

# City of Vancouver Seniors Housing Strategy

# What we heard report

July 2023

Prepared by Happy Cities for the City of Vancouver



# City of Vancouver Seniors Housing Strategy

## Summary of what we heard

### The City of Vancouver's first Seniors Housing Strategy

The City of Vancouver is developing a Seniors Housing Strategy to better understand and meet the housing needs of seniors, Elders, and older adults aged 55+ in Vancouver. To hear input from the community, the City contracted Happy Cities to engage adults 55+ and seniors-serving organizations in Vancouver.

### Who we heard from

We reached about 1,500 people through:

- 200 phone survey responses
- 950+ online survey responses
- 7 pop-up and community outreach events, reaching over 150 people
- 4 focus group discussions, reaching 45 stakeholders
- 9 conversation kits, reaching 65 people
- 1 ideas fair, attended by 60 stakeholders

### Directions for further exploration

1. Increase the supply of affordable and supportive housing for adults 55+
2. Streamline and improve access to housing and support services
3. Improve housing design standards
4. Prioritize impact and accountability in housing policy
5. Invest in advocacy and partnerships
6. Build complete neighbourhoods

### Snapshot of what we heard

- The majority of seniors are satisfied with their current housing situation. However, those who are living in unaffordable or inadequate conditions need immediate action and support. Low-income renters are most vulnerable, and often struggle to navigate the housing system, placing them at risk of homelessness.
- Affordability is the top housing challenge for adults 55+ in Vancouver, with 97% in support of adding more social and supportive housing options for seniors.
- Seniors in Vancouver are a diverse group with different needs, preferences, cultures, life experiences, abilities, and ages. Factors including racism and ageism make it difficult for some seniors to access appropriate housing.
- Most people want to age in place in their current home, but not everyone can access the supports and home upgrades they need to do so. Notably, 16% of people 55+ have not yet considered their future housing options.
- Universal design in new housing is crucial.
- Around two thirds of adults 55+ would consider in-home support services, but existing services lack the resources to meet the growing demand.
- Walkable neighbourhoods are key to supporting wellbeing, social connection, and independence for older adults.

### Key challenges identified:



# Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. What we did</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. Promotion	5
2.2. Engagement activities	6
<b>3. Who we heard from</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1. Participation	7
3.2. Geography	8
3.3. Demographics	9
<b>4. What we heard</b>	<b>11</b>
4.1. Current housing	11
4.2. Future housing needs	15
4.3. Key challenges	17
4.4. Actions to improve housing	30
<b>5. Recommendations</b>	<b>31</b>
5.1. Putting what we heard into action	31
5.2. Directions for further exploration	32
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>40</b>



# 1. Introduction

## Project overview

The City of Vancouver is developing a Seniors Housing Strategy to better understand and meet the housing needs of seniors, Elders, and older adults aged 55+ in Vancouver. This work aims to create actionable policies and identify ways to improve housing for the growing seniors population—with consideration of the diverse life experiences, health, incomes, and cultural needs of the aging population. This project included significant engagement with the community, including seniors and older adults, their families and caregivers, senior advocacy and community groups, non-profit housing providers, and development organizations.



### What do we mean by seniors housing?

Seniors and older adults aged 55+ live in many types of housing. Their needs can change quickly as they age. As we develop the Seniors Housing Strategy, we want to understand seniors housing needs across tenures (e.g. market renters, non-market renters, and owners) and types of housing, with a specific emphasis on seniors-focused housing and residences. This includes:

- Seniors non-market housing (including social, supportive, and co-op housing)
- Supports for seniors renting in the market
- Long-term care
- Assisted living

Seniors are the fastest growing age demographic in Vancouver. Many seniors live on fixed incomes and will need to adapt to health, accessibility, and housing needs as they age. Some seniors and older adults will choose to stay in their existing home or community as long as they can. Others may seek out or require seniors' buildings with supports, or will downsize to a more manageable or accessible home. About 70% of seniors and older adults 65+ in Vancouver are homeowners; however, seniors who rent their homes experience greater affordability challenges—with close to half of renters spending over 30% of their income on housing costs. There is also a growing population of seniors and older adults experiencing homelessness, and a number of seniors living in Single Room Occupancy hotels (SROs), many of them in inadequate conditions.

## Timeline

- **March to May 2023** | First phase public and stakeholder engagement
- **June 2023** | What We Heard report; Ideas Fair
- **Summer to Fall 2023** | Policy development and drafting the Strategy
- **Winter 2024** | Second phase of public and stakeholder engagement and Strategy refinement
- **Mid 2024** | Final Strategy presented to Council



# 2. What we did

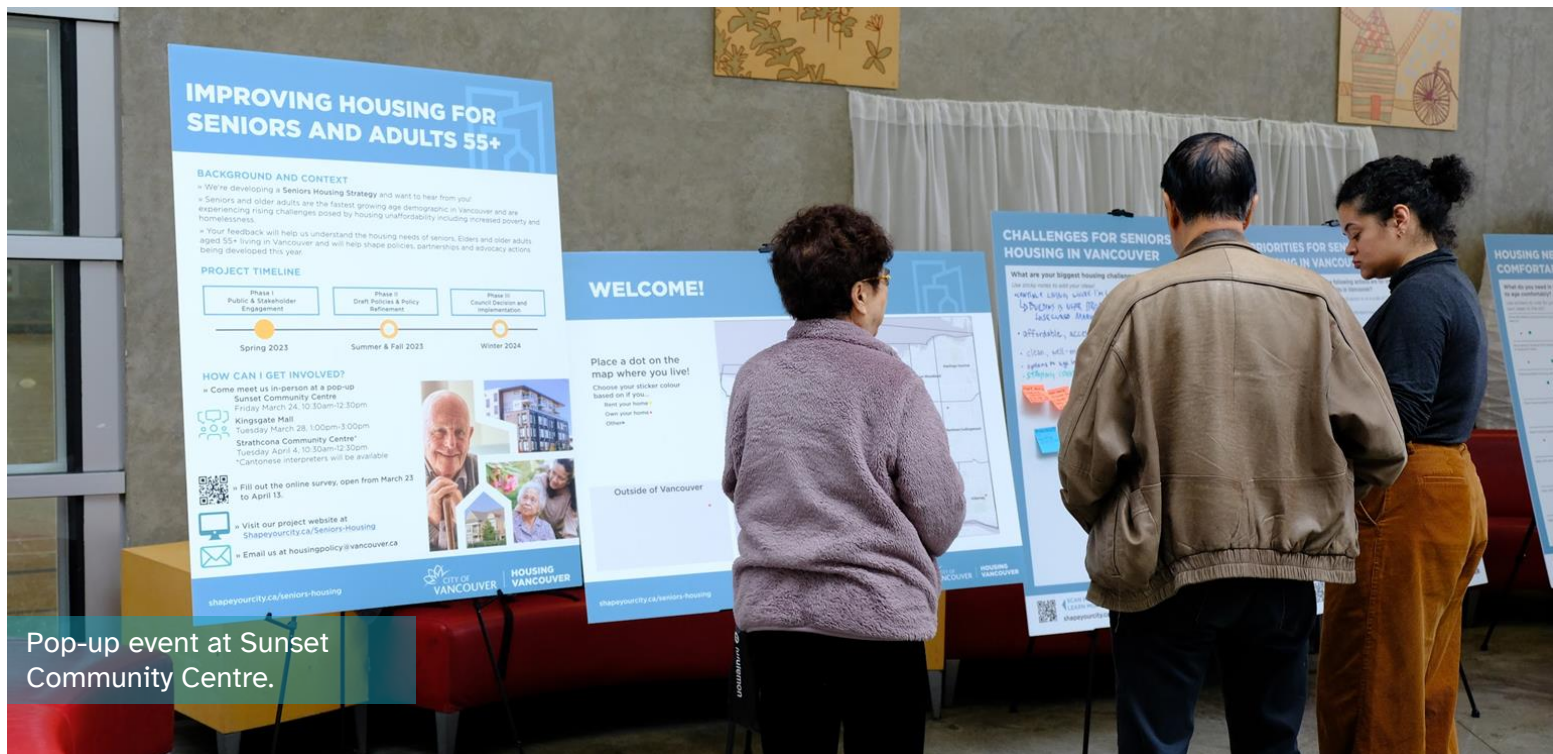
## 2.1. Promotion

We aimed to create an inclusive engagement process to hear from voices across Vancouver, including homeowners and renters—both market and non-market—from all neighbourhoods. To do so, we:

- Met residents where they are, rather than asking them to come to us
- Offered a variety of easy, accessible, and inclusive ways to give feedback (online, in person, and over the phone)
- Provided translation and interpretation services at several in-person pop-up events and for the surveys (online survey translated to Traditional Chinese; phone survey available in Cantonese, Mandarin, and Punjabi)

We reached out to share information about the project and key messages through:

1. **Social media:** The City of Vancouver and Happy Cities used targeted advertising and social media posts to encourage participation in engagement activities (on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter).
2. **Posters:** The City displayed eye-catching posters at community centres and libraries.
3. **City email:** The City emailed over 1,500 community members through the Housing Vancouver listserv to announce the project launch, sharing a link to the project page and online survey.
4. **Email invitations:** Over 120 stakeholders were emailed (including organizations and individual representatives from organizations who support seniors and older adults across the city).



Pop-up event at Sunset Community Centre.

## 2.2. Engagement activities

We offered five ways for the community to share feedback. These avenues of participation ensured that, regardless of technological abilities, people were able to share their ideas and priorities.



**Phone survey:** Mustel Group conducted a demographically representative phone survey. We offered Punjabi, Mandarin, and Cantonese translation.

**Digital survey:** Adults 55+, seniors-serving organizations, and caregivers were invited to fill out an online survey on the City of Vancouver's Shape your City page ([www.shapeyourcity.ca/seniors-housing](http://www.shapeyourcity.ca/seniors-housing)). A printed version of the survey was available at each pop-up, and it was also translated to Traditional Chinese.



