



Helping Canadians Maximize Their Investment in Solar Power

Canadians are becoming increasingly interested in installing photovoltaic (PV) systems, as energy prices rise and the cost of the technology falls—and along with their increasing awareness of the need to find cleaner sources of energy to supplement or even replace what they receive from the “grid.” Fortunately, for the past few years, those interested in solar power have had more information at their disposal to guide their decisions.

Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) created an online resource, the Photovoltaic Potential and Solar Resource Maps of Canada, which Dr. Rémi Charron, Senior Researcher of Sustainable Housing at CMHC, describes as “a quick and easy way for consumers to

ascertain how much power PV systems can generate in regions across Canada.”

The maps are NRCan’s response to increasing demand for data on PV potential: people wanted to know how many kilowatt-hours (kWh) they could expect to generate in a given Canadian location—data that was often lacking, especially for remote or small communities.

Dr. Sophie Pelland, Research Officer with the CanmetENERGY Distributed Energy Program at NRCan, was responsible for finding resources that could be turned into useful by-location data. “We

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About the National Housing Research Committee

The National Housing Research Committee (NHRC), established in 1986, is made up of federal, provincial and territorial, municipal, industry, social housing, academic community and consumer representatives. Its objectives include:

- identifying priority areas for housing-related research or demonstration,
- fostering greater co-operation, developing partnerships and minimizing overlap in research activities,
- encouraging support for housing research,
- promoting the dissemination, application and adoption of research results.

In addition to the Full Committee, the NHRC also operates through working groups to exchange information, discuss research gaps and undertake research projects. Currently, working groups meet on housing data, homelessness, sustainable housing and communities and distinct needs. The NHRC participants also contribute articles to the *NHRC Newsletter*, which is produced twice a year, and network through their online community: www.nhrc-cnrl.ca.

The NHRC co-chairs are Steve Mennill of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and Michael Buda of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). CMHC provides the Secretariat for the Committee and produces this Newsletter.

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were directed to the Canadian Forestry Service (part of NRCan), which already had a model for interpolating horizontal radiation data," she says. "The two NRCan groups realized that the model could be used with radiation data received by various non-horizontal surfaces corresponding to typical PV array orientations, such as a south-facing surface with latitude tilt." Environment Canada was able to supply such data from 144 weather stations averaged over a period of 20 years, and solar maps were generated by feeding this into the Canadian Forestry Service model. CanmetENERGY then used information about typical PV system performance to translate the solar radiation amounts into expected electricity production values (in kWh/kW).

Some of the results might surprise Canadians: despite the country's northern locale and reputation for chilly winters, most Canadian cities have a yearly PV potential that compares favourably with those of international locations known to be leaders in solar power, such as Germany and Japan.

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Regina, Saskatchewan, leads the list of provincial capitals, at 1,361 kWh/kW—but even St. John's, Newfoundland, (at 933 kWh/kW) outranks both Tokyo and Berlin.

This online resource can help consumers understand what kind of energy savings to expect from a PV system—which in turn can guide their choice of systems, considering the costs and the equipment required to make a given system run effectively and safely. The map site can also help consumers deal with less-than-ideal situations, says Pelland. “They might want to know how PV potential varies with orientation of the panels—for example, if they were vertical or inclined more than 45 degrees. We also post monthly values, because some people might want a system that works best in winter.”

Pelland says that the number of inquiries about the resource shows a steady increase in interest since the site's launch in 2006. As Charron puts it, “its relevance has peaked with increased attention”

to environmental concerns. Meanwhile, Environment Canada and Natural Resources Canada continue to collect insolation data, have provided the GIS data underlying the maps online to enable regional analyses, and have been working with satellite data to supplement the data based on ground stations. Possible future directions for the online resource include more guidance on shading, a major issue for Canadians trying to maximize PV potential in cities. ■

The resource maps are available on the NRCAN website (https://glfc.cfsnet.nfis.org/mapserver/pv/index_e.php). Questions about the online resource may be directed to Sophie Pelland at spelland@nrcan.gc.ca or 450-652-2650. An “About Your House” guide, available on the CMHC website (product n° 63890), also provides information for consumers on types of PV systems, sizing and installation, financing and incentives, and working with utilities.

New Urbanist Versus Conventional Suburban Neighbourhoods: Do Residents Behave Differently?

The New Urbanist design movement aims to integrate design principles such as pedestrian-friendly streets, mixed housing types and local commercial services in an attempt to make neighbourhoods more attractive, encourage community interaction and reduce car use. But are they achieving those results in comparison to more conventionally designed suburban developments?

While some studies have examined this question, says CMHC Senior Researcher Susan Fisher, “there hadn't been any Canadian studies comparing the two neighbourhood types for such a wide range of behaviours and perceptions. There had been some comparative American studies, but they tended to focus on one outcome, such as travel behaviour.” By examining behaviours and attitudes such as walking, car and public transit use, social interaction, neighbourhood attachment and use of green space,

CMHC would like to help shed light on whether the New Urbanist developments (NUDs) were achieving their intended results.

Smart Cities Research Services, a Montréal-based consulting group, won a CMHC competition to conduct the research, working with CMHC. After a literature review, the first task was to identify four suitable NUDs that could be readily compared to conventional suburban developments (CSDs) in terms of key features such as age of the development, access to transit, and distance to their cities' central business district. Smart Cities then collected neighbourhood design data and conducted a quantitative occupant survey in each of the NUDs and four corresponding CSDs, garnering 2,043 responses. The survey addressed both travel and social behaviours, and included a 24-hour travel diary. The group then geocoded the results for detailed analysis of travel distances.

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The study's findings are extensive, revealing that the NUDs studied are denser, feature a greater mix of housing types and almost double the number of stores and services within one kilometre. Neighbourhood perceptions differed correspondingly: NUD respondents reported significantly higher levels of satisfaction with

neighbourhood design features, visits to open or green spaces, and even numbers of greetings from neighbours when they went for walks.

Car use was one of the most significant differences, says Fisher. "Respondents in CSDs were driving 24 per cent more, while about 50 per cent more households in NUDs reported walking trips." In contrast, there was no significant difference in public-transit use—though, as Fisher indicates, "we selected each neighbourhood pair to have similar access to public transit."

