus group participants across five cities raised a variety of housing-related concerns and discussed potential interventions to address these for older LGBTQ2S populations. Specifically, participants expressed fear of discrimination in housing as well as the intersecting barriers to safe and affordable housing. Participants envisioned housing that would address social isolation and exclusion through community-building and intergenerational housing models, programs and policies. In addition, participants reported the need for government and housing providers to ensure policies and practices are making housing more affordable, accessible, safe, and affirming for all LGBTQ2S populations, in keeping with the National Housing Strategy and current human rights protections.

Theoretical Approach

Our approach to this national housing research study was informed by the *Social Ecological Model* (SEM) which is a theory-based framework aimed at understanding the ways in which a range of individual, environmental and policy-level factors interact and impact on health, social, economic and related outcomes (see Figure 1). Specifically, the five core levels of the SEM include individual or intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, community and policy environments. These multiple levels of influence can impact on, for example, if and how well an individual is able to engage with their peer network, their communities or organizations of choice, and their local government – all of which can influence housing. Further, the SEM perspective is highly applicable in understanding the various levels of factors contributing, both positively and negatively, to complex phenomena facing older populations such as how low-income older adults and access to food, the transitional care needs of vulnerable seniors who move from hospital to home, and how the built environment can contribute to levels of physical activity among older adults. According to the SEM literature, often the most effective approaches to understanding and intervening on a particular phenomenon of interest is to draw on a combination of interventions at all levels of the model. This has relevance for housing policies in relation to older LGBTQ2S populations. (See Figure 1 below).

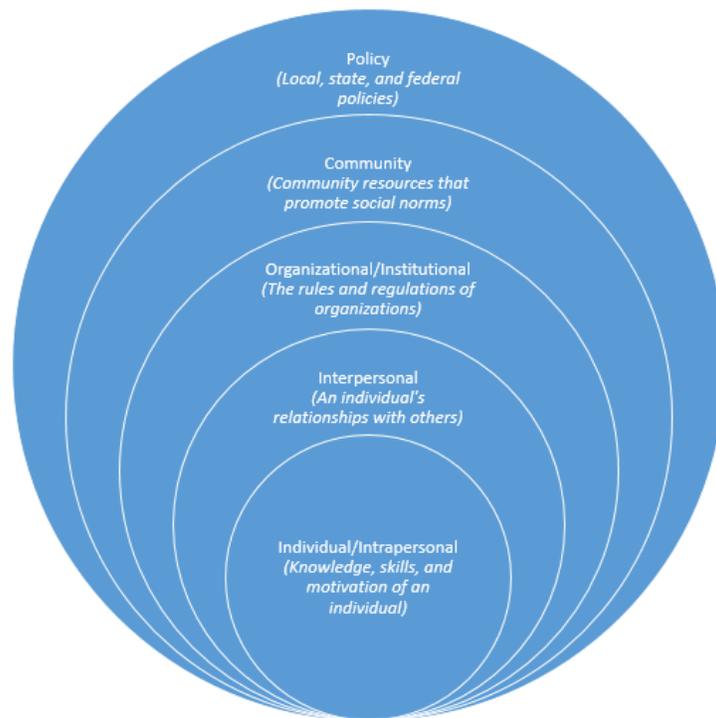


Figure 1: SEM Theoretical Model

Further, our study incorporated *Gender-Based Analysis* (GBA+) within all levels of the SEM by examining, for example, if and how gender is considered in housing policies. As indicated by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the term ‘gender’ refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender diverse people. Further, gender influences how people perceive themselves and each other, how they act and interact, and how power and resources are distributed in society. Although gender is often represented as a binary (girl/woman and boy/man), our study asserts the importance of considering the diversity in how individuals and groups understand, experience, and express gender. Our team included both the GBA+ and the SEM frameworks to provide an analytic tool to advance our understanding of the levels of influence on housing from the individual level through to the policy level.