**Conversation kits:** The conversation kits allowed interested individuals to lead a discussion with seniors and older adults and report their findings to the City.

**Focus groups:** We organized and hosted four focus groups with key stakeholders. Sessions were two hours long each, and took place between April 17 and 27, 2023. Three of these sessions were held online and one in person (at 312 Main in the Downtown Eastside).



**Pop-up events:** We hosted four public pop-up events in Vancouver. Each event was two hours long, with free beverages and healthy snacks.

- March 24 at Sunset Community Centre
- March 28 at Kingsgate Mall
- April 4 at Strathcona Community Centre
- May 10 at Barclay Manor in the West End

**Additional community outreach activities:** City staff attended seniors-focused events in the community to share project information and gather public feedback at three additional locations:

- March 15 at the Kitsilano Neighbourhood House Seniors Resource Fair
- April 11 at the 411 Seniors Centre Society Coffee and Conversation drop-in event
- April 21 at the QMUNITY Spring Fling for seniors and older adults in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community (at Creekside Community Centre)

**Ideas Fair:** The City of Vancouver hosted an Ideas Fair on June 20 that was attended by approximately 60 service providers, community groups, housing providers, academics, and members from the Older Persons and Elders Advisory Committee. Along with presentations from the Office of the Seniors Advocate and the project team, facilitated discussions were held with attendees to prioritize actions and ideas for the Strategy.

In addition to these activities, the City of Vancouver conducted separate engagement with housing providers and operators.

# 3. Who we heard from

## 3.1. Participation



### Pop-up events

- Most participants spoke briefly with the engagement team, contributing to two to four of the interactive display boards (see Appendix C).
- A smaller number of participants sat down with the team to participate in a sit-down focus group conversation held alongside the pop-up event.

### Focus groups and non-profit housing providers workshop

Across five sessions, we heard from 57 participants, representing over 36 organizations, including:

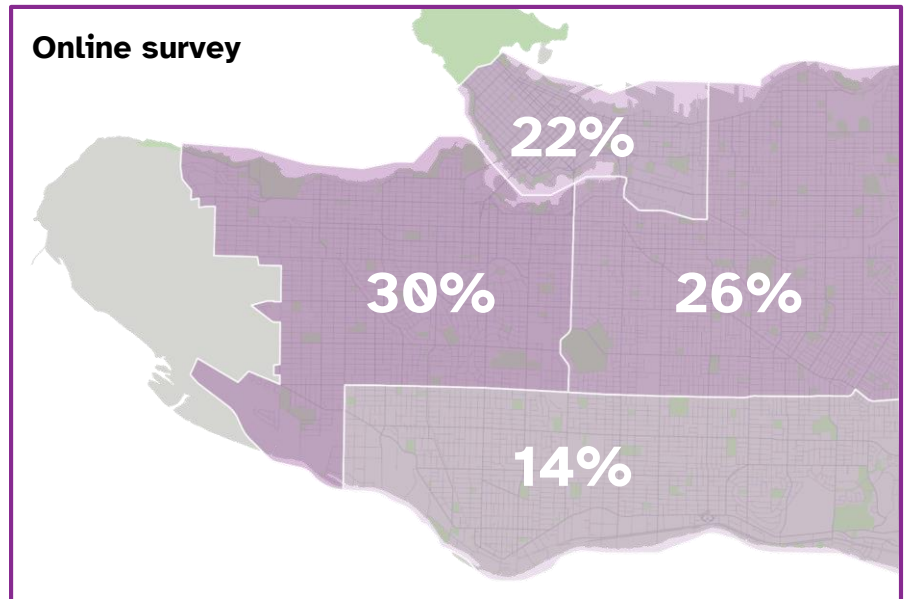
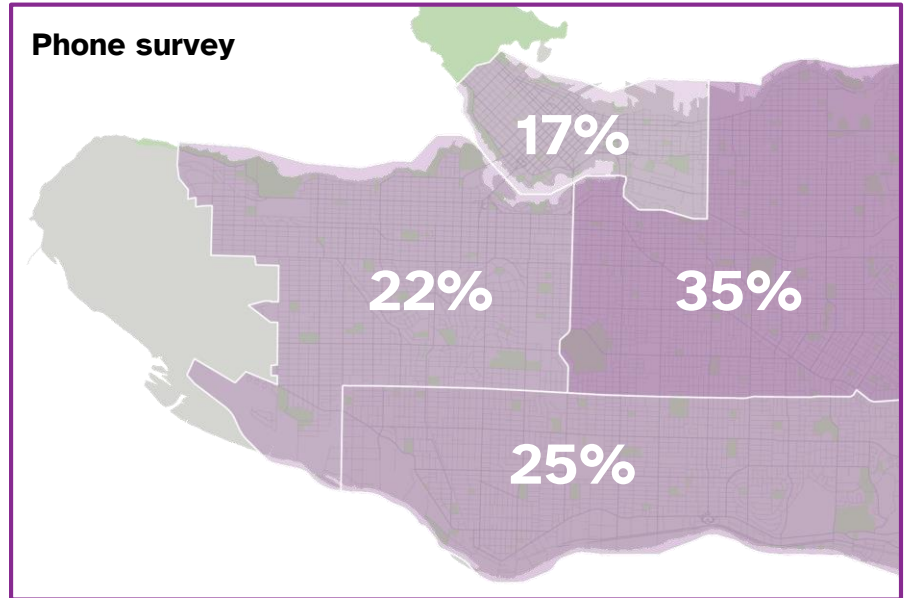
- 411 Seniors Centre Society
- Affordable Housing Societies
- BC Non-profit Housing Association
- Brightside Community Homes Foundation
- The Broadway Group
- Catalyst Community Developments
- Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House
- Council of Senior Citizens' Organization
- The Chalmers Foundation
- Collingwood Neighbourhood House
- Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House
- Elizabeth Fry Society
- Fair Haven Homes Society
- Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House
- Gordon Neighbourhood House
- Hogan's Alley Society
- Hopehill
- Jewish Seniors' Alliance
- Kitsilano Neighbourhood House
- Kiwassa Neighbourhood House
- M'akola Development Services
- Mosaic BC
- Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House
- Simon Fraser University
- Streetohome
- SUCCESS BC
- Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre
- Terra Social Purpose Real Estate
- Tonari Gumi Services Society
- United Way BC
- Vancouver Second Mile Society
- Wavefront Centre
- West End Seniors Network
- Westside Seniors Hub
- Whole Way House Society
- Yarrow Intergenerational Society

## 3.2. Geography

Through both surveys, we heard from people living in all neighbourhoods across Vancouver.

To make it easy for people to participate and to reach those who are not online, the project team also hosted several in-person pop-ups, focus groups, and community outreach activities across the city, including at:

- Kitsilano Neighbourhood House
- Barclay Manor, in the West End
- Strathcona Community Centre
- Kingsgate Mall
- Sunset Community Centre
- Creekside Community Centre



### Interpreting the results of the phone survey vs. the online survey

This report includes responses from both the phone and online surveys. The phone survey is demographically representative, meaning it provides a more accurate sample of the entire population. The phone survey allowed us to dive deeper into analyses to understand the relationships between variables.

The online survey is not demographically representative. However, it reached over 950 people, offering nearly five times as many responses as the phone survey and a comprehensive picture of seniors and older adults living in Vancouver.

The data is supported by qualitative responses from the conversation kits, focus groups, and pop-up events.

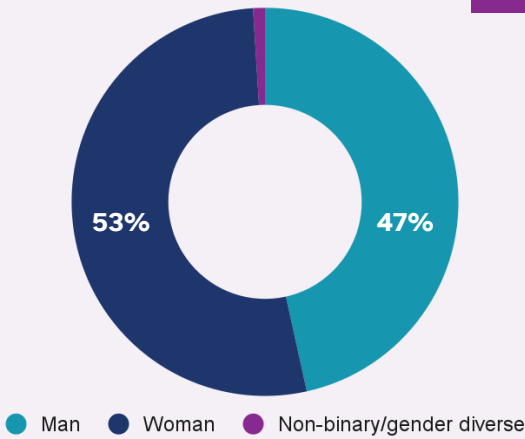


# 3.3. Demographics

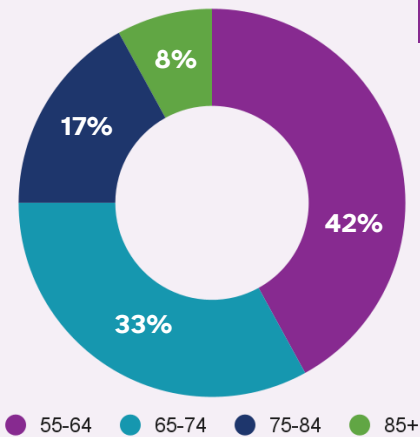
## Phone survey

The phone survey was conducted by Mustel Group between February 16 and 28, 2023. In total, they surveyed 200 individuals. The majority of surveys were conducted in English, followed by 19 in Cantonese, and three in Mandarin. The survey participants were largely representative of the general population and survey findings were weighted to ensure it was representative where needed. Demographics included:

Gender



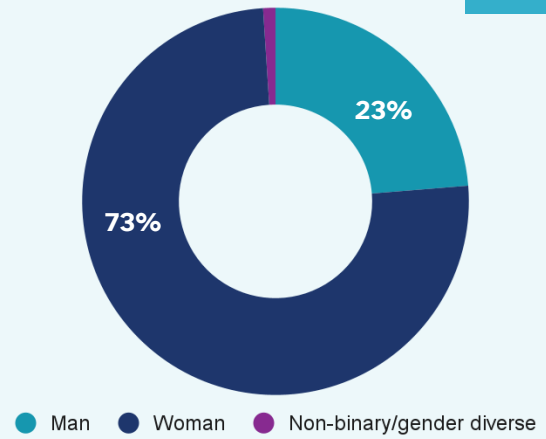
Age



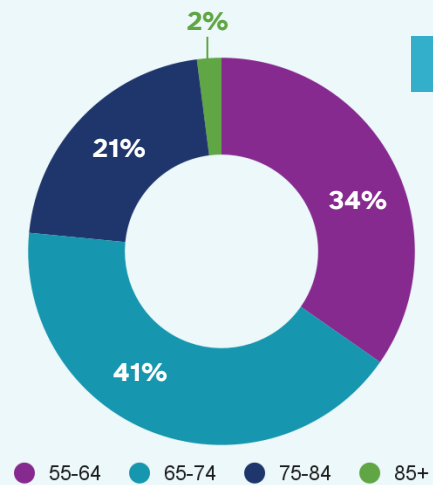
## Online survey

A total of 950 responses were submitted to the online survey. The online survey was not demographically representative. Demographics included:

Gender

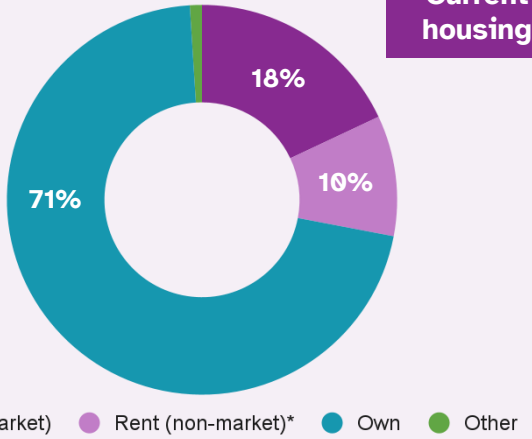


Age

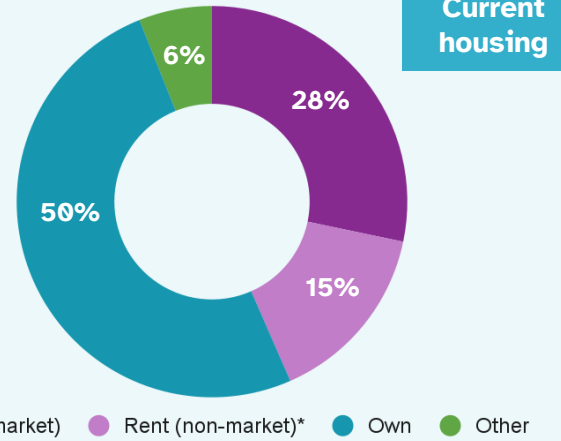


# 3.3. Demographics

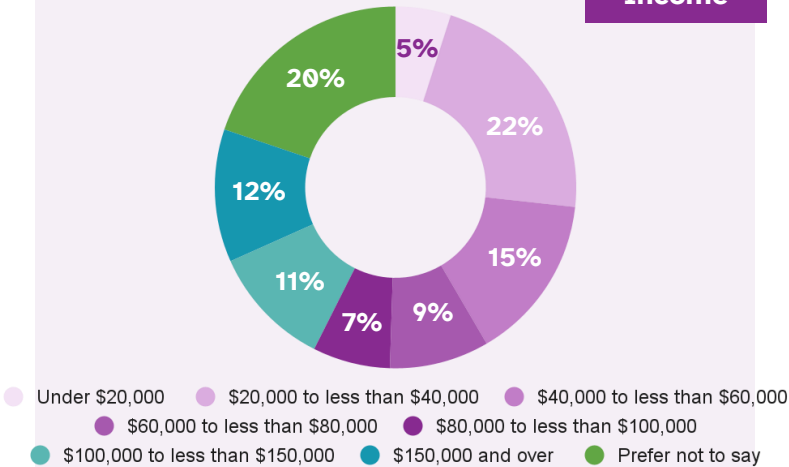
Phone survey



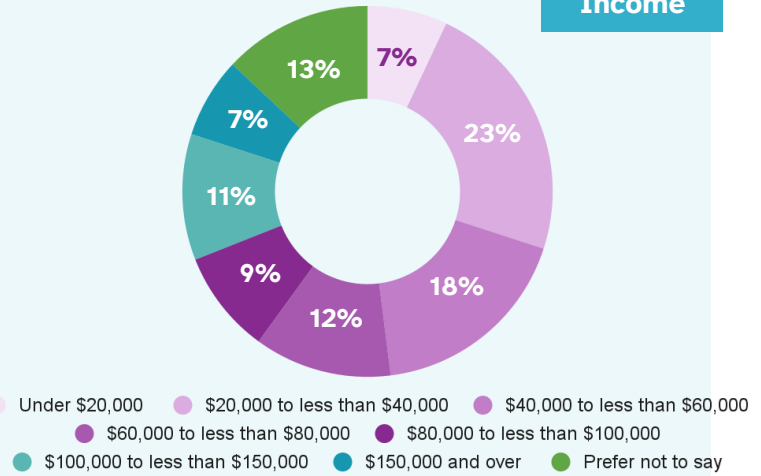
Online survey



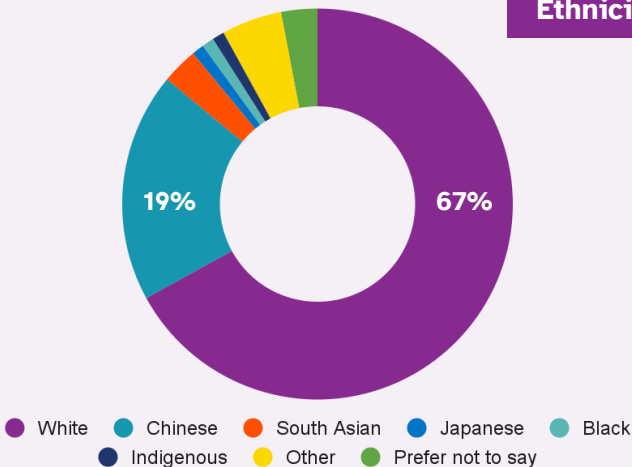
Income



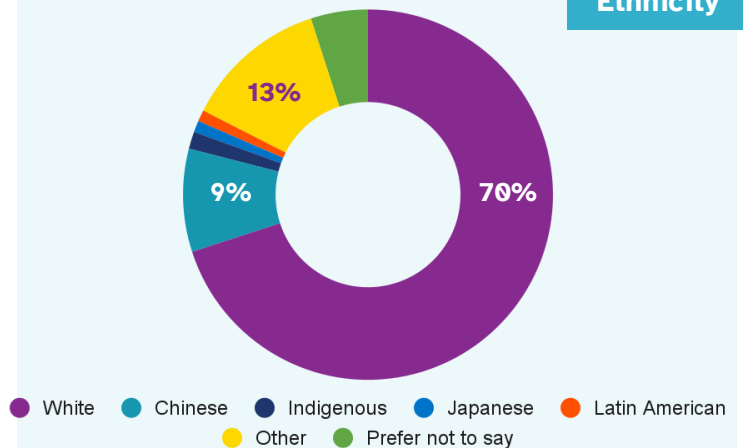
Income



Ethnicity



Ethnicity



\*In this report, the term "non-market housing" includes social, supportive, and co-operative housing.

# 4. What we heard

## 4.1. Current housing

Household types and composition vary across Vancouver. The majority of seniors are homeowners, contributing to high rates of housing satisfaction and stability. However, many older adults who rent—whether in market or non-market housing—said they face significant challenges. We heard that vulnerable seniors—in particular, low-income renters and people experiencing or at risk of homelessness—face the greatest challenges around housing insecurity, affordability, wellbeing, safety, and supports to age in place.

### Housing tenure

In line with census data, the majority of people surveyed are homeowners. Less than one third across both surveys are renters, with the online survey reaching more renters (32%) than the phone survey (24%). The majority of renters surveyed live in market units. A very small minority of respondents to the online survey expressed that they are currently experiencing homelessness or living in a shelter. Both surveys found that the majority have lived in their current home for more than 10 years (79% phone, and 61% online). Those who own their homes tend to have lived longer in their homes compared to renters, showing that renting can be associated with shorter tenure and decreased stability.

**4x**

**Renters are four times more likely to have lived in their homes for less than five years, compared to homeowners.**

*(Online survey)*

### Housing stability

The majority felt their housing situation is stable, but a significant portion felt it is unstable (22% in the online survey, 12% in the phone survey). Over eight in 10 homeowners in the online survey said their housing is stable (83%), followed by 57% of non-market renters. In contrast, just 34% of market renters said their housing is stable—with renovictions being the top concern among market renters—highlighting the vulnerability of the rental market. A further 18% of non-market renters said they are unsure if their situation is stable or not. Reasons for instability included unaffordable rent, rising costs of living, fear of eviction due to renovations or redevelopment, inability to afford home maintenance costs, lack of accessibility in their home, or actively seeking new housing.