Despite the large sample size, Fisher advises that "the differences we observed don't necessarily mean that the urban design features alone are the cause." To address this, the team did correlation analysis to determine the relationship between the urban design variables and travel-behaviour data. Then they did regression analysis to determine the influences on vehicle kilometres travelled (VKTs), including urban design variables, socio-economic variables (such as number of adults per household and income) and perceptions (for example, convenience or safety for walking and satisfaction with urban design) in the mix. The urban design factors were statistically significant and suggest that the New Urbanist design features are associated with reduced VKTs, even when controlling for household size, income and car ownership.

CMHC already has the data needed to conduct the next step of the analysis: the influence of self-selection bias. The surveys included questions about respondents' previous residence locations, and whether they were driving or walking more or less since their most recent move. "Our aim is to determine whether these people were attracted to certain types of neighbourhoods, or predisposed to change because of who they are, rather than because of the neighbourhood design features," says Fisher. "That's the focus of the second part of our study, which we're hoping to embark on soon." ■

A 2010 Research Highlight, now available on the CMHC website (product n° 66954), provides a detailed breakdown of the comparative analysis, along with maps and photos of the sample neighbourhoods. For more information, contact Susan Fisher at sfisher@cmhc-schl.gc.ca or 613-748-2317.



Simplicity Is Key to Sustainability for Le Soleil, an EQuilibrium™ Home

"The challenge is not technical," says Christopher Sweetnam-Holmes, Principal of EcoCité Developments. "Anyone can build a net-zero energy home—but can they do it reasonably in terms of cost?" That challenge succinctly expresses the goals of CMHC's EQuilibrium™ sustainable housing demonstration initiative, which brings Canadian private- and public-sector players together to develop homes that are not only environmentally sustainable but also financially viable. Each EQuilibrium™ project is open to the public for at least six months, sold at market value, then monitored for performance with occupants for at least one year.

In 2006, EcoCité joined a team of environmentally conscious building professionals and academics, formed to respond to the EQuilibrium™ call for proposals with an urban "typical Montréal triplex" project. The project team included the architectural firm Studio MMA, the engineers Pageau Morel and Associates, the builder Les Constructions Sodero and an academic research team headed by Prof. Michel Bernier of the École Polytechnique de Montréal.

Abondance Montréal: le Soleil is a three-storey triplex condominium that, like other EQuilibrium™ housing projects, makes use of a variety of environmentally friendly features: solar photovoltaic and hot-water panels, a geothermal heating system, a greywater heat-recovery system and heat-recovery ventilators, and rainwater harvested from the roof for use in toilets. External factors also contribute: le Soleil is located on a former parking lot, now an infill property in Verdun, Quebec, and a

nearby subway station offers easy access to downtown Montréal. These factors cannot be ignored, Sweetnam-Holmes explains: "If we'd built a neighbourhood of perfect net-zero energy buildings in a suburb, it would have had a higher energy output overall than normal housing downtown. You can't look at housing in isolation."

Perhaps the most distinct feature of le Soleil is its simplicity. Whenever possible, the builders used off-the-shelf products from regional suppliers, which local installers better understood. A reduction in the complexity of construction also kept costs down, says Sweetnam-Holmes. "We were aiming for the building envelope to approach an insulation level of R50 with low air leakage," he says. "This is hard to do without a double wall, which would drive up labour costs. Le Soleil's wall system uses a locally produced urethane made from recycled plastic bottles and soy-based oils.

Other simplifications, such as separate heat pumps and ventilators for each apartment, not only reduce costs but also complexity for the owners—which, says Sweetnam-Holmes, is important to effectively market green designs. "We focus on what adds value," he says. "People want the best building possible for the money they can spend—something that feels healthy and is well designed. We don't ask people to make calculations."

Despite having what Sweetnam-Holmes credits as "some of the best experts in the business" around the table, he says that the industry still has a lot to learn about green



construction. "There's a challenge in connecting professionals to the realities of construction, to how things are actually built and their real costs." He also notes that both the banks and the new-home warranty organizations were overly wary of unfamiliar types of construction. "We wouldn't have had trouble with a LEED building, because it's an accepted standard—but there's no standard for energy production," such as the photovoltaic arrays of le Soleil. The remedy, he says, is for policy-makers to move beyond technical issues and focus on institutional barriers to green construction. ■

A project overview now available on the CMHC website (product n° 66939) provides more detail and images of Abondance Montréal: le Soleil. For more information, contact Christopher Sweetnam-Holmes at cholmes@ecocite.ca or 514-524-0191, ext. 102.

Energy Performance and Residential Shading Devices



Window coverings are usually one of the first purchases Canadians make after they move into a new home—and new research from the National Research Council of Canada (NRC) shows that it's one of the more important choices they can make about their home's energy performance.

"The issue we were trying to address is that

new, more advanced shading devices have been coming onto the residential market—both interior and exterior devices, for keeping heat in or out, depending on whether you want to heat or cool," says Senior Research Officer Guy Newsham, who leads NRC's Lighting and Daylighting Research Subprogram. "Information was not available to suggest how these might perform in a Canadian context." Specifically, Canada's climate, latitude and building standards could affect the performance of shading devices.

The research, carried out by NRC's Abdelaziz Laouadi, aimed to test several traditional and innovative shading devices on a model R-2000 home in several Canadian climates and compare their performance against available window types. Working with a standard Canadian Centre for Housing Technology (CCHT) house, Laouadi first conducted measurements of heat retention and transfer with a variety of shading devices:

- typical and highly reflective interior blinds,
- interior highly reflective closed-weave screen shades,
- between-pane highly reflective metallic blinds,
- exterior insulating roll shutters; and
- exterior closed-weave screen shades.

Laouadi then replicated the findings *in silico* by generalizing the results through a computer simulation for four Canadian cities: Ottawa, Montréal, Winnipeg and Halifax. The simulation took into account data on householders' usage and control of shading devices. To make the findings relevant to building practitioners and consumers, Laouadi compared the energy performance of these devices against their cost and estimated shelf life—projecting the cost-effectiveness of each option.

Not surprisingly, the more sophisticated window types, such as triple-clear, super low-e windows, tended to be the most expensive options, though the study found double-clear, low-e windows with argon gas to be a good balance of cost and performance.

