

# Looking at Affordable Housing Through a Gender Lens

A survey of housing professionals and practitioners

## INTRODUCTION

An underlying assumption of gender-based analysis is that certain needs are related to gender because women, men and other gender identities experience circumstances differently. How then can a gender lens be applied to the planning, design, development, construction, and assessment of affordable housing?

An online survey of housing researchers and housing sector groups was carried out for CMHC in the fall of 2017 to explore this question. The survey looked for:

- learning from housing designed specifically for women and/or the LGBTQ+ community;
- areas for related improvements in government policies/programs; and
- ways to encourage/improve housing for vulnerable women and the LGBTQ+ community.

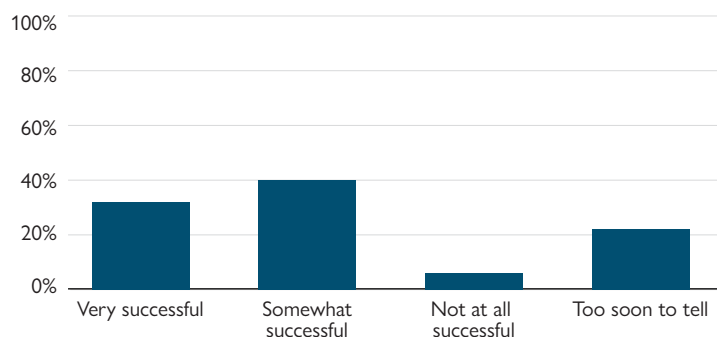
The results from 375 respondents, follow-up contacts with 44 respondents, and a literature review previously conducted by CMHC were combined to reflect how current housing meets the needs of women and LGBTQ+ persons.

## FINDINGS

The survey found that:

- Canada's housing system is addressing most of the housing needs of women and the LGBTQ+ community in that it serves all people equitably, and there are policies in place to address affordability issues.
- About seven in 10 respondents (72%) said that as far as they knew housing projects for women or LGBTQ persons were somewhat or very successful (see figure 1).
- However, there are additional needs related to specific issues, such as domestic violence, homelessness and the need for supportive services (generally provided through other policy sectors) such as mental health, disability, child care.
- Broad features of housing programs (such as planning and consultation in design), were seen as needing attention.
- Stakeholders placed particular emphasis on access to housing, physical safety and housing discrimination as areas which could be better addressed by thoroughly applying a gender lens.

**Figure 1:** Rating of success of housing projects that address women of LGBTQ+ communities



## How can using a gender lens best serve the needs of women and the LGBTQ+ community?

Survey respondents pointed to differences in “intention” between housing groups providing housing for women or the LGBTQ+ community.

- Some housing stakeholders suggested that projects intentionally based on gender are more effective in meeting the needs of women or the LGBTQ+ community.
- Others urged caution in claims for ‘unique’ status for women and the LGBTQ+ community, arguing for inclusive communities for all low-income or vulnerable people.

## Was there broad, gender-based analysis of women and housing in the literature?

- A review of 29 publications published between 2010 and 2017 found approaches to women's housing needs were very diverse. Much research focused on subgroups of women, such as those with children, Indigenous women, newcomers or seniors.
- Housing studies of the LGBTQ+ community also focused on subgroups, such as seniors, refugees, or individuals with complex intersectionality.

## How could a gender lens be applied to the phases of housing development, from housing design and construction to the operation of housing and assessment of results?

- It proved challenging to distinguish how a gender lens could relate to all phases of housing development and management (e.g. land use planning, funding, operation or subsequent evaluation).
- Nevertheless, attention to women's needs during the design phase of housing and communities was recommended by many respondents. Suggestions included:
  - improved, early consultation with women and members of the LGBTQ+ community to better reflect the "lived experience;"
  - emphasis on discrimination, safety and access to supports/amenities;
  - innovations such as combining housing and daycare or housing and employment, cohousing communities with common social spaces, and so on;
  - a holistic approach in housing operations, with integrated services for women/LGBTQ+ residents (e.g. housing, health care, education, community integration, and so on).

## Has a gender lens been applied across the housing continuum?

- The housing continuum refers to the range of housing forms in Canada, from temporary emergency shelters through transitional housing, supportive housing, social housing, affordable housing, market rental housing and market homeownership (see figure 2).
- Applying the continuum concept to 'gender needs' is challenging because gendered experiences may change over time, due to other factors such as age and health.
- There is limited information on gender-related needs in market rental and homeownership housing, although some research is related to discrimination (in rental housing) and access to financing (for homebuying).
- A gender-based housing approach would need to dovetail with gender-based approaches in many other policy areas (e.g. education or substance abuse, for younger women; health, for senior women)

**Figure 2:** The housing continuum



## FURTHER READING

Full report – *Looking at Affordable Housing Through a Gender Lens*  
([https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/archive/research\\_2/gender\\_lens\\_to\\_housing\\_in\\_canada.pdf](https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/archive/research_2/gender_lens_to_housing_in_canada.pdf))

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## ALTERNATIVE TEXT AND DATA FOR FIGURES

Figure 1: Rating of Success of Housing Projects That Address Women of LGBTQ+ Communities

Rating of Success	Percentage
Very successful	32
Somewhat successful	40
Not at all successful	6
Too soon to tell	22