**57%**

**of people living in non-market housing described their housing situation as stable.**

*(Online survey)*

**34%**

**Only one third of market renters consider their housing situation as stable.**

*(Online survey)*

**5x**

**Market renters are over five times more likely than homeowners to consider their housing as unstable.**

*(Online survey)*

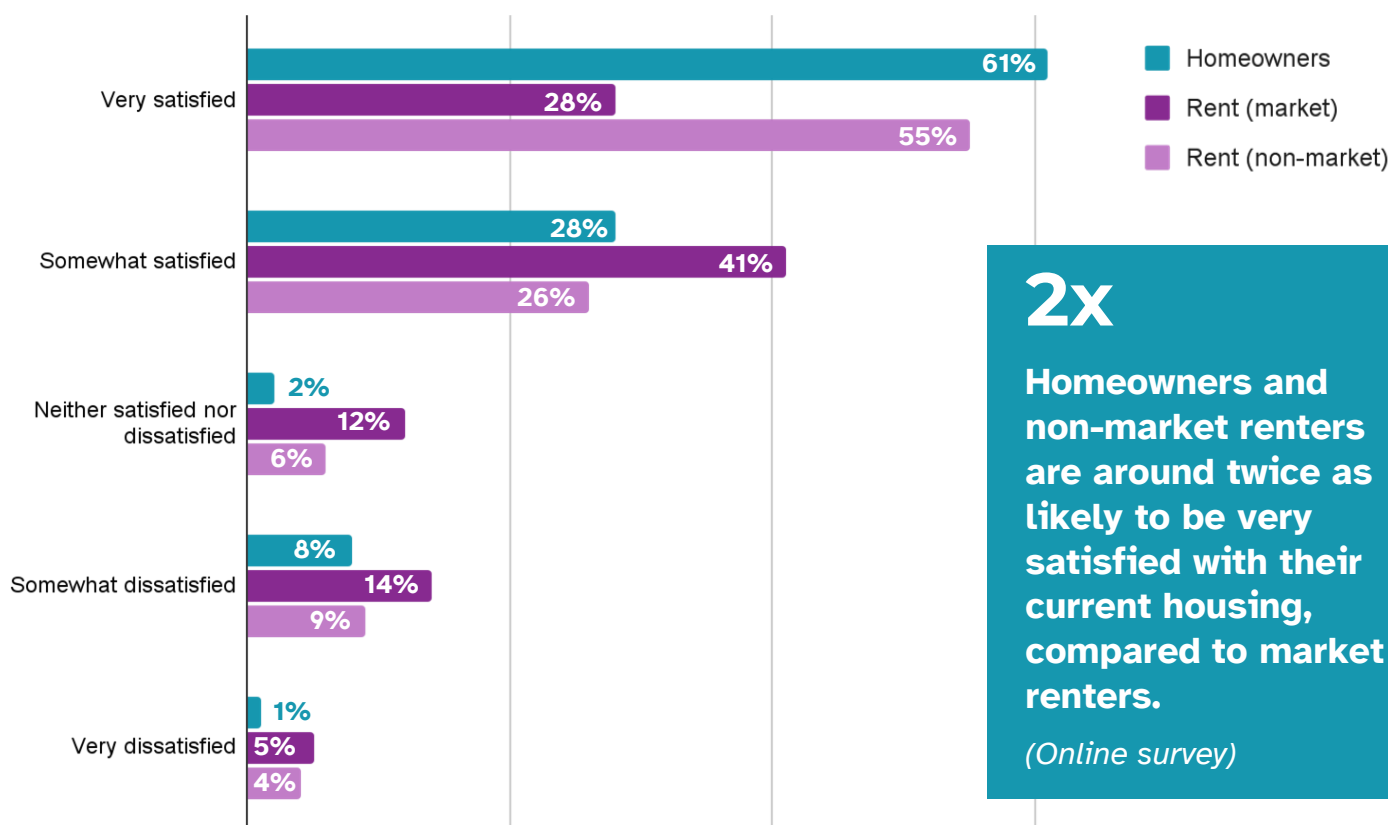
## 4.1. Current housing (continued)

While most adults 55+ in Vancouver are satisfied with their housing situations, satisfaction varies greatly between homeowners and renters, with market renters being the least satisfied group overall.

### Housing satisfaction

The majority of respondents are satisfied with their current housing (84% in the phone survey, 80% in the online survey); however, a small percentage expressed dissatisfaction with their home (10% by phone, 15% online). Overall, owners reported the greatest satisfaction with their current housing (89% in the online survey are very or somewhat satisfied), followed by non-market renters (81% satisfied). Market renters are the least satisfied group overall (69% satisfied, with only 28% very satisfied).

### Housing satisfaction, by tenure type (online survey)



### Caregiver and seniors-serving organizations survey

In addition to the public online and phone surveys, we surveyed caregivers and seniors-serving organizations on their thoughts about seniors housing challenges in Vancouver and ideas for how to improve it. The survey garnered 74 responses from a diverse range of housing societies, caregivers, service providers, and advocacy groups. The findings closely resemble the public surveys, with respondents highlighting challenges including high rents and home costs, and the need for more affordable seniors housing, at-home supports, and a diversity of housing options to allow seniors to age in their communities. The full results are in Appendix E of the report.

## 4.1. Current housing (continued)

### Housing satisfaction (continued)

When asked about positive aspects of current housing, access to amenities—such as parks, libraries, recreation centres, plazas, and corner stores—emerged as the top choice in both surveys. Approximately four in 10 phone survey respondents and nearly eight in 10 online survey respondents highlighted access to neighbourhood amenities as a positive aspect of their current home. The phone survey found no notable differences among demographic segments.

For those living in non-market housing, the top positive aspect was affordability (mentioned by 78%).

In terms of challenges, the phone survey identified a lack of affordability (16%) and required upkeep or maintenance (15%) as the top concerns. Renters were more likely to mention the poor design of their homes (20%) compared to owners (7%). At the focus groups and the Ideas Fair, some participants also mentioned that low-income seniors often have to rent units in buildings where many people are dealing with mental health and/or substance use issues. This mix of tenants can pose challenges to seniors, as many do not feel safe in these buildings.

# 77%

of respondents said access to neighbourhood amenities was a positive aspect to their current housing.

*(Online survey)*

*When asked about positive aspects of current housing, neighbourhood amenities rose to the top in both surveys.*



### Commonly heard factors influencing housing satisfaction:

#### Positive aspects of current home

- Access to neighbourhood amenities (e.g. parks, libraries, recreation centres, plazas, and corner stores)
- Pleasant yard or outdoor space
- Social connections with neighbours, family, and friends
- Design of the home
- Pet-friendly home

#### Negative aspects of current home

- Unaffordable housing costs
- Upkeep and maintenance
- Design of the home
- Inability to age in place
- Noisy neighbourhood area
- Lack of connection with neighbours
- Feeling unsafe, whether due to neighbours or housing conditions



## 4.1. Current housing (continued)

Many seniors who are homeowners live in single detached homes with multiple bedrooms. Around one third of seniors live alone, while others live with partners or family members.

### Household composition

Nearly one third of phone survey participants live alone (31%), while four in 10 (42%) online survey respondents live alone. The phone survey reached more intergenerational households, with approximately 28% living with children or grandchildren. In both surveys, a small minority live with other extended family members (such as parents or siblings) or roommates.

The phone survey reached more people living in single detached homes, comprising approximately 51% of respondents (versus one third in the online survey). The online survey reached more apartment and condo dwellers, accounting for 49% (vs. 38% in the phone survey). The remainder live in townhomes, duplexes, laneway homes, or other forms of semi-detached housing.

Homeowners living in single detached homes tend to have more bedrooms in their home than renters. The majority of phone and online survey respondents live in a two- or three-bedroom home, with three-bedroom dwellers most common in South Vancouver.

**64%**

**of senior homeowners live in a three-bedroom home.**

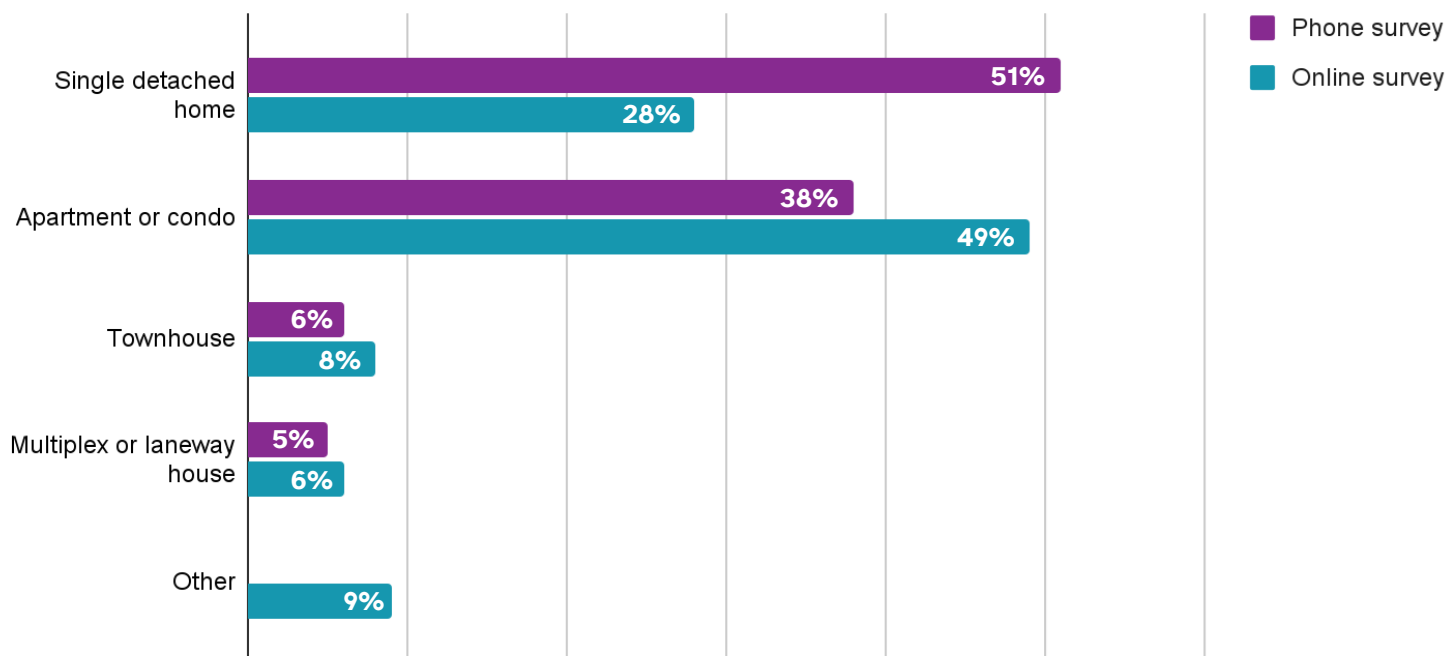
*(Phone survey)*

**31%**

**of adults 55+ live alone.**

*(Phone survey)*

### Dwelling types, by percentage of people surveyed:



## 4.2. Future housing needs

The vast majority of people want to stay in their current home as long as they can, with in-home support services a popular option for aging comfortably. However, many people feel that their current home is not equipped to support aging in place, due to accessibility, health, affordability, and other challenges.