Combinations of window types and shading devices were more nuanced. The most effective devices at reducing house heating and cooling energy use were insulating roll shutters and close-weave screens—but while rollshutters were most effective when used with conventional windows, the savings when used with high-performance windows was negligible. These devices are also expensive, which means that their payback periods may exceed their lifespans. Even so, cost was not directly related to performance: typical interior blinds actually performed better than their more expensive between-pane metallic cousins. Overall, the findings suggest that the best choice of window coverings depends not only on one's location, but also the amount and duration of one's investment. As Newsham explains, "The simple message is that your choice of window coverings has an effect on energy performance of your home. Canadians may be choosing curtains or blinds for a variety of reasons such as aesthetics or cost, and might not be aware that there are a variety of options out there with a variety of effects." ■

A report of the study, "Guidelines for Effective Residential Solar Shading Devices" is available at www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca. For more information, contact Abdelaziz Laouadi, Project Leader for the Indoor Environment Research Program of NRC's Institute for Research in Construction at abdelaziz.laouadi@nrc-cnrc.gc.ca or 613-990-6868. The research was also featured in the June 2010 issue of *Construction Innovation*, an NRC publication for building practitioners.

A New Way for Condominiums to Manage Capital Expenditures

The number of condominiums in Quebec grew by almost 50 per cent from 2001 to 2006, representing a growth from 15.2 to 19.9 per cent of homeowners. Though these rates are below the Canadian average, Quebec is rapidly catching up. So too are the financing problems that plague condominiums everywhere—especially when dealing with large capital expenditures. In 1994, Quebec adopted the Ontario model of requiring condominium corporations to create reserve funds, but owners have shown resistance to making reserve fund payments toward repairs and assets such as roofs or windows that may be made long after they have moved on—yet if these building repairs or improvements are not done, the contributors to the reserve fund do not collect on their investments.

Last year, the Société d'habitation du Québec asked its senior economist, Robert Gaboriault, to assess the problems with matching reserve funds and large capital expenditures. Gaboriault authored a discussion paper that explores alternatives to the traditional reserve fund. The paper, *Modèle de copropriété sans fonds de prévoyance* ("No Reserve Funds Condo Model") is making waves in Quebec housing circles.

As the title suggests, the paper proposes doing away with requiring reserve funds altogether. "I took my model from public finance and infrastructure spending," says Gaboriault. "When they have to create new roads or bridges or watermain, they borrow; I look at condos as micro communities." What the paper suggests is that condo corporations make a clear distinction between what is private (and paid for by the owners individually) and what is public, and use it to secure a collective single mortgage.

Whereas the purpose of a reserve fund is to even out the costs of large expenditures, a "cashout refinance mortgage loan" would do the same, but the costs will be flattened *after* the fact. Owners would then be committing funds to projects that they had already agreed to take on, and whose benefits they expect to enjoy. And if they choose to move, they simply rollover their share of the common mortgage along with their own property: this would be transparent to buyers, who would know, which repairs and renewals they are paying for.



But large capital expenditures might also include new assets. "If you wanted to add a pool or have a nicer landscape, you know in advance how to finance it," says Gaboriault, "because you can go step by step when you add assets or plan major repairs." He adds that this certainty makes the model adaptable for both affordable housing and energy retrofits—including the large outlays needed for geothermal or solar power.

Naturally, such a radical change in the condominium arrangement would be greatly assisted by having specialized legal and financial tools, so that owners and buyers are encouraged to adopt it, and can readily understand their investments. To that end, Gaboriault has prepared an investment calculator that identifies typical common assets and helps create a calendar for projected capital expenditures and establishes the weight of the common assets in the total value; this calculator can be customized for different types of investment, number of owners, and variables such as inflation, interest rates and cash-out capability.

Gaboriault expects that the idea of mortgaging the common assets will gain traction in Quebec; his paper is circulating through a provincial ministry of Justice committee tasked with looking at the condominium problem. And the idea might not stop with condo ownership, he says. "There is no reason why this cannot work with condo hotels, non-profit organizations, co-operatives and non-residential condos, so long as you can define the value of the common assets." ■

For a copy of the paper (available in French only) or to learn more about the emerging model of capital expenditures, contact Robert Gaboriault at robertgaboriault@gmail.com.

SLID Data Reveal Core Housing Need Trends and Dynamics

CMHC has recently published its annual “Recent Trends in Affordability and Core Housing Need” analysis of Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) data in the 2010 *Canadian Housing Observer*.

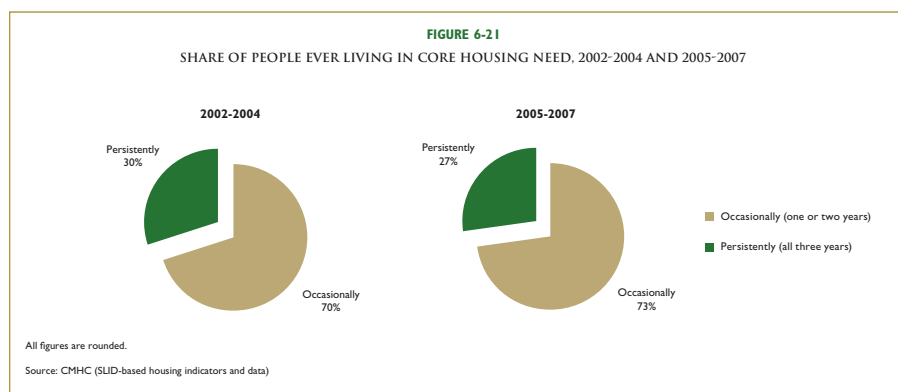
As in previous years, Chapter 6 examines trends in urban housing and core housing need, now taking into account annual cross-sectional estimates from 2007 SLID data. Overall, this analysis reveals that urban core housing need fell from 13.9 per cent in 2002 to 12.4 per cent in 2007. These figures are broken down by income quintile, tenure type, province, and selected census metropolitan area, affording a wealth of detail to researchers and policy-makers alike. The decrease in core housing need may be attributed to higher incomes and low unemployment in this period. Nonetheless, affordability (as opposed to adequacy and suitability) remained Canadian households’ principal barrier to finding acceptable housing.

The chapter also examines individuals’ movements into and out of core housing need, drawing on new longitudinal SLID data. “SLID data comes from two staggered six-year panels which overlap for three years, so combining data for the three overlapping years from both panels provides the largest possible survey sample,” explains Ian Melzer, CMHC’s Manager of Housing Needs Policy and Research, whose team conducted the analysis. The longitudinal analysis of 2002-2004 data published in the 2008 *Observer* was, for the first time, able to distinguish between core housing need that was persistent (reporting all three years) and occasional

(reporting one or two of the three years). A similar analysis of 2005-2007 is contained in the 2010 *Observer*. “When we looked at the 2005-2007 data, the results for core housing need were very similar,” says Melzer. “This confirmed that the pattern of core housing need dynamics seems to be fairly stable.”

