



Purpose of the Note

Older lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, queer, and two-spirit (LGBTQ2S) populations experience unique barriers to safe, affordable, and affirming housing. The housing issues facing these populations in Canada are not well captured in federal data sources, which impedes effective housing policy and program responses.

The purpose of this note is to address the gaps as described in each of the briefing notes to ensure the unique housing needs of older LGBTQ2S Canadians are addressed in our 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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Data on LGBTQ2S Housing Needs

Key Observations and Recommendations

- Older LGBTQ2S adults (55+) experience unique health and social issues, including barriers to adequate housing.
- The National Housing Strategy notes the importance of collecting data on vulnerable populations such as seniors and the LGBTQ2S community.
- The Government of Canada must collect additional high quality national data specific to older LGBTQ2S Canadians in order to better meet their unique housing needs.

Methods

With funding support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), we undertook a 1-year Partnership Development grant with our national research team. This study consisted of three parts: (a) a scoping review of existing international 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 issues identified.

A total of 970 participants responded to the online survey, including housing service providers and LGBTQ2S-identifying individuals. 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 policy and program issues emerged from the survey data including: 1) issues of training for 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, 3) the need to address gaps in housing policies, procedures, laws and regulations as they relate to LGBT 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 project 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). The five core levels of the SEM include individual or intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, community and policy environments. These multiple levels of influence can impact, 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 can be highly appropriate 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).

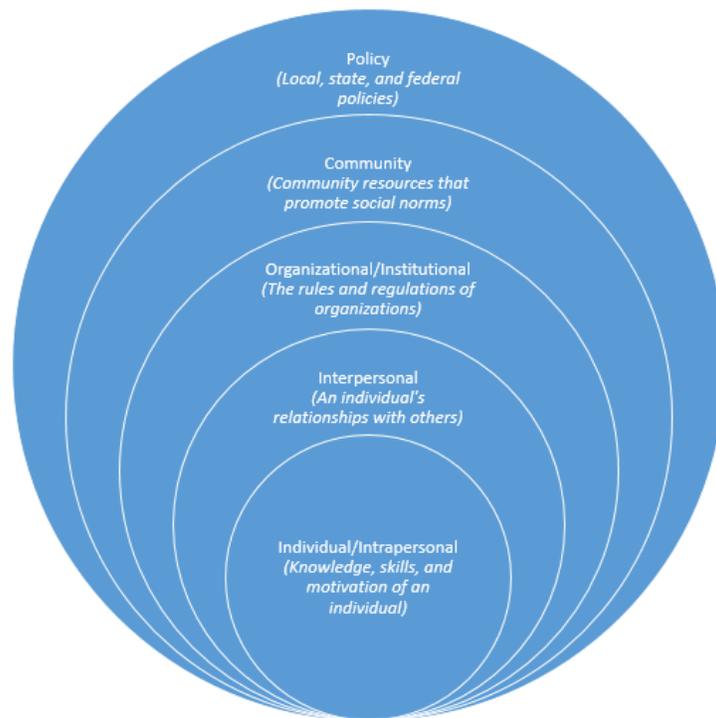


Figure 1: SEM Theoretical Model

Further, we incorporated *Gender-Based Analysis (GBA+)* within all levels of the SEM by examining 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. For this study, we operationalized the Government of Canada priority of ensuring the integration of GBA+ into all programs and policies. 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

Housing is widely recognized as both a key determinant of health and a human right. Adequate housing leads to better health and social outcomes and lower health and social care costs. Despite this recognition, affordable and habitable housing must include security of tenure and availability of services and infrastructure, and take into account the expression of cultural identity.

The Government of Canada through the National Housing Strategy (NHS) has committed over \$50 billion towards addressing two key priorities: increasing housing affordability and reducing homelessness. While the NHS notes the importance of focusing on vulnerable Canadians, it also notes there are data gaps in the unique housing issues for LGBTQ2S populations. Without this

data, the success of policies and programs designed to improve access to adequate housing for LGBTQ2S populations cannot be evaluated.

