



RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

BC Housing: Seniors Housing Intentions Survey

October 2016 Socio-economic Series

INTRODUCTION

The proportion of adults 55+ is projected by BC Statistics to increase from 29% in 2011 to 36% in 2030. Similar growth in the population of seniors and the elderly is expected across most provinces. This research was conducted to learn more about the types of housing and related supports that will be needed in British Columbia (BC) over the medium and long term as a larger proportion of the population becomes seniors. In addition to a provincial overview of seniors' housing intentions, this study also focused on seniors in northern, urban, suburban, and rural communities.

This survey was conducted by Sentis Market Research for BC Housing and Office of Housing and Construction Standards, with financial support from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). While the project was limited to BC, it provides insight on the subject of seniors housing needs and preferences and the implications of the aging population on the housing supply, what types of housing solutions might be appropriate and how intentions, needs and solutions might differ between urban and rural areas.

OBJECTIVES

Specific objectives of the survey were to investigate:

- Whether older adults plan to age in their existing communities or relocate, and how far they plan to move
- The housing form and tenure that older adults are looking for as they age
- The types of support services older adults want/need to be associated with their housing, such as meals, personal care, housekeeping, nursing support, etc.
- Factors that might influence key decisions around where seniors plan to live, such as proximity to family, and access to health support and leisure services, etc.

METHODOLOGY

A telephone survey of adults aged 55 or older across British Columbia was conducted in June 2015. A total of 400 people were interviewed across the province as a whole; an additional 300 interviews were carried out with residents of four northern BC communities: Prince Rupert, Port Edward, Terrace, and Kitimat. Housing Action Plans had been recently completed in these northern communities, and the plans identified a need for research to gain a better understanding of seniors' housing intentions. The results were weighted by age and gender to ensure that regional samples accurately reflected the senior population.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Ownership and Current Housing

BC seniors' current housing situation was found to have a substantial bearing on their future housing intentions. For example, if they currently lived in a single family home – as 84% of respondents did – they saw themselves as staying in that home or moving to another detached home in the future. Home ownership was related to household income; those with incomes of less than \$30,000 a year were more likely to rent compared to those with incomes of \$30,000 or more.

The incidence of home ownership among BC seniors was highest in northern communities and rural areas; home ownership decreased with age, and increased along with household income. Similarly, the proportions living in single-family (detached) dwellings were higher in northern communities and rural areas than in smaller cities or Metro areas.

Accessibility of Current Housing

Half (50%) of the seniors surveyed said their current home would be easy “for someone with a mobility issue to get around or carry out daily living activities” (see Table 1). This means that 50% of seniors' homes across the province may not be set up to accommodate them as they age, that is, their homes are not “accessible”¹.

Table 1 Accessibility, BC residents 55+

Accessibility		
50	current home easy to get around in (28% very easy and 22% somewhat easy)	
50	current home difficult to get around in (27% somewhat difficult and 23% very difficult)	
Among seniors who live independently in a non-accessible home		
23	would consider modifying home (9% definitely and 13% probably)	

BC seniors who lived in an apartment or condo were least likely to feel their homes had accessibility issues (20%), compared to those living in single family homes (61%). Perceptions regarding the accessibility of current housing were relatively similar across the province and northern communities.

Older seniors may already have moved or improved accessibility of their homes, since only 32% of those 75 or older thought their homes were inaccessible, compared to 60% of younger seniors (55-64 years).

Only one quarter (23%) of those in homes with poor accessibility (or 11% of the total) said they would be likely to modify their existing homes to make them easier to get around. This was despite the fact that three-quarters said it was very important to have a home that was “easy and safe to get around”. The top reasons for being undecided or unlikely to modify their homes were that the house would be difficult or impossible to modify (29%), that they would prefer to move to more suitable housing (27%), or that they could not afford to modify their homes (15%).

Moving Intentions

Two-thirds of BC seniors 55+ said remaining in their own home was very important when making decisions about where to live as they aged. In fact, only one-quarter said they were likely to move in the next five years.

Movers were most likely to move within their current municipality (56%), or within their current region (21%). About 13% thought they would move elsewhere in BC. Seniors living in the northern communities were the most likely to predict that they would move outside of their municipality or outside their region.

Older seniors (75 years and older) were the most likely to say they definitely would not move in the next five years. Meanwhile, seniors in the 65 to 74 age bracket expressed the highest definite intentions to move in the next five years. It would seem that younger seniors were in a transitional stage, while seniors 75 and older had likely already made their ‘retirement’ move.

¹ The term ‘accessible’ housing in this research refers to housing that is easy to get around in or carry out daily living activities for someone with a mobility issue. It does not refer to housing that is fully wheelchair accessible in terms of meeting CSA standards or regulatory standards.

Moving Considerations

Pointing out that housing needs can change as people age, the survey asked seniors to rate the importance of eleven factors in the decision about where to live (see Table 2). While ease and safety of getting around the home was ranked highest, being able to remain in their own home rather than a retirement community was also very highly rated. Not unexpectedly, cost of housing was an important issue.

Seniors in metropolitan areas of the province were more likely to give priority to being close to amenities and public transit and less concerned about proximity to hospitals and other health services. Those in rural areas gave lower priority to being close to family and friends, compared to their counterparts elsewhere.