Transitions such as job loss or gain, moving, or family breakup play a large role in occasional core housing need. Persistent core housing need is related to particular demographic characteristics such as being in a female-headed, lone-parent family, being an unattached senior woman, having a low household income, having government transfers as the main income source, and failing to complete high school. In general, most individuals who lived in core housing need did so temporarily. The 2010 *Observer* contains the first ever analysis of the dynamics of core housing need over a six-year period (2002-2007) based on data from one SLID panel.

Also for the first time, CMHC analyzed depth of core housing need, defined as the difference that a household *would need* to pay for acceptable housing and the amount it *can afford* to pay based on the affordability standard of shelter costs being less than 30 per cent of before-tax household income. The median depth of core housing need (in constant dollars of 2007) decreased from a 2004 high of \$2,030 per household to \$1,870 in 2007. Groups such as renters, lone-parent households, and households in Toronto and Vancouver with above-average incidences of core housing need also had higher median depths of housing need.



The level of detail afforded by the SLID analysis can help to develop policy to address the root causes and triggers of core housing need, and alleviate their effects where most needed. As Melzer puts it, “We expect the data to be used by anybody who is interested in housing—policy-makers, the provinces, municipalities, non-governmental organizations and academics.” ■

The 2010 *Canadian Housing Observer* is available on the CMHC website (product n° 67065). For more information about the SLID data and analysis, contact Ian Melzer at imelzer@cmhc.ca or 613-748-2328.

A Framework to Optimize Investment in Core Public Infrastructure

For the past year and a half, Canada has intensified its spending on infrastructure through the Economic Action Plan, bringing the role of infrastructure as a means to stimulate growth to the forefront of public discussion. More quietly, an initiative led by the National Research Council (NRC), the National Round Table on Sustainable Infrastructure (NRTSI) and Infrastructure Canada (IC) has been examining the question of how best to invest those funds in the long term.

While there have been many advances in the building and maintenance of core public infrastructure such as roads, bridges and water facilities over the past decades, budgeting for each is often planned in isolation – and there has been little consistency across jurisdictions to determine performance and the need for maintenance. The conditions for determining the remaining lifespan of a bridge or a sewer might vary by up to a decade among provinces and municipalities.

“Why are we managing these assets in silos?” asks Dr. Zoubir Lounis, Acting Director of Urban Infrastructure at the NRC Institute for Research in Construction. “Say a municipality has \$1 million each for transit, water, wastewater, roads and bridges—it shouldn’t be like that. It should invest its money in assets that will give it the best return on investment.” Determining return on investment, however, is a much more complex question. NRC, NRTSI and IC convened a group of representatives from provinces, municipalities, academia and industry to develop the *Model Framework for Assessment of State, Performance, and Management of Canada’s Core Public Infrastructure*, which sets out some common performance indicators for those five types of infrastructure, helping different jurisdictions to share information and reduce duplication of effort.

The Framework fundamentally shifts the idea of investment toward creating sustainable communities, says Dr. Lounis. “The key thing about this framework is the move to define overall objectives why we maintain or build new infrastructure.” These seven key

objectives—public safety, public health, public security, mobility, social equity, environmental protection and economic development—constitute what Dr. Lounis calls a “move to objective-based planning” as opposed to infrastructure spending that is driven piecemeal by conditions.

And just as the Framework arose from the input of experts in many fields, having a consistent basis for data on infrastructure across the country could provide a wealth of information for researchers in the field.

Since the publication of the Framework in May 2009, several municipalities have been leading the way in adopting its measures and objectives, Dr. Lounis notes; he expects others to follow. The process, he says, is analogous to Canada’s building codes: it is drawn up from the input of many, with a great deal of compatibility among them, while maintaining the independence of each jurisdiction. “We are not making the decisions here,” he says, “We are giving them the tools. The Framework is a decision-support tool to help municipalities and provinces make more objective decisions.”

Dr. Lounis expects the Framework to continue to grow. The team is working on the development of tools to implement, assess and pilot the Framework, while other assets, such as energy, could be added to it. It has also garnered international attention, for example from the US Transportation Research Board. However it evolves, says Lounis, “sustainable communities will continue to be the driver.” ■

The Model Framework for Assessment of State, Performance, and Management of Canada’s Core Public Infrastructure is available on the NRC website at <http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/eng/projects/irc/public-infrastructure.html>. For more information, contact Zoubir Lounis at Zoubir.Lounis@nrc-cnrc.gc.ca or 613-993-5412.



Housing and Societal Outcomes: an Assessment of Available Research

"Canada has used investment in housing as an economic stimulus and a job-creation tool all the way back to the 1930s and the Depression," says Ed Starr, Principal of SHS Consulting. However, making the case for housing as an investment for other reasons is an ongoing challenge.

With funding from CMHC, a team of four SHS Consulting researchers embarked on an extensive review and analysis of more than 100 studies, to assess the research community's knowledge of linkages between housing and societal outcomes related to education, skills development and employment. In particular, the project aimed to identify and assess the current body of research into these linkages, in terms of existing empirical evidence, data gaps, and related methodological challenges and opportunities.

The body of housing-related literature points not only to these linkages but also to housing as a driver of social and economic development, with links to improving physical and mental health, enhancing income security and facilitating the resettlement of immigrants. However, there were also significant gaps. "We were sympathetic," says Starr. "The research points to these conclusions, but it's easy to dismiss many of these conclusions because they're not based on significant time frames or large enough samples." For comparison, he points to health studies—such as those that clarified the connection between second-hand smoke and lung cancer—which involved tens of thousands of subjects being tracked over decades before a conclusion could gain enough acceptance to influence the public sphere.

From their review and analysis, the SHS Consulting researchers were able to construct an inventory of linkages, establish what indicators were used and determine the strength of the connection. For example, the link between housing conditions and child education is fairly well established, with a strong connection between poor educational performance and noisy homes, overcrowded dwellings and poor housing conditions. In contrast,

separating neighbourhood and family affluence as factors in children's educational attainment is not easy to determine, and invites further study.

