

Mandate of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons

Call for contributions: The right to adequate housing of older persons

Prepared for: United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures

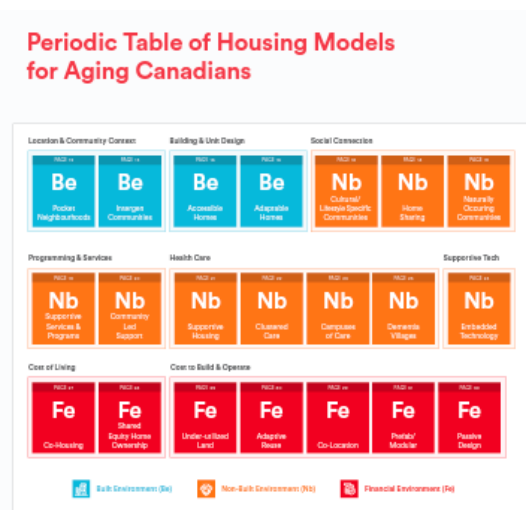
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Guiding Question: What alternative housing strategies for older persons, other than care homes and state institutions, exist in your country? What policies/programmes are in place to enable older persons to live independently in their communities as they age? Please provide detailed information.

Housing is a key social determinant of health. Not only is it important for people to have affordable housing, but also adequate and appropriate housing. This becomes especially relevant for potentially vulnerable populations such as older adults. Historically, other than living with a family member, care homes and state institutions were the only options for older people when they get to a point where they need increased support. Thankfully our approach to providing suitable housing models for older persons is changing to better respond to the evolving needs and desires of how older people would like to live and age. Outlined below are some different housing models that are starting to be adopted across Canada and internationally to ensure that housing is affordable, adequate, and appropriate for our aging population.

SE Health is a leading health organization in Canada in the seniors' living and care sectors. SE Health recently partnered with other organizations on a project dedicated to promoting new models of affordable and appropriate housing for older Canadians, called "Building with Mission". Building with Mission encourages organization to build new housing projects that provide an age-friendly built environment, a supportive non-built / experiential environment, and an affordable financial environment.

Our "Periodic Table of Housing Models for Aging Canadians" is intended to help organizations navigate the range of housing options available by providing a conceptual framework to support concept development. Note that these options are not mutually exclusive or exhaustive.



Below are highlighted several models that emphasize different characteristics of age-friendly housing. Further information as well as Canadian and international precedents can be found in the full report available [here](#).¹

¹ <https://www.buildingwithmission.ca/publications/four-scenarios-for-the-future-of-housinghealth-amp-aging-in-canada-6glka-4e6hj-znezy-jmkna>

Models that Prioritize an Age-Friendly Built Environment

Pocket Neighborhoods

Pocket neighbourhoods are a type of planned community that consist of groups of smaller residences clustered around a shared open space. Communities are designed to foster social interaction between neighbours. Some are cooperatively owned. Pocket neighbourhoods share many of the same principles as co-housing (see below), can be well integrated into the wider community and can facilitate multi-generational living. “Pocket neighbourhoods are often described as being a neighbourhood within a neighbourhood.”²

Intergenerational Communities

A growing number of housing projects are intentionally designed to facilitate interaction across generations. Rather than seniors-segregated communities, these projects offer housing options for all ages and stages. Some housing models go even further and are designed to accommodate multigenerational living within the same home.

Healthy Homes

Healthy homes are intentionally designed to promote good health and often adhere to emerging healthy design standards in order to create an environment that prioritizes the health of the resident.

Inclusive / Accessible / Adaptable Homes

Definitions across these design terms are blurry but the main idea is to design homes that, from the outset, can accommodate the needs of residents of different ages and abilities. These design approaches allow homes to accommodate or adapt easily and inexpensively, as necessary, to better enable older adults to stay in their homes for longer.

Homes Conducive to Care

As health systems across the country and internationally increasingly shift care to the home, this begs the question of whether home design might better accommodate care. Emerging design standards take into account the need for home design to better accommodate care giving.

Sustainable Homes

All new homes must strive to be as sustainable as possible and make an effort to reduce their environmental impact to maintain the overall health and well-being of the planet.