### Aging in place

The majority of people want to stay in their current home for as long as possible (86% of phone survey respondents, and 74% of online survey respondents), regardless of age, location, or tenure.

#### Most commonly cited barriers to aging in place:

- Health issues
- Mobility challenges and inaccessible units
- Affordability concerns
- Neighbourhood or building redevelopment
- Managing home maintenance and upkeep
- Lack of supports
- Limited services or resources in the neighbourhood

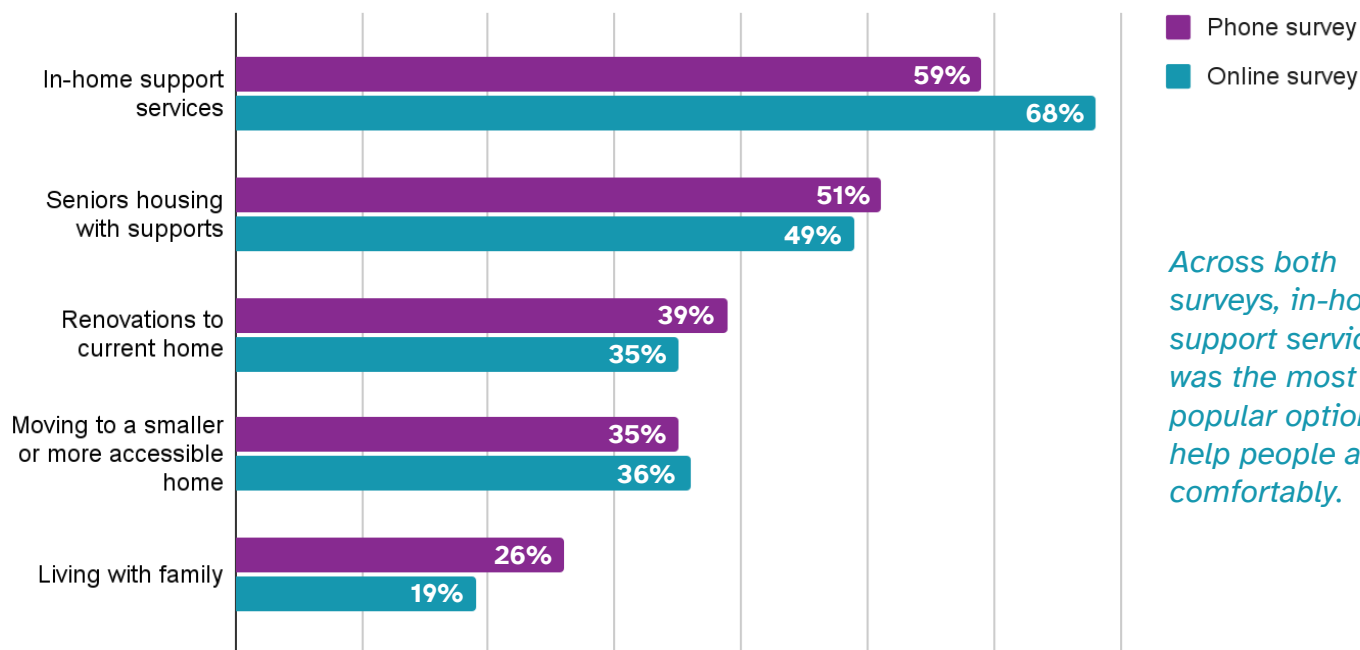
**74%**

**of respondents want to stay in their current home for as long as possible.**

*(Online survey)*

Adults aged 65+ expressed the highest level of concern regarding health issues affecting their ability to age in place, with 40% of phone survey respondents mentioning health challenges, compared to only 15% among those aged 55 to 64. Conversely, among the 55-64 age group, affordability was the primary concern (30%) compared to 8% and 10% among those aged 65-74 and 75+ respectively.

#### Percentage of people who would consider:



*Across both surveys, in-home support services was the most popular option to help people age comfortably.*

## 4.2. Future housing needs (continued)

While many people would consider bringing in housing supports or moving to a home that better meets their needs, a commonly heard theme was that navigating housing options and support services can be challenging. There is a perception that long-term care can be isolating and may place restrictions on visitors, making it difficult for partners to stay together. The phone survey found that 16% of respondents had not yet started considering future housing options. This may pose future challenges—especially considering the long wait times for many seniors and affordable housing options. Through all engagement activities, we heard that there is a need for affordable housing options across neighbourhoods that provide secure tenure for people to age in the right place.

**16%**

**of people have not yet started considering future housing options.**

*(Phone survey)*

**31%**

**cited not being able to age in place as their primary housing challenge.**

*(Online survey)*



Engagement at a community pop-up event.



Focus group discussion at Sunset Community Centre.

***“Not knowing where I'm going to end up when I'm older, that's my biggest fear. There's not many options out there.”***

—Pop-up attendee and BC Housing resident

## 4.3. Key challenges

Through all engagement activities, we heard several challenges from older adults, care partners, and seniors-serving organizations. In this report, we have grouped the challenges into eight prominent themes:



**Housing affordability**



**Meeting diverse senior needs**



**Navigating the system**



**Housing design**



**Support services**



**Housing management and maintenance**



**Neighbourhood context**



**Social connection**

While not all of these challenges are directly tied to housing, they are closely related to overall seniors health and wellbeing, and important to consider when drafting the Seniors Housing Strategy. These challenges will require partnerships and collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, including the City, health authorities, community-based seniors services, housing providers, and the provincial and federal governments. The following pages provide an overview of what we heard about each challenge.



Pop-up event at at Sunset Community Centre.

### **Innovative ideas**

Integrated with the key challenges and recommendations on the following pages, we have included several “Innovative idea” boxes—examples of promising housing solutions that we heard from older adults and community organizations during engagement.



## 4.3. Key challenges (continued)

### Housing affordability

**Housing affordability was the top challenge identified by participants in the surveys and in focus groups, with older adults and seniors-serving organizations expressing that there are not enough affordable and below-market housing options in Vancouver that meet seniors' needs.**

The majority of respondents in both the phone and online surveys (75%) considered their housing costs to be fairly or very affordable when considering other living expenses. However, approximately one fifth felt their housing was not very affordable, and a small percentage found it unaffordable. Renters generally spend a higher proportion of their income on housing compared to homeowners, with market renters being the most likely to have a significant housing cost burden.

The lack of affordable housing options for seniors and older adults, combined with their fixed income during retirement, poses major challenges. Stakeholders emphasized that there is an overall shortage of subsidized and affordable housing options for seniors in Vancouver. Renters specifically expressed that below-market units are still unaffordable for many individuals. Moreover, people felt there has been a decline in the availability of rent-geared-to-income housing units for seniors in B.C. These affordability challenges often force residents to seek housing outside their neighbourhoods or even the city as they age and their needs change.

**1 in 5**

**are currently struggling with housing costs.**

*(Online survey)*

**78%**

**of non-market housing residents said affordability was a key positive aspect of their housing.**

*(Online survey)*

#### **SAFER program**

Around one in 10 renters who responded to the phone and online surveys receive SAFER (Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters) from the Province, but many feel the program is inadequate in its current form.

When asked if the SAFER program provided effective support, only 8% felt it was very or somewhat effective. In the focus groups and surveys, many people expressed that the SAFER program is not providing effective support, as market rents are increasing rapidly and the subsidy is unable to keep up.

**6x**

**Market renters were six times more likely than homeowners to find their housing very unaffordable.**

*(Online survey)*

#### **Challenges are greater for renters**

- Both surveys found that renters spend more of their income on housing compared to owners.
- In the online survey, market renters were the most likely group to spend more than 50% of their income on housing costs.



## 4.3. Key challenges (continued)

### Meeting diverse senior needs

**Seniors are not a homogenous group, but rather encompass a diverse range of people with different needs, preferences, cultures, backgrounds, abilities, and ages.**

We heard that it is crucial to recognize the diversity of seniors in Vancouver and avoid categorizing older adults solely based on their age. Failing to understand people's unique needs can lead to misconceptions and wrongly perceiving older adults as incapable. By acknowledging the individuality of older adults, the City can ensure that people receive support and services tailored to their specific needs, fostering a more inclusive environment for all.

This section provides a brief overview of some of the distinct community needs that we heard during engagement. This is not a comprehensive list of all seniors communities in Vancouver.

#### **Seniors experiencing or at risk of homelessness**

There is a general lack of affordable units and shelter spaces that are suitable for seniors, placing many at risk of homelessness. By definition, unhoused people are not receiving adequate supports to maintain housing and wellbeing. Immediate action is needed to provide housing for seniors who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness, and who cannot afford to wait for multiple years on a waitlist for a social housing unit.

Seniors who are experiencing homelessness can face profound feelings of isolation and loneliness. Reaching this demographic is challenging, particularly those residing in shelters or relying on temporary arrangements, such as couch-surfing. Many of these individuals do not have advocates to champion their cause, do not feel supported by the system, and encounter discrimination from law enforcement and other entities.

#### **Reaching 'invisible' seniors**

We reached a small portion of older adults experiencing homelessness through the surveys and pop-up events, and engaged with organizations that work with vulnerable seniors through focus groups. However, there are still many 'invisible' seniors who we were not able to reach. Staff from community-based seniors services and non-profit housing operators emphasized that housing challenges are even greater for people who are vulnerable and marginalized in Vancouver's housing system—and who are often under-represented in public engagement processes—including socially isolated people, people experiencing homelessness, racialized seniors, newcomers, people who do not speak English, and more.

The Downtown Eastside offers a strong sense of community for many people experiencing homelessness. Transitioning into supportive housing in a new or unfamiliar neighbourhood can mean losing this vital support network. We heard that housing for seniors experiencing homelessness requires solutions including:

- Dedicated supportive housing tailored specifically to seniors in need of assistance.
- Shelters that cater specifically to seniors.
- Consideration of temporary modular housing that includes accessible units, elevators, and that can accommodate seniors living together.