Many of the available studies, though valid in themselves, could have made a more solid case for affordable housing as a social investment, he says. "The vast majority of the studies were based on interviews, news articles, anecdotal information, and so on," says Starr. "What we did was to try to identify in the literature whether the conclusions were scientifically valid—and whether the methodologies used could generate reliable results." Moreover, he found that there

were considerable gaps in research on vulnerable groups such as Aboriginal groups, seniors, people with disabilities, immigrants and single-parent households.

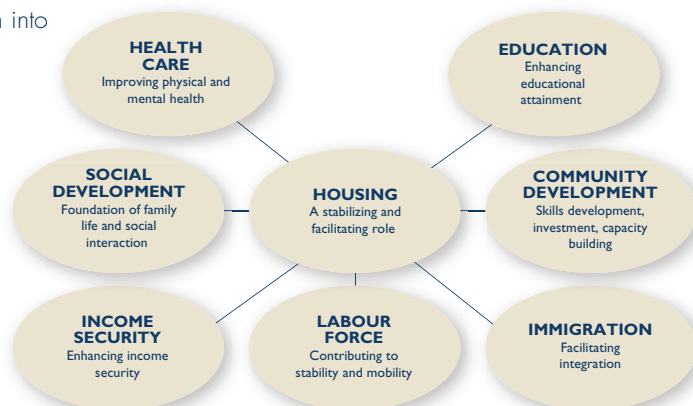
These gaps, says Starr, point to further research areas and methodologies that might be most effective.

"In terms of research methodologies, there should be more research focused on specific

hypotheses, with sample groups to follow over time: for example, following students as they move into affordable housing, to see if educational performance improves over time." He cites a study at Guelph, Ontario, in partnership with Habitat for Humanity, that showed improvement in students' grades—though for a small sample over a short time.

The point, he says, is to "have a very strong case to take to policy-makers. However, more research is needed. By learning more about these linkages, policy-makers will have a greater understanding of the broader impacts of various housing policy initiatives on society as a whole" ■

A Research Highlight now available on the CMHC website (product n° 66751) provides more detail on the study's findings. For more information about the study, please contact Ed Starr at admin@shs-inc.ca or 905-763-7555.



The Effects of Social Housing on Families

"There's a big income gap in urban areas of British Columbia between people in social housing who are fairly low income, and people in market housing who need to have high incomes to buy into the local market," explains Robyn Newton, Senior Researcher with the Social Planning and Research Council (SPARC) of British Columbia. She adds that housing challenges faced by many lower-income families in British Columbia, are compounded by the fact that "what little affordable market rental stock is available in the province is very old. Developers are not building new rental housing because the province restricts rental increases, and investing in rental housing is not very profitable."

In 2007, SPARC BC undertook an interview-based study that aimed to get a profile of the families receiving social-housing placements in Greater Vancouver and the Okanagan, to assess this social housing in terms of affordability and appropriateness, and to assess the effects of moving into social housing on families. The study involved a literature review, 85 interviews with household family heads who had moved into social housing between June 2004 and June 2006, and interviews with key informants such as housing providers.

The participants were younger than the overall population, more likely to be female lone-parent families, and more likely to have disabilities, but also relatively well educated. Participants had found their way into social housing for a variety of reasons: some had experienced family breakups, had left violent relationships, or were immigrants who couldn't work in their field of expertise. For single parents, childcare is so expensive in the area that "if you're a single parent, it might not be worth going to work," as Newton puts it.

In many ways, the findings from the interviews reflected those of the literature review: families who had moved into social housing reported less financial stress, more privacy, less crowding and



increased security of tenure. Many of the improvements could be traced directly to the improved housing situation, says Newton. "I was struck by the fact that children did better in school. For one thing, there was less family stress but, more importantly, children had their own bedrooms — a quiet place to study and sleep." Likewise, some families who had a kitchen for the first time were able to prepare their own food, leading to improved nutrition. "People on social assistance can't afford nutritional food; what money they put into housing they can't spend on food," she says, adding that many lack the mobility to shop at lower-priced supermarkets.

She also points out that "there are benefits that go far beyond having higher disposable income: families are choosing to spend money on health

services, eating better food, and putting children in recreational programs. If we were able to follow them over the long term, we'd probably find that we're saving money on health care."

While the study affirms several benefits of social housing for families, it cautions that the location of social housing is also important. For example, families that have disposable income to purchase recreation for their children must also have access to these amenities. Newton hopes that the findings will help policy-makers realize that there are benefits of investing in social housing. "Policy-makers need to know that many families that get into social housing are single parent led," she says. "We know from SPARC BC's 2008 research *Lone Mothers on Social Assistance* that their financial challenges are incredible, and those in social housing are much better off." ■

A Research Highlight on the study, available on the CMHC website (product n° 67033) provides more detailed findings. For more information, contact Robyn Newton at robynnewton@shaw.ca or 604-985-3929.

Newfoundland and Labrador Makes Affordable Housing Integral to Its Poverty-Reduction Strategy

In August 2009, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador released *Secure Foundations*, its plan for social housing over the next ten years. The document represents an affirmation of the role of affordable housing in poverty reduction. The plan follows a province-wide review of housing in 2006-2007 that included Newfoundland Labrador Housing (NLH) and various stakeholders in housing. "The review recognized that social housing is an issue that can only succeed by building a series of partnerships with other organizations," says Kate Moffatt, NLH's Executive Director for Program Delivery and Planning.

At the same time, the Province had to sustain its social-housing services through a devolution agreement with the federal government and take into account fundamental changes in the province's demographics and housing market. For example, though 80 per cent of the province's social-housing stock was three-bedroom, families had become smaller over the decades, and there were more single parents and single people looking for social housing. To make an effective plan, says Moffatt, "we first had to figure out where we are—and so we invested a considerable amount of time and resources to complete our research." That research draws on papers from six dimensions of the housing situation—such as partnerships, finance, and demand for social housing—and consultations with 150 groups.

The plan sets out three goals:

- increased emphasis on individual well-being and strengthened communities,
- strengthened partnerships and management practices, and
- improved housing assistance.

Within each of these is a set of concrete objectives, such as enhancing the management of assets and service to clients and delivery partners. Fundamental to the achievement of these goals, Moffatt says, is the fact that the plan dovetails with other provincial policy frameworks for healthy aging, long-term care and community-support services, and mental health and addictions. To ensure coordination, *Secure Foundations* established three interdepartmental committees.

Increased coordination will lead to a single, consistent service window for stakeholders in social housing, who often have to deal with NLH or the departments of Justice, Human Resources, Labour and Employment, and Healthcare and Community Services separately; instead, a Supportive Living Community Partnership Program, including expertise from each of these bodies, handles requests for funding.