LGBTQ2S Canadians

Older LGBTQ2S Canadians, while not a monolithic population, have faced discrimination and stigmatization for their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression throughout their lives (see **Annex 1**). As a result, they are more likely than older heterosexual and cis-gender Canadians to experience certain mental and physical health issues. These experiences contribute to older LGBTQ2S Canadians living alone, not having connections with their families or origin, living in poverty, and experiencing social exclusion, among other issues.

For example, housing disparities have been documented in relation to the perceptions and fears that distinctly impact older LGBTQ2S adults entering assisted living or long-term care settings where these facilities have been described as the “final closet”. This refers to older LGBTQ2S adults having to hide their sexual and/or gender identity to protect themselves from potential harassment and discrimination from care staff and other residents. As COVID-19 continues to impact health and social care workers in these settings, greater attention must be paid to LGBTQ2S populations in an effort not to further increase their vulnerability.

Sex, Gender, and LGBTQ2 identities

Sex and gender are often used interchangeably however they are separate constructs. *Sex* is often used to refer to the chromosomes and genitals associated with males and females, but there are individuals who are born *intersex* (with genitals that are not clearly male or female). *Gender* is often used to refer to the social roles ascribed to sex (men/women).

Additional definitions can be found here: <https://egale.ca/awareness/glossary-of-terms/>

These terms are distinct from sexual *orientation* (e.g., heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual) and from gender *identity* (whether someone identifies as male, female, or gender non-conforming) and gender *expression* (e.g., wearing clothes associated with a particular gender).

Considerations

Existing Policy Reform Context

The Government of Canada has protected gender identity and gender expression in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (2017) and committed to major international agreements concerning human rights and gender equality. While there have been some major strides in data collection to better understand this policy area, more action is needed. The 2001 and 2006 Canadian censuses were the first to collect data on same-sex common-law and married couples, respectively, while the 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey was the first to collect data on sexual orientation. Other signs of progress include the option to indicate a non-binary gender on official identification, and questions on gender and sexual attraction on the Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth. Yet data gaps include the Canadian Community Health Survey, which did not ask about sexual orientation in the 2020 annual component, and is only distributed to Canadians aged 18-59, meaning the sexual orientation of older Canadians is unknown. Further

data gaps include the unknown prevalence of LGBTQ2S people in care homes and rental units, as well as a lack of information collected on gender identity in other national surveys.

Gender-Based Analysis (GBA+) is a tool to help make programs, policies, and services more accessible to all Canadians and used by the federal government to assess how gender and other identity factors (e.g., age, race, socio-economic status) *intersect* to influence how Canadians experience government initiatives. While there has been growing implementation of this tool across departments and agencies, poor tracking, evaluation and a lack of gender-disaggregated data has been noted as a barrier to its effective use. Inadequate data on LGBTQ2S populations impedes effective GBA+ analysis and evaluation of programs, policies, and services.

The unique health needs of LGBTQ2S communities have been previously examined by the Senate Standing Committee on Health. This ground-breaking report makes a number of recommendations relevant to enhancing data collection, including that the Government of Canada, through Statistics Canada:

- consult with LGBTQ2S communities, organizations, and researchers to develop and include questions on sexual behaviour and sexual attraction in its surveys
- promote the oversampling of LGBTQ2S populations in its surveys in order to produce samples of sufficient size for intersectional analyses
- include questions on sex assigned at birth, gender identity and sexual orientation in all its surveys regardless of respondent age and on a priority basis in surveys on health, housing, income, homelessness and the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other substances

When seeking to collect data about any marginalized group, it is important to acknowledge historic distrust and provide opportunities for ownership and meaningful engagement. The need to ensure privacy and confidentiality of data is paramount. The Senate report also recommends consulting with transgender and non-binary individuals to establish best practices for collecting gender information and identification and establishing an advisory committee on sexual and gender minorities to support LGBTQ2S efforts in national programs like the National Housing Strategy.