Unfortunately, people experiencing homelessness have often lost trust in institutions due to past harm. Supportive housing options must be mindful of maintaining residents' dignity and not overly restricting their autonomy.

## 4.3. Key challenges (continued)

### Meeting diverse senior needs (continued)

#### Seniors with disabilities

Seniors with disabilities face specific challenges in accessing housing and support services that meet their needs. For example, housing for individuals with certain cognitive disabilities and dementia requires careful consideration of building acoustics and noise control to create a comfortable environment. There is also no dedicated housing available for the Deaf-Blind community, such as the Bob Rumble Centre for the Deaf in Ontario. A further challenge is that many seniors with disabilities cannot afford the support services and home renovations they need.

We also heard that older people with disabilities are at risk of social isolation, and can greatly benefit from community support networks. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach, including accessible housing options, affordable support services, and fostering inclusive and supportive communities.

#### Innovative idea: Small-scale shared living

Many people supported the idea of small-scale shared home options, where seniors can live communally with 10-12 people. In this type of building, there is also built-in space for caregivers to live or drop in to provide support services. This arrangement can arise if a group of seniors decides to rent a home together; however, it can be challenging to set up and secure a lease for. Some participants shared the idea that the City can further support by identifying buildings that could be leased at lower rates to seniors housing providers.

Local example:

- **Abbeyfield Houses** of Vancouver operates a seniors home in Marpole with 16 rooms and shared kitchen, dining, and living facilities. The building's live-in coordinators prepare meals for residents.

#### 2SLGBTQIA+ seniors

2SLGBTQIA+ seniors have intersecting identities and diverse life experiences. They may fear that they will not be welcome in all housing situations, including long-term care homes or supportive housing buildings. In particular, transgender and non-binary people face higher rates of discrimination, are more [likely to experience poverty](#), and may have specific healthcare needs (such as access to gender-affirming care, or care for HIV-positive survivors).

We also heard that many 2SLGBTQIA+ seniors belong to a “silent cohort”—people who grew up before homosexuality was legalized and faced significant stigma. As a result, some 2SLGBTQIA+ seniors may feel mistrust toward institutions, making it challenging to collect data through surveys or identification.

Currently, there are no care homes catering specifically to 2SLGBTQIA+ seniors, despite the existence of such homes for other communities.

#### Indigenous seniors and Elders

We heard from a small number of Indigenous older adults through the online and telephone survey. The City of Vancouver has also engaged with some Indigenous-led non-profit organizations through a sector workshop, and continues to follow protocols in engaging with the *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* (Musqueam), *Sḵ̓w̓x̓w̓ú7mesh* (Squamish), and *səlilwətał* (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. The City will continue to engage the Nations and urban Indigenous peoples throughout the Strategy process to better understand the specific needs of Indigenous communities.

## 4.3. Key challenges (continued)

### Meeting diverse senior needs (continued)

#### Cultural communities

Many Chinese seniors who live in Chinatown highly value their neighbourhood, as many have a strong social network and sense of community there. Older adults and seniors-serving organizations in Chinatown mentioned that the various clubs, community events, and informal gatherings located there contribute to a vibrant and connected neighbourhood. For Chinese seniors with language barriers, living in Chinatown brings a sense of comfort and belonging, as they can communicate and meet daily needs more easily in their native languages. The availability of communal spaces and programming in residential buildings was highly valued by Chinatown seniors, as it provides opportunities for socializing, engaging in activities, and fostering connections with fellow residents. These factors contribute to the overall wellbeing and quality of life for seniors in Chinatown.

It is crucial to maintain affordable and liveable housing options for seniors to age in place in communities where they have deep cultural connections, such as Chinatown.

#### **Innovative idea: Seniors outreach programs**

Many non-profit organizations in Vancouver that were engaged through this process provide valuable outreach services to diverse seniors, including (but not limited to):

- Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility
- Seniors Services Society of BC
- 411 Seniors Centre Society
- Dignity Seniors Society
- Jewish Seniors Alliance
- QMUNITY
- S.U.C.C.E.S.S.
- South Vancouver Seniors Hub
- Tonari Gumi
- Yarrow Intergenerational Society

#### Racialized seniors

We heard that a primary challenge for Black seniors is the anti-Black racism that many experience in housing. Landlords may subject them to discriminatory practices, such as asking illegal questions during the application process. This discrimination is evident where Black seniors have been turned away from accommodations they had already paid for. It is crucial to acknowledge that Black people, especially seniors, have unique needs that often go unrecognized. Aging in their own community, close to family, and residing in a culturally suitable environment are essential factors for Black seniors—and for many other cultural communities and marginalized groups. We heard that many Black seniors have low incomes, making retirement and accessing suitable housing options even more challenging.

#### **Newcomer seniors and seniors with English as a second language**

Language barriers further compound existing challenges faced by many seniors—including navigating the housing system, accessing support services, and interacting with staff, landlords, or otherwise. Seniors who do not speak English can face serious health and wellbeing challenges in long-term care and other housing forms, if there are no staff that speak their language, or if staff cannot accommodate different cultural needs and preferences. Without someone to translate or speak the same language, seniors can experience extreme isolation and loneliness in their homes.

Participants also mentioned that newcomers are not always aware of community-based seniors services. Settlement services have strong connections with immigrant seniors, but are not allowed to support them once they achieve permanent resident status—due to strict eligibility requirements that are tied to funding—leaving some people in a jurisdictional gap.

## 4.3. Key challenges (continued)

### Navigating the housing system

Participants shared that the housing system is difficult to navigate for the people who are most in need. Many people do not know what options are available to them, nor how to apply for supports for themselves or their loved ones.

#### Waitlists and lack of affordable housing supply

Many people age 55+ are stuck on waitlists for affordable housing, long-term care, supportive housing, and independent living options in Vancouver. People expressed that it is difficult to navigate and find a unit through the BC Housing system. Even if one has the necessary resources, support, and knowledge to navigate the system, waitlists for a unit can be five to 10 years long. Many do not know where to else to turn for help if they cannot access a unit through BC Housing. In the interim, many people are forced to live in homes that do not meet their accessibility needs, or where they do not feel safe—for lack of any other affordable and accessible options. This compromises people’s wellbeing and poses safety and health risks on a daily basis. We also heard that seniors who rent are challenged by the competition for the few units that become available in the private market.

#### Ageism

Many seniors renting in the market expressed that they have faced discrimination from private landlords, who often prefer younger tenants with higher incomes. Landlords may have concerns about older adults experiencing emergencies, or hold biases around seniors’ abilities to care for the property or afford rent.

*“The government doesn’t understand us. They can’t. When you’re in old age and you have nowhere to go, even though you’ve paid taxes your whole life.”*

—Pop-up participant



Pop-up event at Kingsgate Mall.

#### Innovative idea: Mixed-income and intergenerational communities

Many people expressed that mixed-income and intergenerational buildings can help foster connections between seniors, younger adults, and other neighbours. Some buildings can also focus on providing housing and programming for people with particular life experiences, such as seniors who are part of veteran, arts, or faith-based communities.

Local examples:

- At [Co:Here](#) in Vancouver, residents in mixed-income apartments cook, eat, and garden together in their common kitchen, dining hall, and garden. These social spaces support neighbourly connections, care, and health.
- [PAL Vancouver](#) offers social housing units for seniors in the arts community, allowing them to continue their creative pursuits and stay active and engaged. The building includes a rooftop patio and theatre space, which hosts regular community events.

## 4.3. Key challenges (continued)

### Navigating the housing system

#### Accessing information and resources

Many seniors and adults aged 55+ find it challenging to understand their eligibility for housing programs and access information on available housing options. These challenges are compounded for people who have difficulties accessing or using the internet, or who do not speak English. Many housing applications—market and non-market—require people to navigate competitive online systems. The end result is that many people do not know their rights and cannot access the benefits and services they are entitled to.

People expressed desires for a “one-stop shop”—a single, centralized place and resource they can visit to know all the options available to them and how to apply to each one. For example, specific community groups and organizations may offer housing, but individuals may not know which options apply to them. There is need for education, support, and centralized resources around available housing options, support services, and tenant rights and protections.

***“It doesn’t feel like there’s anyone out there who’s listening who can help us. You have to go through the system [to find affordable housing] but the system isn’t working. So you have to live in fear every day.”***

—Focus group participant

#### Flexibility

Flexibility in policies is essential to accommodate rapidly changing needs as individuals age. Restrictive policies in some buildings can further complicate the housing situation, limiting the ability of adult children and parents or couples with different needs to live together. There are also instances where individuals, such as women with trauma and/or people with behavioural challenges, struggle to find long-term care facilities that can provide the necessary support.

#### Understanding tenant rights

Many renters struggle to find accurate information about their rights. Many seniors feel voiceless and lack advocates when dealing with landlords, creating vulnerability and anxiety around losing their homes.

Some respondents noted difficulties when obtaining actions from the tenancy board during landlord-tenant in disputes.

Additionally, the fear of retaliation from their landlord can prevent seniors from asking for necessary maintenance or upgrades, for fear of losing their unit and having no other affordable options to turn to.



## 4.3. Key challenges (continued)

### Housing design

#### Accessibility and universal design of housing is crucial for meeting the needs of seniors and older adults 55+.

##### Accessible, adaptable, and flexible units

People’s accessibility needs can change rapidly as they age. A major challenge we heard is that many people live in units that do not meet their accessibility needs. Some live in older buildings where elevators do not consistently work, and so are trapped in their units if they are not able to climb stairs. Housing for older adults should include features like larger wheelchair- or walker-accessible bathrooms, space around the bed for maneuvering with mobility aids, and accessible kitchens with lower cupboards. Consideration should be given to storage spaces and charging infrastructure for walkers and scooters, as well as avoiding carpeting that hinders wheelchair or walker navigation and poses tripping hazards. Flexible unit design and housing options, such as lock-off units and the ability to easily reconfigure units, can provide older adults with more choices and adaptability as they age.