Service providers will see changes on the front lines as well: for example, NLH hired a technical advisor to help non-profit groups streamline their project designs, and a community-support liaison officer to help organizations find affordable rental housing through rent supplement by matching tenants with existing supports. Furthermore, the establishment of a capital homelessness fund helps housing providers deliver on-site services.

All of these measures are responses to the research and consultations that led to *Secure Foundations*, and the plan will continue to rely on this kind of input as it is implemented. As Moffatt puts it, "We realized that we needed a research and development fund to address potential housing needs—for example, this one-time funding provides an opportunity to look into the reconfiguration of buildings." Another related initiative is the Province's Residential Energy Efficiency Program, which is administered through NLH.

The Minister Responsible for Housing is required to communicate progress on the achievement of goals and objectives by presenting a bi annual update to the public; the first such report is expected in 2011.■

Secure Foundations is available online at www.nlhc.nl.ca. For more information on the social-housing plan and Newfoundland and Labrador's poverty-reduction strategy, contact Kate Moffatt at 709-724-3053 or camoffatt@nlhc.nl.ca.

Small Rental Markets Near Community Colleges: Affordable, but not for All

In the mid 2000s, Nova Scotia's community college system underwent a significant expansion of facilities and a consolidation of most of its programs, such as pipefitting, to one or two strategically chosen campuses across the province. While this restructuring may have improved overall program delivery, it also created potential housing pressure for students who could no longer register for and take certain programs near their homes. Compounding this, the nine rural campuses (of a network of 13 campuses) were largely located in communities of less than 10,000, which featured less robust rental markets than might be found in Halifax or Sydney.

David Bruce, Director of the Rural and Small Town Programme at Mount Allison University, had heard of the potential for "increasing competition for scarce housing resources—for example, the opening of call centres in New Glasgow and Port Hawkesbury brought an influx of modest-paying jobs to compete with students for housing. But we didn't know much about those markets; there were lots of studies about universities but not community colleges, most of which don't have residences."

With previous experience in studying small rental markets and funding from CMHC, Bruce took a closer look at three towns served by the Nova Scotia Community College system: Truro, Pictou and Port Hawkesbury. This study included a literature review, a web-based student survey (with 254 respondents) and 40 interviews with rental property owners and campus staff.

Though the study's findings vary among campuses, the markets were on average slightly *more* affordable than a student might expect when attending a college in Halifax or Sydney. "Students were not necessarily feeling that it was difficult to find housing," says Bruce, "but that housing was often in poor condition, and requiring major repairs. Also, certain types of students, such as mature students and those with families, were having difficulty. There simply wasn't enough supply of two- to three-bedroom apartments in these communities, and this also put them in direct competition with other residents."

"Students typically make up the largest rental market segment in small towns with a university, such as Wolfville or Antigonish," says Bruce. "In a community college town, the proportion of students is much smaller—look at Port Hawkesbury, which has about 3,500 people and about 675 students. Estimates suggest that only about 150 of these students relocated to the community and

needed rental housing—so they make up a small group in the total number of renters. These markets are driven more by seniors looking for rental housing and by modest- and low-income families."

Bruce's report, "Affordability Challenges and Rental Market Dynamics in Small Nova Scotia Communities with Community College Campuses", also found that rental market information was often lacking—or that rental property owners were not making use of what is available. While the report cites the need for more research, it also cautions that in some cases, communities have been too small to include in rental market surveys and often the numbers are too small to be meaningful. "What constitutes a balanced market in a large urban centre (say, a vacancy of three to four per cent) might not be the same in a small community. A similar vacancy rate might mean only a handful of vacant units, or none at all in certain size and type," says Bruce. "We need to find more creative ways to capture rental market information."

The report issues several recommendations to various stakeholders: developers, for example, should consider forming partnerships with their local campuses, to ensure that new rental properties respond to the changing pressures of the market; campuses could also be more proactive in providing local housing information to incoming students. "The most important recommendation to planners and policymakers," says Bruce, "is to look at the regulatory environment, to ensure that the widest range of rental housing options can be permitted and developed (such as residential mixed use and secondary suites) as appropriate within the local community context." ■

The full report of the study's findings is available at www.mta.ca.

For more information about the Rural and Small Town Programme, contact David Bruce at dwbruce@mta.ca or 506-364-2391.



Comparing Support Models for People with Mental Illness

What degree of on-site support is best as a housing model for people with mental illnesses? A recent study of a Toronto mental-health housing organization that offers both high and limited levels of on-site support sheds some light on this question.

A team of researchers, led by Assistant Professor Jill Grant of the University of Windsor, undertook a longitudinal study to compare outcomes of the two models in terms of social well-being and tenant satisfaction. The study focused on two sites run by the organization: one featured a high-support model, including a full-time caretaker, a program manager, seven resource workers and a peer mentor; in the other, a lower-support model, tenants were supported by a building manager, had access to community resources, and generally planned recreational activities for themselves.

Both models feature a high degree of community involvement, says Dr. Grant. "This is an organization that has very strong values and ideals. Since they were expanding, they were concerned about not compromising those values." Part of that expansion was a partnership with a Southeast Asian community group that worked mostly with tenants in the low-support model.

The researchers conducted surveys of tenants as they moved into the housing developments, measuring satisfaction with their housing and social support, perceptions of mental and physical health, and mastery—which Dr. Grant describes as "the sense someone has of their own competence." In-depth interviews also explored issues such as choice of housing programs and how tenants hoped their living environments would meet their needs. The research team followed up with participants six and twelve months later, to get a sense of their progress.

To conduct the surveys and assist with the research, says Dr. Grant, "our team hired and trained four people who live within the housing model. We matched them with me and my grad students." These resident-researchers began as observers and were given an increasing role over the course of the study. Interviewees were given a choice whether to have a peer present.

Though the sample number was small (27 respondents), the results showed consistent satisfaction with both models and appreciation of the supports offered. What was more significant, says Dr. Grant, was that *choice* of support model seemed to be a principal success factor. Participants stated that they had often based that choice on safety and social interaction, rather than on available supports. "When we asked tenants what kind of support they had been looking for, and whether the organization was meeting those needs, people had a hard time answering. They'd been thinking about a safe, comfortable and attractive dwelling," says Dr. Grant.