Table 2 Factors considered when making a decision about where to live

%	Factors considered when making a decision about where to live (% rating very important)
74	home is easy and safe to get around in
66	remaining in own home rather than a retirement community
62	cost of housing
60	proximity to family or friends
53	proximity to hospitals and other health services
45	being close to amenities (i.e. rec facilities, shops, restaurants, social activities)
44	having a sense of community
43	amount of home maintenance or upkeep
38	the weather or climate
33	being close to public transportation
24	size of home or desire or need to downsize

Future Housing

If they moved in the next five years, seniors across BC said they would most likely move to a single family home (34%) or an apartment/condo (27%) with two or more bedrooms (73%) (see Table 3). Over half of seniors across the province said that if they moved they would likely buy their home. Seniors living in metropolitan areas were the most likely to opt for an apartment/condo while those in more rural areas predicted that they would move to a single family home. Seniors in metropolitan areas of BC also expressed the greatest interest in moving to a home with at least three bedrooms.

Future housing intentions appear to change as seniors age. If they moved in the next five years, seven in ten (70%) young seniors (55 to 64 years) would buy their home, while only three in ten (29%) of those 75 or older would do so. Another three in ten (31%) of those 75+ would move into a retirement home or assisted living residence.

Table 3 Current and future housing

%	Current housing
67	single family home
18	apartment/condo
10	townhouse/row house/duplex
4	mobile home
%	Future housing
34	single family home
27	apartment/condo
14	retirement home/assisted living
12	townhouse/rowhouse/duplex
%	Likely size of home
4	studio/bachelor
19	one bedroom
48	two bedroom
25	three or more bedrooms
1	private room with shared living spaces
%	Likely ownership of future home
56	buy a home
14	plan to move into a retirement home/assisted living
9	rent from private agency/landlord
6	rent from gov't/non-profit agency
4	live with family/friends

Support Services

Few seniors across the province made use of support services such as meal preparation, personal care, housekeeping or laundry, medication assistance or nursing support, or transportation services on a regular or occasional basis. The two most commonly used services were housekeeping/laundry (16%) and transportation services (5%).

However, among the 22% who had health conditions or mobility issues, usage increased significantly for almost all support services. Further, while only 5% of seniors overall said they had needed a service but were unable to get it, this proportion reached 13% among those with health conditions/mobility issues. For the few that had this experience, housekeeping/laundry was typically what they were looking for, followed more distantly by handyman/yard work. The primary reasons for being unable to get support services included affordability, services being unavailable, or not qualifying based on income. The study confirmed that seniors with health conditions or mobility issues will need support services the most. Current usage of support services was at similar levels among seniors across BC and in the northern communities.

CONCLUSIONS

This study confirmed that while many of the BC seniors surveyed had a strong preference for staying in their current homes, half were living in housing that could present accessibility challenges as they age. At the same time, only about one-quarter of those living in homes with poor accessibility anticipated making modifications to their home. Views on accessible housing were similar among seniors across the province and those living in the northern communities.

Seniors' housing intentions appear to change with age. Across the province, including northern BC communities, survey respondents aged 65 to 74 had the highest definite intentions of moving in the next five years and could be said to be in a transitional stage. Meanwhile, respondents 75 and older had likely already made their 'retirement' move.

A key difference between metropolitan communities and rural or remote northern communities was a preference respondents in large cities for an apartment/condo for their future housing. As well, rural seniors were more likely to predict a move outside their current municipality and region than were metropolitan seniors. Both findings may reflect preferences as well as more limited housing options available in rural communities, compared to metropolitan areas.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE HOUSING INDUSTRY

Half of seniors surveyed were living in homes that will be difficult to manage as they develop mobility issues, yet only one-quarter of them said they were likely to modify their homes. The difficulty of making modifications and the cost involved were the main reasons not to do so, underlining the benefits of adaptable homes. Integrating accessibility at the design stage (e.g. wider doorways and turning spaces) and "roughing in" for future structural changes at the time of construction (e.g. framing for grab bars or kitchen modifications) are the most cost-effective ways to allow homeowners to age in place.

Designers and builders of bungalows and multi-unit housing, particularly apartments, could make their properties more appealing to those who are "downsizing" by including no-step entrances, wider doorways and other accessibility features at the time of construction.

Since about 11% of seniors and near-seniors anticipate modifying their homes to make them easier to navigate, over time there will be a considerable number of consumers looking for renovators with knowledge of renovation for accessibility. There may be an opportunity for specialized renovation teams that are familiar with re-grading to create no-step entrances, installing ramps or lifts, and retrofitting aids such as roll-under counters and grab-bars.

FURTHER READING

Full Report

BC Housing: Seniors Housing Intentions Survey

ftp://ftp.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/chic-ccd/Research_Reports-Rapports_de_recherche/eng_unilingual/RR_BC_Seniors_Housing_Mar17.pdf

Related Insights and Highlights

2011 Census/National Housing Survey Housing Series: Issue 9 – The Housing Conditions of Canada's Senior Households (2016)

<http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/68518.pdf?lang=en>

The Cost of Including Accessibility features in Newly-Constructed Modest Homes (2015)

ftp://ftp.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/chic-ccd/Research_Reports-Rapports_de_recherche/eng_bilingual/RR_Cost%20of%20Accessibility_EN_Nov10.pdf

Environment Scan on Canadian Seniors' Transitions to Special Care Facilities (2013)

<http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/67899.pdf?fr=1442087458471>

Maintaining Seniors' Independence - A Guide To Home Adaptations (rev 2012)

<http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/61042.pdf?fr=1421179776520>

Impacts of the Aging of the Canadian Population on Housing and Communities (2008)

<https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/catalog/productDetail.cfm?cat=143&itm=10&lang=en&fr=1457989400825>

Research Highlight

British Columbia's Seniors Housing Intentions Survey

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Housing Research at CMHC

Under Part IX of the *National Housing Act*, the Government of Canada provides funds to CMHC to conduct research into the social, economic and technical aspects of housing and related fields, and to undertake the publishing and distribution of the results of this research.

This Research Highlight is one of a series intended to inform you of the nature and scope of CMHC's research.

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