² [Alternatives to Long-Term Care and Housing: An Environmental Scan](#), Benzie, Cacciola, Chu, Barcellos, Grant, Niehaus, Nsair, April 2020

Models that Prioritize the Experiential / Non-Built Environment

Cultural Lifestyle Specific Homes

There is growing demand from older adults to live in communities that align with their cultural or lifestyle preferences. In Ontario, for example, the wait time for a long-term care bed in a culturally or religiously specific home is double the average.³

Home Sharing

There are a variety of home-sharing models including co-housing and intergenerational home-sharing. In some models, younger adults may live with an older adult and help around the house in exchange for lower rent while in other groups of friends may choose to live together and share expenses and communal spaces.

Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs)

What's most interesting about these communities is that they are unintentional in their development. NORCs are defined as housing developments that are not planned or designed for older people, but which over time come to house a large proportion of seniors. In Toronto, Canada there are 489 NORCs which are home to 70K seniors.⁴ These apartments tend to attract seniors who are seeking to live in an informal community of peers. In some NORCs and seniors' apartments, community health and social service partners bring programs and services into the building to extend tenant independence and improve overall well-being.

Community-led Support

Harnessing the knowledge, skills and capacity of community members, a growing number of grassroots organizations and new ventures provide support to older adult neighbourhoods. These models build some structure around the idea of "neighbours caring for neighbours" and offer services that enable older adults to age-in-place.

Supportive Social Housing

Supportive housing is a widely used term that can take on different meanings. We define supportive social housing as housing that is both affordable for those with lower incomes (e.g. rent geared to income, rent supplements, housing allowances) and offers a range of supports to higher-need / higher-risk tenants (e.g. life skills training, mental health support, intensive case management). Supportive housing developments typically target a specific population such as formerly homeless seniors, older adults with physical or cognitive disabilities or those with addictions.

³ [Shortage of nursing homes geared to ethnic groups a 'disaster' for aging immigrant population](#), Toronto Star, Feb. 15, 2021

⁴ [Vaccinating Seniors in NORCs](#), UHN Open Lab Website, viewed July 23, 2021

Clustered Care

Clustered care models often serve a similar demographic to traditional nursing homes (e.g. older, higher need seniors) but instead of living in an institutional setting, older adults live in small house-like buildings. Typically, groups of 8-12 residents share a home and are supported by a small, dedicated care team. Residents have access to all the amenities of the home including the living room and kitchen (where they can prepare their own food whenever they like) and eat family-style at a dining table. Cooking, cleaning and laundry is often done on-site in the home by the same team of caregivers who provide daily resident support. Staff develop richer relationships with residents as the care team is small and consistent. Staff are also given more autonomy than in traditional nursing home settings. The staffing model is, however, typically more expensive, although this may be offset by lower administrative costs and lower staff turnover. SE Health is exploring integrating cluster care models within seniors' apartments to offer a range of housing options within a single development.

Campuses of Care

Campuses of care aim to integrate a broad spectrum of seniors housing and care options within a contained geography. "At an individual level, campuses increase local access to a coordinated range of health and social care services, supports and housing options. At an organizational level, campuses offer enhanced collaboration opportunities across providers and partners to improve consistency and coordination of care, and improved access to shared resources, expertise and infrastructure. At a system level, campuses can address a diversity of health, social, financial, and housing needs to help seniors avoid premature or inappropriate use of higher intensity care settings."⁵

Dementia Villages

This model of housing for adults with dementia aims to shift away from institutionalization and instead seeks to create a homelike and authentic living experience for residents. For all that is lauded about the dementia village model, it is still a model that segregates older adults with dementia from the rest of society.

Supportive Technologies

Digitally enabled homes and service models have the potential to assist with activities of daily living and enhance resident independence and well-being. Many older adults are already accustomed to using technology in their daily lives and will increasingly be digital natives in the years to come. To enable the use of supporting technologies, first and foremost homes must be able accommodate high speed and reliable internet - access to the internet is increasingly viewed as a key social determinant of health and so should be considered a priority regardless of the income level of residents. Homes may also incorporate smart home or assistive technologies such as smart security or lighting systems or fall detection technology to enhance resident safety. When it comes to care, digital solutions can make it easier for residents to connect with caregivers through remote monitoring, diagnostic testing, virtual check-ins and virtual clinical visits. Finally, solutions focused on enhancing digital connection for older adults offer the opportunity to engage in virtual calls, participate in community chats, and access a range of entertainment and informational resources.