While the findings did not show significant differences in outcomes between the Southeast Asian and other cultural groups, there was a tendency for Southeast Asian tenants to show more improvements in mastery over the course of the study, while the satisfaction of others improved most with social support. While the data is not comprehensive enough to support a conclusion, says Dr. Grant, "if you come from a more collectivist culture, as in Southeast Asia, your initial development is likely to be more individualized."

While CMHC helped to fund the first year of the study, the team has continued to collect data and to explore the issue of choice as a factor for success. ■



A Research Highlight, now available on the CMHC website (product n° 66808), provides more detail on the longitudinal study; an article in the *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* details some of the subsequent findings. For more information, contact Dr. Jill Grant at jgrant@uwindsor.ca or 519-253-3000, ext. 3074.



After Refining Its Counts of the Homeless, Calgary Takes the Next Step

The City of Calgary has conducted nine counts of the homeless since 1992. That has come to an end as the Calgary Homeless Foundation launched a new Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) that will allow funders and service providers to create, share and use data in real time.

Calgary's history of homeless counts has seen considerable evolution. It began with a survey of facilities and agencies, coupled with a physical street count in a small area where homeless people were known to congregate. Over time, the area surveyed has grown, the definitions have become more rigorous, and the number of partnering agencies has expanded exponentially—bolstered by the 2003 *Calgary Community Plan* and *Calgary's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness*.

While the data from the homeless counts have guided policy, practice and resource allocation, the City of Calgary has also learned much about effective data collection, says Dr. Sharon Stroick, Research Social Planner with the City. With funding from the Homelessness Partnering Secretariat, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, she authored a report, *Best Practices in Conducting Counts of Homeless Persons, 1992-2008*, which details Calgary's history of homeless counts, and passes along the lessons learned. In brief, the three most important lessons are *advance planning*, *adequate resourcing* and *extensive yet targeted consultation*.

"We arrived at these by trial and error," says Stroick. "You have to do good planning—whether you're doing a street count or a facilities and services count, you'll need to know it needs to know it." Even so, unexpected situations would occur: for example, when tracking emergency social service provision was moved to an Edmonton-based call centre, or when one service agency initially did not want to share data because its own information systems were deficient.

Overall, Stroick describes the atmosphere of partnerships in Calgary to be both strong and open to change. This has helped the City make progress in its homeless counts, and was also a considerable asset during the introduction of the HMIS earlier this fall.

Not only will the HMIS gather demographic and program data, it will also allow for point-in-time counts on any day. But the system is geared not just to gather, but also to use, data in real time, says Stroick. "Because it will use the standardized 211 AIRS taxonomy for information and referral services, we'll be able to check on program capacity and housing stock to make real-time referrals." Calgary's justice, health and addictions resources will also be able to make use of the data—helping to prevent, among other things, discharging people directly into homelessness.

The HMIS may also be of use to other jurisdictions. The data gathered can be rolled up to provide information to Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS), the Government of Canada's data management system for homeless people; it also makes use of the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) categories of absolute and relative homelessness to allow for future international comparisons.

While Stroick eagerly anticipates the reports that will emerge from mining the HMIS data, she points out that "other places might still get traction out of a homeless count. Smaller municipalities and rural areas can use them to begin to raise public awareness. It's hard to jump right in and do a comprehensive 10-year strategy to end homelessness without broad support." Municipalities such as these may be able to learn from Calgary's experience and gather comparable data in a shorter time. ■

The report is available on the [City of Calgary website](http://www.calgary.ca/docgallery/bu/cns/homelessness/best_practice_conducting_homeless_person_counts.pdf).¹ For more information about Calgary's counts of homeless persons and the new HMIS, contact Dr. Sharon Stroick at 403-850-1859.

¹ http://www.calgary.ca/docgallery/bu/cns/homelessness/best_practice_conducting_homeless_person_counts.pdf.

A Typology of Shelters Across Canada

The Homelessness Partnering Secretariat (HPS) of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada has conducted an analysis of data from 136 shelters across the country to determine their typologies and patterns of usage. The results form an empirical basis for trends in shelter use.

To gather data, the HPS team, led by Dr. Aaron Segaeert, worked with the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS), a software application that HPS provides free of charge to shelters to help them manage their operations; about 30 per cent of emergency shelters across Canada use the application. “Within HPS, nothing formal had been done before to categorize shelter types, so we weren’t taking anything for granted,” says Dr. Segaeert, “not what was said in the literature, nor even what the service providers called themselves. We wanted to use the data to tell us what types were empirically.”

The team gathered information about shelters through directory and web searches, field representatives and referrals—a challenge, given that many shelters keep a low profile for security reasons—then compiled a few key measures from HIFIS data: average stay length, average cumulative stay length, turnover rate and average number of stays in a given shelter over a year. What emerged was a clear typology of shelters:

- Emergency shelters (75 shelters) revealed a pattern of having high turnover, with multiple stays for each client (2.4 stays per client on average); 96 per cent of stays were for less than 90 days.
- Transitional shelters (24) had low turnover, with clients staying only once; 36 per cent of stays were for longer than six months.
- Emergency family shelters (8) were similar to emergency shelters, with high turnover; 93.7 per cent of stays were for less than 90 days, but there were only 1.1 stays per client on average.
- Violence-against-women (VAW) shelters (23) revealed patterns almost identical to those of family emergency shelters.



“What surprised us was the consistency in use for each type of shelter.”

The data suggest that, while nearly half of clients in transitional shelters stay less than 90 days, many continue with the support programs intended to help them hold down permanent housing after they leave; likewise, clients of VAW shelters seem to be getting the help they need to establish themselves in stable housing situations. The figures also qualify the notion, brought forward from some previous studies, that clients were using emergency shelters for longer periods, straining their capacity and forcing transitional shelters to take on emergency cases.

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In all, Dr. Segaeert describes the results as confirming rather than confounding anecdotal observations. “What surprised us was the consistency in use for each type of shelter,” he says. “Of the 136 shelters we looked at, we found that only two emergency shelters and three women’s shelters varied from the general pattern. They fit the pattern of transitional shelters, and may have been misclassified.”

While the analysis provides insight into shelter use, HPS plans to use it to prepare for a broader enumeration of emergency shelters, and eventually all shelters, with a view to understanding the overall number of homeless people across the country. “We’ll be looking

at emergency shelters first, where we will capture the majority of the homeless people accessing the system,” says Dr. Segaeert. “That’s because, before they access the transitional shelter system, they have already accessed the emergency shelters. Duplication is the main problem in homeless counts.” One of the aims of such a broad endeavour is to take into account people who use multiple shelters within a city, or move from city to city. ■

For more information about the HIFIS and the study on shelter use, contact Dr. Aaron Segaeert at aaron.segaeert@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca or 819-934-5353.