Context

Older LGBTQ2S Canadians are more likely than heterosexual Canadians to experience a variety of poor health and social outcomes. This is partially due to a lifetime of discrimination and stigmatization in relation to sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression (see **Annex 1**). These experiences can contribute to older LGBTQ2S Canadians living alone, not having connections with their families of origin, living in poverty, and experiencing social exclusion. With fewer personal supports to help them manage their health and housing needs, many must rely on non-LGBTQ2S affirming home care services and/or transition into assisted living facilities when they can no longer live independently. This can be problematic as many older LGBTQ2S individuals may feel they have to hide their sexual and/or gender identity to protect themselves from harassment and discrimination from care staff and other residents in congregate living facilities such as long-term care.

Housing is widely recognized as both a key determinant of health and a human right. The United Nation's *Rights to Adequate Housing* states that adequate housing is more than just a roof and four walls; at a minimum, adequate housing must be affordable, habitable, address factors like security of tenure and availability of services and infrastructure and take into account the expression of cultural identity. Adequate housing leads to better health and social outcomes and lower health and social care costs and is particularly important for addressing the inequities experienced among vulnerable populations, such as those with low incomes, seniors, and racialized populations, and LGBTQ2S individuals.

Older LGBTQ2S populations face unique barriers to housing such as differential treatment in housing availability, pricing, incentives, and application requirements due to issues of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. These barriers can contribute to continued health and social inequities for older LGBTQ2S adults. Housing discrimination against LGBTQ2S individuals can occur in different ways, including through discriminating in rental applications as well as through housing providers creating unwelcoming living environments.

The COVID-19 pandemic will likely serve to further exacerbate the housing pressures felt by vulnerable communities such as seniors and LGBTQ2S Canadians, among others. For example, as COVID-19 increases the burden on care workers in congregate living facilities such as long-term care homes, there is a risk of reduced attention to LGBTQ2S-specific awareness and training which in turn can further increase LGBTQ2S resident's vulnerability and potential for discrimination, harassment and abuse. Without the meaningful inclusion of older LGBTQ2S Canadians in the development, framing and evaluation of housing policies and programs, we will not fully appreciate the scope of these issues and their impacts on the lives of these populations.

Engaging end-users of housing policies or programs in their creation can help to inform success by ensuring relevancy, addressing practical issues, and building consensus. However, when seeking to work with or know more about any marginalized or vulnerable group, it is important to acknowledge historic and ongoing stigma, trauma and distrust, and work toward the creation of multiple opportunities for different types of engagement to support different kinds of contributions to housing policies and programs. For example, the longstanding discrimination faced by LGBTQ2S Canadians may result in a distrust of housing providers and policy makers and these issues must be addressed in order to cultivate meaningful engagement under the National Housing Strategy and other housing-related initiatives.

Considerations

Existing Policy Reform Context

The National Housing Strategy (NHS) represents an investment of more than \$50 billion dollars aimed at ensuring Canadians have access to affordable housing that meets their needs. The NHS notes the importance of supporting the most vulnerable Canadians, including seniors and LGBTQ2S individuals and the need for ongoing consultations with vulnerable groups and stakeholders. The Federal Housing Advocate is responsible for monitoring, assessing, reporting, and making recommendations on housing rights in Canada, which must include engaging vulnerable populations such as LGBTQ2S communities.

The LGBTQ2S Secretariat works with federal government to ensure that issues of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are considered in the development of policies,

programs, and laws. The minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth is responsible for the Secretariat and is mandated to consult with civil society representatives to lay the groundwork for an LGBTQ2S action plan that would guide the work of the federal government. This must include meaningful engagement on issues of housing for LGBTQ2S Canadians.

The health and social needs of LGBTQ2S Canadians have been previously examined by the Senate Standing Committee on Health. The report makes a number of recommendations relevant to engaging LGBTQ2S communities, including that the Government of Canada is meant to:

- Consult with trans and non-binary individuals to establish best practices for collecting gender information and identification options for non-binary people (Recommendation 6).
- Consult with LGBTQ2S organizations, researchers and LGBTQ2S individuals to help the agency develop and include questions on sexual behaviour and sexual attraction in its surveys (Recommendation 7).
- Establish an advisory committee on sexual and gender minorities to support departments in their efforts to implement LGBTQ2S community-specific measures as part of the National Housing Strategy and other programs (Recommendation 12).
- Hold consultations with intersex people and stakeholders on subsection 268(3) of the *Criminal Code*, which allows for surgeries on intersex people (Recommendation 22).