⁵ [Seniors' campus of continuums: local solutions for broad spectrum seniors care](#), F. Morton-Chang, S. Majumder, W. Berta, BMC Geriatrics, 2021

The landscape of point solutions that address a targeted need (e.g. fall detection or supporting connection to informal caregivers) is changing rapidly. The challenge now is to deliver an integrated and seamless suite of solutions to older adults to enable easier at home adoption. While the integration of supportive technologies in the home is still in its infancy, there are emerging examples of what might be possible.

Models that Prioritize the Financial Environment

Co-housing

Co-housing or co-living models lend themselves well to older adults seeking to reduce their cost of living while maintaining strong social connections and informal networks of support. Projects typically include privately owned units designed around communal amenities or a shared ownership model with private bedrooms/bathrooms and shared common amenities (much like cluster living). In many cases, co-housing projects begin with a group of future residents who come together to develop a project that meets their needs, but increasingly professional co-housing consultants and developers are bringing new projects to market.

Shared-Equity Home Ownership Models

Community land trusts and housing co-ops are examples of alternative forms of affordable home ownership; these models provide both more affordable housing options and the ability for lower or moderate-income residents to build equity. They tend to foster a strong sense of community amongst residents and rely on competent and committed volunteers for effective self-management. The appeal of these models is their ability to preserve affordability indefinitely unlike other affordable housing models that are time-limited in nature.

Adaptive Reuse

Identifying more cost-effective ways of designing and building age-friendly housing is critical to deliver more affordable housing options. Serious consideration of opportunities for adaptive reuse of existing buildings to develop new seniors housing is required. For example, in Ontario, nearly half of existing long-term care homes need to be retrofitted to meet updated standards. For some long-term care homes, it will not be possible or desirable to upgrade their facility, creating an opportunity to adapt these buildings into alternative housing options. Similarly, there are approximately 27,000 buildings belonging to religious groups in Canada and it is estimated that by 2025 roughly 9,000 places of worship will close.⁶ There is an opportunity to convert these buildings and/or underutilized sites into more affordable housing options for seniors. All kinds of sites are being adapted to include affordable housing and / or housing for seniors including churches, schools, post offices, hotels and malls.

Prefabricated and Modular Construction

This type of housing is manufactured off-site in factory-controlled conditions and then brought to a site for installation and finishing. This process can offer several cost-saving advantages including fewer delays or cost overruns associated with extreme weather, more efficient use of materials and faster

⁶ [The Revitalization of Church Buildings: How New Life & Purpose can be Brought to these Historical Resources](#), Ontario Professional Planners Institute, Nov, 2018

construction times, although this is highly dependent on the location of the site and desired design of the project. Many developers and builders across the country are experienced in sourcing and delivering modular buildings and increasingly the market is developing modular designs that are also age friendly.

Conclusion

There are many housing models that are or could be adopted in Canada that go beyond traditionally medicalized care homes to create places where Canadians can age well independently for longer. Currently, however, there is little government support in Canada to incentivize alternate housing models for older adults.

Relying on our existing stock of care homes or expecting to build sufficient capacity through the building of new care homes is not an option. Doing so would be unaffordable and impractical. Some estimates predict that the cost of publicly funded care homes will more than quadruple in the next 30 years and would result in a cost burden by 2050 that would represent more than one-quarter of all projected provincial and federal personal income tax revenue.⁷

A greater supply and a greater range of housing options for older adults, especially those that are affordable and consider the wider determinants of health and wellbeing are desperately required as our population ages. SE Health urges the government to investigate funding/incentivizing a greater range of innovative models for housing models for older adults.

⁷ [“Time to defuse the bomb that will explode when boomers turn 85”](#) by Bonnie-Jeanne MacDonald, Financial Post, Jan 28, 2022.

References

- <https://www.buildingwithmission.ca/publications/four-scenarios-for-the-future-of-housinghealth-amp-agingin-canada-6glka-4e6hj-znezy-jmkna>
- [Alternatives to Long-Term Care and Housing: An Environmental Scan](#), Benzie, Cacciola, Chu, Barcellos, Grant, Niehaus, Nsair, April 2020
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