Relevant Findings from the National *LGBTQ2S Housing Matters* Project

Working with researchers and community partners from across Canada as well as internationally, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)-funded *LGBTQ2S Housing Matters* project to advance our understanding of the housing needs of older LGBTQ2S populations. This project consisted of three parts: a national survey, focus groups across five provinces, and a scoping review for empirical research examining housing issues in these communities. Key findings relevant to the issue of data for better understanding and supporting the housing needs of LGBTQ2S communities include:

- A lack of data in the research literature, as well as from residential housing organizations, on specific sexual orientations and gender identities, despite substantial evidence describing inequitable health and social outcomes.
- The need to collect better data from tenants and residents in order to legitimize their presence and advocate for better programs and supports.

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- Considering the *intersectionality* of sexual orientation and gender identity with other identity factors – such as age, ability, and race – in order to meaningfully understand the issues these groups face and develop effective policy responses.
 - Appropriately collecting data to ensure privacy and confidentiality of sensitive and personal information, particularly from older LGBTQ2S Canadians who may not trust data security, and building trust by using these data to inform policies aimed at addressing the housing needs of LGBTQ2S communities.

Conclusion

Data gaps of the unique housing issues facing older LGBTQ2S Canadians impede the Government of Canada's ability to develop and implement successful policies and programs to reduce housing inequities. In keeping with the NHS, enhancing data collection on LGBTQ2S populations can enable policy makers to better understand the prevalence and types of housing issues faced by older LGBTQ2S Canadians, as well as how they intersect with other vulnerabilities. This includes increasing both the *quantity* of data from LGBTQ2S populations and its *quality* to reflect issues of housing needs nationally. These data can inform the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies and programs that better meet the housing needs of older LGBTQ2S Canadians and enrich the lives of all Canadians as a result.

To this end, the Government of Canada should consider the following options:

- Use existing federal population level data collection infrastructure, such as the 2021 Census, to collect data on LGBTQ2S housing needs, and support the use of these data by partners and stakeholders in the housing, seniors, health, and social services sectors.
- Use best practices for collecting data from marginalized communities, including involving them in decisions and supporting their empowerment through the use of their data.
- Consider whether existing surveys and programs with upper age limits restrict input from older LGBTQ2S Canadians.
- Ensure data from LGBTQ2S Canadians are made accessible, with appropriate privacy safeguards in place, to inform housing policies, programs, and services of the Government of Canada, its partners, and stakeholders.
- Continue to monitor and evaluate the level of use of GBA+ to ensure that government housing programs and policies are influenced by the intersectional needs of all Canadians.
- Ensure there is sufficient capacity to use these data to inform the development, implementation and evaluation of housing policies, programs, and services, such as further supporting the use of GBA+ as an analytic framework.
- Work with federal partners in housing such as the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation to collect data that aligns with the United Nations' description of *adequate* housing, including security of tenure, affordability, accessibility, location, and cultural adequacy, as well as related dimensions which are important to the housing needs of LGBTQ2S communities, such as safety and affirmation of sexual and gender identities.
- Provide needed resources and guidance to support data collection specific to LGBTQ2S housing needs at the provincial, territorial, and municipal levels.

About the Authors

The national *LGBTQ2S Housing Matters* project is 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

LGBTQ2S communities have experienced decades of discrimination. In Canada, homosexual activities were criminally punishable until 1969, and it was not until 2017 that the Canadian Human Rights and Criminal Code included gender identity and gender expression. Their formative experiences included being told they were sick, immoral, their sexual encounters were illegal; they were excluded from many institutions, including marriage, until 2004. However, there are ongoing harms that communities face across the life course experience including BIPOC populations. While recognition of LGBTQ2S issues is improving, 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 are concerned about a lack of social support and social isolation, particularly if they have any health problems. With increasing care needs and fewer sources of care, there is a greater likelihood that LGBTQ2S older persons will have to rely on home care and health care services.

As sexual and gender minorities, older adults identifying as LGBTQ2S are particularly vulnerable to prejudice from their care providers as well as care facility residents. Many fear revealing their sexual and gender minority status will result in stigma and discrimination, including poorer quality treatment. Accordingly, older LGBTQ2S individuals fear going “back into the closet” to protect themselves from discrimination and stigmatization as they age. In our 2019 survey of 813 older LGBTQ2S Canadians, over one third (36%) reported having a negative housing experience in the past five years.

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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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- Creating Safer Housing for older LGBTQ2S Canadians through Regulation and Enforcement.
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