Emergency exits are another major accessibility challenge, particularly in multi-storey buildings. Participants emphasized the importance of accessible egress standards and mandating accessible emergency exit plans to ensure the safety of all residents. Participants further mentioned that the Rick Hansen Foundation offers guidance in this regard.

##### Shared spaces

Multi-unit housing should include well-designed social spaces to promote neighborly connections and support among residents, with considerations for services for older adults, such as nurse drop-in hours. Climate mitigation and adaptation measures—such as cooling spaces that people can go to during extreme weather—are also essential, particularly in older buildings with heating and cooling issues.

##### Health and wellbeing through design

Many aspects of housing design can promote wellbeing and health for older adults. These include, but are not limited to:

- Accessible (and visitable) multi-unit buildings with shared amenities
- Well-ventilated units with access to natural light and views to nature
- A wide range of housing types, including ground-oriented unit options (which some seniors expressed a preference for)

##### Innovative idea: Co-op housing

Co-operative housing helps build community while offering relatively affordable units, where neighbours are expected to support each other and participate in the building’s daily life. In these mixed-income communities, higher earners subsidize lower earners, and everyone gets help if their situation changes. By increasing the supply of co-op units, cities can create more affordable options for older adults on low or fixed incomes.

At the same time, seniors can face barriers to living in a co-op because of expectations around contributing to the building. For some seniors, the participation demands can be too physically or mentally taxing. Seniors-focused co-op communities are one promising solution.

Local example:

- The new [Fraser Street Seniors Co-op](#) is located on City land. The building includes the [411 Seniors Centre Society](#) offices on ground floor, ensuring that residents have easy access to support services.

## 4.3. Key challenges (continued)

### Support services

**The ability to access community or home support services is critical to the wellbeing and health of older adults and seniors, many of whom want to age in place their current home. Many community organizations offer well-used services in Vancouver, but there is more demand than capacity to provide services, and costs can be prohibitive.**

The phone and online surveys revealed that a minority of seniors currently access support services (9% in the phone survey, and 19% online). The most common services received are cleaning and food delivery. Nursing care and outreach volunteer services are less prevalent. In both surveys, a significant portion of seniors anticipate needing or wanting at-home assistance with tasks such as cleaning and personal care in the future.

#### **Community-based services and neighbourhood houses**

Neighbourhood houses, housing navigators, and community-based seniors services play a crucial role, helping people fill out application forms, file taxes, translate information, and more. The availability and accessibility of these support services across the city are essential for seniors to maintain their independence and overall wellbeing.

At-home care programs—such as Better at Home, Close to Home, and more—are well-used but have long wait lists and limited staff and funding capacities to meet current needs (for instance, the West End Seniors Network program has 100+ people on its waitlist). These needs are anticipated to increase even more in the coming years due to the growing number of seniors in Vancouver.

#### **Health challenges**

Many people expressed that it is difficult to access supports until one is in a crisis. Further, seniors who have been in the hospital for an extended period often lack a safe place to return to, whether due to eviction or accessibility needs that their home no longer meets. There are also limited end-of-life services available for seniors.

**25%**

**anticipate needing or wanting some form of home or community support in the future.**

*(Phone survey)*

#### **Challenges we heard:**

- Affordability and capacity of support services.
- Respite care options, particularly for seniors caring for a spouse or parent.
- Seniors-specific mental health supports and culturally appropriate supports.
- Ability to access at-home care services as people age and their needs change.

***“You want to be proactive, but there’s this gap between your ability to be independent and ask for extra services. You have to be in an emergency situation to get support. People need support before they are in emergencies.”***

—Focus group participant

## 4.3. Key challenges (continued)

### Support services

#### Food security

Food insecurity poses a significant challenge for seniors, particularly those with fixed or low incomes. Many seniors struggle to access nutritious meals, especially if they are left to cook for themselves. Participants expressed that housing options that include meals or food programs can be a viable solution to address this issue. Additionally, initiatives such as bringing seniors to meals at seniors centres or neighbourhood houses can help combat isolation. It is also crucial to consider the delivery of groceries and meals to seniors who may have mobility limitations.

Food programs—including gardening programs and low-cost markets, such as the Kiwassa Green Market—have had a positive impact on seniors' health by offering access to fresh and healthy food. Despite these efforts, many seniors still require assistance with meal preparation, which can be addressed through meal services, such as Meals on Wheels. Some organizations also offer culturally appropriate seniors grocery delivery services, such as those provided by Tonari Gumi Services Society and Yarrow Intergenerational Society. People highly value these services, highlighting the importance of stable funding for community-based and non-profit organizations to maintain and expand these services.

#### Innovative idea: Homecare and navigation support programs

Homecare programs can help people to age in place longer, helping them to stay and maintain connections to the community they call home. These services are highly popular, but struggle to meet demand, and often have waitlists. Additionally, navigation services are critical to help people find suitable housing options as they age. Greater funding from the Province can help expand these services.

Local examples:

- The [Oasis Senior Supportive Living program](#) partners with private, public, and non-profit housing providers to implement programming for older adults, helping them to maintain fitness, social connection, nutrition, and a sense of purpose. It is currently being piloted in buildings operated by Brightside Community Homes Foundation.
- Run by the Seniors Services Society of BC, [SHINE](#) is a province wide initiative that helps seniors access and navigate housing services and supports. It is jointly funded by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions.

#### Innovative idea: Apps and technology

For older adults (or their family members) who have smartphones and internet access, there is potential to explore technology solutions to help meet daily needs and foster social support. However, supports and information for seniors must also be accessible through in-person, phone, and print avenues, as not all older adults are comfortable using or able to use technology.

Local example:

- A new, community-based app called [Tuktu](#) helps seniors, families, and others find resources (such as groceries, meals, travel companions, and social companions).

## 4.3. Key challenges (continued)

### Housing upkeep and maintenance

**Renters and homeowners both face challenges around the accessibility and upkeep of their homes as they age. Support with home upgrades and maintenance can help people age in the right place and maintain a sense of independence and community.**

#### Renters

Seniors in rental housing can live independently for longer with both homecare support and assistance with unit upgrades. One solution identified is to hire live-in managers in buildings with a high proportion of seniors, whether they are seniors-specific buildings or Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs). These staff would be available to provide immediate support and assistance when needed. In terms of unit upgrades, participants emphasized that the City should preserve existing rental stock by supporting building owners to retrofit units—through incentives, grants, or otherwise. This may include identifying buildings that require upgrades to maintain safety.

One major challenge is accessibility in multi-storey buildings. Many people shared that they live in buildings where the elevators do not reliably work, leaving people stranded in their units. It is crucial that building owners repair and maintain elevators in older buildings where many seniors reside—as is common in the West End.

People living in older rental stock and affordable, lower-cost, or single-room occupancy (SRO) units often face challenges with maintaining a healthy living environment, whether due to pests, mould, or poor temperature regulation. These issues can exacerbate respiratory problems and lead to health complications. Seniors living in social housing and SROs often face additional safety concerns, particularly in buildings where seniors live alongside other vulnerable population groups, such as those with substance use issues.

#### Owners

Homeowners face challenges with home upkeep as they age, in areas such as snow removal, indoor and outdoor upkeep, and minor maintenance tasks. Further, as people age, their accessibility needs often change. Grants and assistance to help people renovate their homes would greatly help seniors age in place. These grants could be used for retrofitting mobility and safety equipment, such as stairlifts, personal alert devices, and security features. Homeowners expressed that they often do not know where or how to start thinking about upgrading their unit, and would benefit from more information about available grants and solutions that meet their needs.

#### Fear of renovictions

Many people in rental housing avoid asking for upgrades or renovations for fear of being evicted, with 40% of market renters in the online survey citing fear of renovictions as a source of housing instability.

Further, people who have lived in their units for a long time often pay considerably less than surrounding market prices, and cannot afford to move to a more accessible or better-maintained home. Incentives and grants should support building retrofits and upgrades, while protecting the tenancy of a building's existing residents.

It is important to ensure that protections consider seniors' unique needs. Some people noted that the right of first refusal policy for tenants in the Broadway Plan area does not adequately meet some seniors' needs. Asking an older adult to move twice within a short time frame can be prohibitive due to health challenges and the physical demands of moving.

## 4.3. Key challenges (continued)

### Social connectedness

#### Social connection is crucial to supporting wellbeing, and can help reduce isolation among older adults.

Social connectedness emerged as a critical theme across all engagement activities. Participants emphasized a desire for easily accessible programming within their homes or buildings, particularly for those with mobility or health challenges. Connections with neighbours create opportunities for mutual support, and are particularly valuable for seniors who don't have family support networks. This need for social connections with neighbours has been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic and recent extreme heat events, where isolated seniors face increased health risks. In the online survey, market renters were the most likely group to report challenges in connecting with neighbours in their current home.

Social connections can be fostered through building design, at-home programming, and through community-based programs. In multi-unit housing, building design can facilitate interactions between neighbours, such as by creating social spaces like courtyards, community gardens, and shared activity spaces. Participants also noted that resident connectors or tenant engagement staff made a significant difference in some buildings, enabling connections with neighbours through organized social activities.

Many people shared that community-based programs—such as recreational activities at community centres and coffee houses hosted by organizations like the Vancouver Second Mile Society and 411 Seniors Centre Society—play a key role in providing affordable social activities and building community ties.



#### Intergenerational connections

Older adults highly value intergenerational connections, expressing that these relationships foster the sharing of skills, knowledge, and life experiences. Multi-unit buildings with intergenerational residents make it possible for younger people, families, seniors, and older adults to help each other out.