Key Findings from our Housing Study

Older LGBTQ2S Canadians experience unique barriers to safe, affordable, and LGBTQ2S-affirming housing. The housing issues facing these populations in Canada are not well captured in federal data sources or other population-level surveys which impedes effective housing policy and program responses. Our housing research study expands on our earlier work with the European Union and aims to further our understanding of the unique housing needs of older LGBTQ2S populations in the Canadian context. This study consisted of three parts: a national online survey of older LGBTQ2S Canadians, focus groups in five provinces, and an international scoping review of empirical research on housing issues in LGBTQ2S communities. Our research revealed three key features of LGBTQ2S housing: **safe** from harassment, **affordable**, and **LGBTQ2S-affirming** of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression.

Key findings relevant to the issue of engaging LGBTQ2S Canadians in an effort to better understand and support the housing needs of these populations include:

- Over one third (36%) of survey respondents reported having had negative housing-related experiences in the past five years. Of these respondents, almost half (48%) did not feel comfortable discussing their sexual orientations with housing staff or landlords and 32% did not feel comfortable discussing their gender identity/expression.
- Close to one third (29%) of respondents indicated that negative experiences were due to the housing environment being non-inclusive, such as intake forms containing heteronormative or cisnormative language, staff or landlords having made assumptions about gender identity or expression, or having had negative interactions with other residents related to the respondents' LGBTQ2S identity.

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- None of the research we identified in the scoping review discussed how older LGBTQ2S adults could be better engaged with institutional or broader government housing policies.

Conclusion

To this end, the Government of Canada and its partners with a role in housing should consider the following options in addressing the housing needs of LGBTQ2S Canadians:

- Ensure meaningful engagement of LGBTQ2S Canadians in housing policy making discussions and housing program development.
- Ensure greater inclusion of the unique housing issues facing older LGBTQ2S Canadians in existing housing policies and programs, including the National Housing Strategy.
- Ensure additional focus on measurable indicators of inclusion in housing policy making among LGBTQ2S populations, such as the SGBA+ approach.
- Ensure meaningful inclusion of LGBTQ2S Canadians in evaluating the ways in which their engagement has been incorporated into the National Housing Strategy and other housing related policies and programs.

About the Authors

The national *LGBTQ2S Housing Matters* research study team consists of a group of researchers and community partners from across Canada interested in better understanding and improving the housing needs of LGBTQ2S populations. More information on the project, including a report of the survey and focus group findings, can be found at <https://bit.ly/LGBTQhousingCanada>.

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Annex 1 – The needs of older LGBTQ2S individuals

Older LGBTQ2S populations, specifically the Baby Boomer generation who were born between 1946 and 1964, have experienced decades of discrimination, stigma, harassment, and violence in relation to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression. In Canada, homosexual activities were criminalized until 1969, and it was not until 2017 that the Canadian Human Rights and Criminal Code included gender identity and gender expression. For many LGBTQ2S Baby Boomers their formative experiences included being told they were sick and immoral, that their consensual sexual encounters were illegal, and were systematically excluded from many institutions, including marriage until 2004. While recognition of LGBTQ2S issues is improving, many older LGBTQ2S adults continue to experience the long-term impacts of these events. They are more likely to live alone and less likely to have children than those who do not identify as LGBTQ2S and many are concerned about a lack of social support, particularly as they age and require assistance from mainstream health care and housing providers. Many fear that revealing their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in congregate living facilities, such as long-term care, will result in stigma and discrimination and overall poorer quality housing and related care.

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- A preliminary report of the survey and focus group data can be found on our [project website](#). Please consult this website or contact the principal investigator, Dr. Jacquie Gahagan, at jgahagan@dal.ca for further information.

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The MacEachen Institute is working to create resources and policy discussions around the COVID-19 crisis. These include briefing notes as well as panel discussions, videos and media commentary. You can find [resources related to COVID-19 on our website](#).

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- [Data on LGBTQ2S Housing Needs.](#)
- [Creating Safer Housing for older LGBTQ2S Canadians through Regulation and Enforcement.](#)

More information about the series can be found [on our website](#).