Homeless in Canada Report Helps to Guide Donations

A report released in October 2009 by Charity Intelligence Canada (Ci) can help Canadians spend their charity dollars wisely among the thousands of organizations with mandates related to homelessness.

The report, *Homeless in Canada*, first offers a snapshot of the state of homelessness in Canada, which Ci drew from a variety of academic sources. As Jeffrey Robinson, one of the report's co-authors, puts it, "You can't know who's doing good work until you know what the picture is." Robinson adds that one of the report's purposes was to "combat basic stereotypes about the homeless—that they choose to be homeless, that they won't play by society's rules—and to get to the real causes."

To generate a list of recommended charities, Ci began with a request for information and culled charity contacts from publications and referrals from other charities. In all, they contacted 435 organizations, 60 per cent of which had a homelessness-related mandate. Of these, 103 charities provided the audited financial statements and annual reports on their organizations that Ci requires to see a three-year track record of results. Finally, Ci interviewed the executive directors and conducted a program evaluation, examining each charity in terms of their client base, logic models, mission statements and how they measure success. In the end, 32 were recommended, 19 of which address Canada's homelessness crisis.

Bri Trypuc, co-author and Director of Donor Services at Ci, says that the list that emerged shows "the best we've found to date that are both effective and have results for the people they serve, and are cost-efficient in running their programs." She adds that the recommended charities are also those that need funding: "If a donor gives a dollar, that dollar will be spent within one and a half years. Homelessness is happening today, and it must be assisted today."

The charities are diverse, with mandates including providing meals, intervention, remedial measures and helping homeless youth. They also adopt a variety of approaches, such as Pathways Housing First—but Trypuc affirms that Ci's evidence-based model is more concerned about results than methods. Robinson concurs: "You can't just focus on prevention or remediation and expect it'll 'solve' homelessness. Prevention may reduce the number of remedial organizations you need, but so long as there are mental-health and addiction issues, there will be a need for remedial care."

The results-based approach is also why the report focuses on the chronically homeless, where intervention costs per individual are highest—but, as Trypuc describes it, "they also have the lowest life expectancy on the street, and present the greatest cost to society, in terms of social services, the justice system and the healthcare system." Indeed, one of the key findings of the report is that these costs far outweigh the funds needed to house these individuals.

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"Homelessness is happening today, and it must be assisted today."



Ci continues to gather information on charities across the country and aims to release reports on the results that recommended charities have achieved in the past year. Meanwhile, donations to charities through Ci have shown encouraging results: there have been approximately 1,575 downloads of *Homeless in Canada* in the year since its release; and, of the roughly \$468,000 in annual donations, more than half have gone directly to the recommended homelessness-related charities.

And Ci will continue to guide those donations where they will do the most good, says Trypuc. “We don’t need to give more—we need to reallocate what we give. Canadians give \$8.2 billion in

charity dollars, and nearly 60 per cent goes to 1 per cent of charities. It’s a big business—and we need to rethink it in terms of which charities have strong outcomes, are stopping and curbing the cycle of homelessness, and giving people the tools they need to break that cycle.” ■

The *Homeless in Canada* report is available from www.charityintelligence.ca. For more information about Ci’s work, contact Bri Trypuc at btrypuc@charityintelligence.ca or 416-363-1555.



Evaluating the Effectiveness of Interventions for the Homeless in BC

"Internationally, there are clear gaps in knowledge and practices concerning homelessness and promoting recovery among people who are homeless," says Dr. Julian Somers of Simon Fraser University. He is leading a large-scale longitudinal study of Vancouver's homeless, which aims to ascertain the relative effectiveness of several interventions in a Canadian context—an understanding that may be critical to guiding policy and investments. "In Canada," he says, "we lag behind other countries in having national policies and programs in support of the homeless; we also have a vast geography with regions that are distinct enough that housing policy solutions may be effective in one region and not in others."

The study is enrolling 500 participants in Vancouver, British Columbia. Field researchers first screen the participants, who must be "absolutely" homeless or precariously housed, and then categorize them as having moderate or high needs; some of each category are selected randomly as a control group, while others are referred to various interventions promoted by the At Home/*Chez Soi* project, an initiative of the Mental Health Commission of Canada to investigate mental health and homelessness in five Canadian cities. The interventions, based on a Housing First approach, are:

- placement in independent apartments, with Intensive Case Management or ICM (for moderate-needs participants), which is available 12 hours per day to link participants with the existing service delivery system;
- independent, scattered-site apartments, with Assertive Community Treatment, or ACT (for higher-needs participants), in which a 24-7 community-based team provides a broad array of clinical and support services; or
- congregate self-contained units with on-site supports (for higher-needs participants).

The participants are then interviewed every three months over two years to monitor progress in their living situations, health, service use and quality of life. "Keeping track of individuals who have no fixed address is an ongoing challenge," says Dr. Somers. "What's

needed is a very active research presence in the field. The team that is doing this work includes professional and experienced research staff, some of whom already worked in agencies in the downtown East Side." This group is separate from the ACT and ICM teams supporting the participants, each of which includes dedicated professionals.

As of this publication, the Vancouver study has over 300 participants. While it's too early to draw conclusions about the long-term effectiveness of these interventions, the team has been able to construct a profile from the first wave of interviews: gender, age, prevalence of substance abuse or blood-borne infectious diseases, how long they've been homeless—and how these factors compare in the higher- and moderate-needs groups. "We found that individuals in the higher-needs group tended to have become homeless at a much younger age, and had been homeless for a much longer period," says Dr. Somers. "This raises other questions. For example, are people who are 42 at recruitment [into the study] likely to wind up having higher needs because they've been homeless longer—or were they higher-needs early on, and the system didn't help them?"

"Such questions of causality will take time to tease out," says Dr. Somers. When asked if there will be any findings released during the course of the study, he adds, "We will absolutely not wait until 2013. It's crucial that the results be made available to policymakers, and to guide whether services and housing supports established through our research should be converted into programs." ■

For more information about the study, contact Dr. Julian M Somers at jsomers@sfu.ca or 778-782-5049. The At Home project is further detailed at www.mentalhealthcommission.ca.