#### Innovative idea: Homesharing

Many participants expressed the desire to access programs that help seniors share their home with a vetted student or person in need of rental housing. The majority of older adults in Vancouver own their homes, and many live in multi-bedroom houses alone. People felt that they would like to rent out their extra bedrooms to someone younger—who is in need of modestly priced housing—and who can help out with cleaning, shopping, or other minor household upkeep tasks. Governments can support policies and frameworks to make this process easier and safer for homeowners, and/or provide incentives for homeowners to participate.

Local examples:

- [Spaces Shared](#) is an online platform that matches vetted guests with hosts who have spare rooms.
- The Metro Vancouver [HomeShare](#) program connects SFU students with adults 55+ who have a spare bedroom to rent.



## 4.3. Key challenges (continued)

### Neighbourhood context

**Neighbourhoods play a key role in supporting the wellbeing and independence of older adults, including their ability to age in the right place and feel safe.**

#### Walkability

People that we engaged highly valued having access to daily needs within walking or rolling distance from their home. In both the phone and online surveys, the majority of seniors felt that their homes provide them with access to their daily needs. From the phone survey, three quarters reported that their home provides them with access to their daily needs, with those living Downtown most likely to feel this way. In the online survey, two thirds said that their home provides access to their daily needs, with no significant differences between renters and homeowners.

To help seniors maintain satisfaction with their housing and connections to their community, it is essential to design walkable neighbourhoods with supportive features such as accessible sidewalks, clear signage, and frequent seating. In particular, social housing and rental housing should be located near to primary services and amenities. Dependable transportation, such as HandyDART, is appreciated, but there is room for improvement in terms of service reliability. Finally, indoor and outdoor community gathering spaces with programming for older adults and accessible design can foster social connections and enhance the overall wellbeing of seniors.

#### Safety and wellbeing

In specific areas, including Chinatown and the Downtown Eastside, people expressed concerns about the closure of businesses that cater to Chinese seniors.

There is also need to address public safety concerns—including noise disturbances, occasional violence, and the presence of individuals with substance use challenges. Solutions should offer support and safe housing options to those most in need, and avoid criminalizing poverty and homelessness.



#### Innovative idea: Campus of care

Many people expressed that the current long-term care model is broken, while other older adults said they would only live in long-term care as a last resort. The campus of care model is one alternative solution. The City can support smaller, community-based seniors affordable housing and care hubs that include intergenerational programming, support services, health clinics, and more as an alternative to the long-term care model. People felt that these community hubs can help make aging less isolating. The [Vancouver Chinatown Seniors Affordable Housing Inventory Report](#) envisions Chinatown as a “‘campus of care’ where seniors can continue to live in the community as they age, without being disrupted from the familiar neighbourhood they have always known.”

Local example:

- [Haro Park Centre](#) in the West End follows a campus of care model.

## 4.4. Actions to improve housing

During the surveys and pop-up events, we asked participants to rate the importance of five proposed actions to improve housing for adults 55+ in Vancouver (listed below). Across all engagement activities—including both surveys and at the pop-up events—there were high levels of support for every proposed action. The top priority identified was adding more social and supportive housing, followed closely by support for seniors to stay in their current homes.

### Percentage of people who rated each action as fairly or very important (online survey)

**97%** Support adding more seniors' social and supportive housing with daily life supports

**95%** Support adding more supports for seniors to age in their current home (e.g. renovation grants, home support services)

**92%** Support improving accessibility and design in new housing

**90%** Support adding more supports for seniors who rent their home (e.g. higher rent supplements, stronger tenant protections and rights)

**90%** Support adding more housing options for seniors to downsize in their neighbourhood

### Ideas Fair: Prioritizing actions and key directions for the Strategy

The City hosted approximately 60 service providers, community groups, housing providers, academics, and members of the Older Persons and Elders Advisory Committee at the Seniors Housing Ideas Fair. The event marked the end of the Strategy's first phase of public engagement and a move to the next phase of policy development.

The session included a presentation from the Seniors Advocate of British Columbia, Isobel Mackenzie, and a summary of engagement findings from the project team. Attendees stated the engagement findings shared largely reflected their organizations' experiences. We then asked attendees to prioritize Strategy directions and actions.

#### Top priority actions included:

- Building and enabling more affordable social and supportive housing by working in partnership with other levels of government and non-profits.
- Advocating for increased home-supports to help seniors to age comfortably in their existing home.
- Advocating for improvements to the SAFER program; and
- Increasing core funding for senior-serving organizations to better meet the housing needs of seniors in the city.

*Full results from the Ideas Fair can be found in Appendix G.*



Participants discuss actions to improve seniors housing at the Ideas Fair.

# 5. Recommendations

## 5.1. Putting what we heard into action

Throughout engagement, people continuously underscored the urgency of tackling the housing crisis for seniors and older adults in Vancouver. The current housing crisis among older adults is a result of policy choices. While policy and funding for seniors housing are not only at the municipal level, the City has a key role to play in areas such as zoning, affordable housing, design guidelines, incentives for home upgrades, support services, education, and more. A key focus for the Seniors Housing Strategy should be to recognize and prioritize solutions for the most vulnerable residents—including renters, people on low incomes, and people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

People emphasized that there is a wealth of evidence and actions that the City—with support from other levels of government, community foundations, and community-based seniors services—can take to address this crisis and house some of its most vulnerable residents. Participants also noted that, in terms of taxpayer dollars, it is far more expensive to care for unhoused people than it is to provide supportive housing.

By prioritizing actions to improve housing options for older adults and seniors in Vancouver, the City can ensure that people can live in dignified, healthy, and supportive environments as they age, creating more inclusive and social communities for all residents. The Strategy must acknowledge and respect the diversity of seniors, including considerations around the distinct housing needs of cultural communities, racialized groups, 2SLGBTQIA+ seniors, Indigenous seniors and Elders, and others.

***“Before the City can improve seniors housing, it needs to take stock first. It needs to understand the role it has played as a bystander, and the impact this inaction has had on the number of evictions, renovictions, displacements from the City of Vancouver, and homelessness among seniors. There are actions the City could have taken, and now needs to take. Otherwise we will continue seeing older adults leaving the city because housing is inadequate. The housing crisis hits vulnerable populations hardest, including older adults. The City must support vulnerable seniors and renters who still remain here.”***

—Focus group participant



## 5.2. Directions for further exploration

This section presents directions for further exploration for the Seniors Housing Strategy, based on what we heard from community members and stakeholders engaged during this process.

Some actions are directly related to the supply and design of housing, while others are closely related—such as ideas around support services and location of seniors housing in relation to neighbourhood amenities. These directions represent what we heard during the engagement process, and represent action areas that City staff should explore further as work on the Seniors Housing Strategy moves into the policy development stage.

### Organizing the Seniors Housing Strategy

Several participants recommended an equity approach to the Strategy. Recognizing that people with various, intersecting identities have different needs, it is important to prioritize addressing the needs of the most vulnerable residents first. For example, people experiencing and at risk of homelessness, and people living in very low-quality housing, need immediate help. There are urgent actions required to house people in the short term, as well as wider systemic changes that will take longer to implement.

The Strategy can also include values or principles to promote wellbeing in housing for seniors—such as dignity, equity, autonomy and choice, safety, social connection, belonging, and more.

### Directions

Through engagement with the community, we identified six future directions to explore that can improve housing for seniors and older adults in Vancouver. These ideas will be carried forward and further developed as the Seniors Housing Strategy is drafted. In creating the Strategy, it is important to ensure that older adults, seniors, and community organizations are involved at all stages of development and implementation.

The six directions identified through this engagement process are:

- 1. Increase the supply of affordable and supportive housing for adults 55+**
- 2. Streamline and improve access to housing and support services**
- 3. Improve housing design standards**
- 4. Prioritize impact and accountability in housing policy**
- 5. Invest in advocacy and partnerships**
- 6. Build complete neighbourhoods**

Each direction is detailed on the following pages.

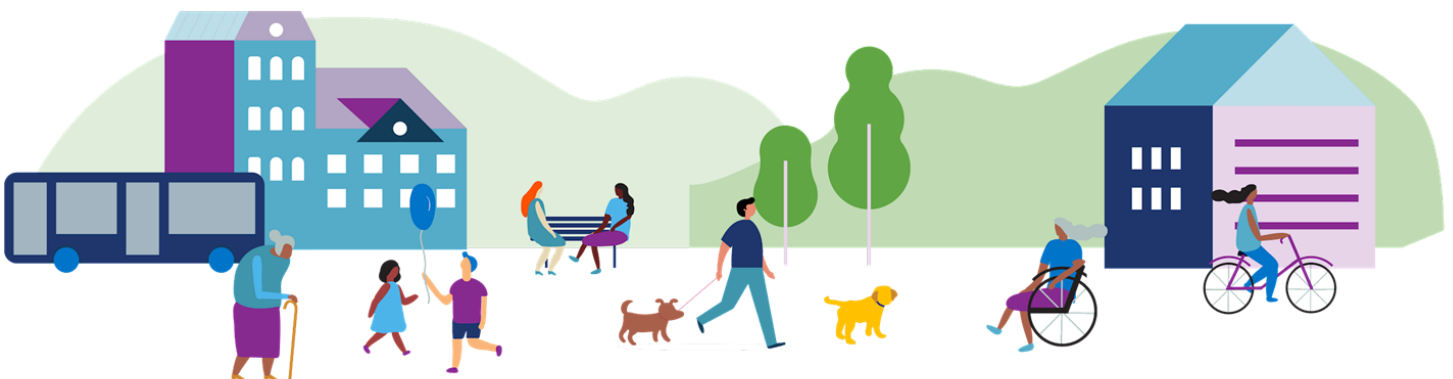


## 5.2. Directions for further exploration

### 1. Increase the supply of affordable and supportive housing for adults 55+

The City of Vancouver can promote collaboration across governments and learn from cities that have successfully implemented innovative housing models to increase the quality and quantity of housing for older adults—particularly for renters and people with low incomes, who face the greatest challenges in finding affordable housing. Actions to explore include:

- **Streamline the development application process** for non-profit housing developers. By simplifying and expediting development processes, the City can encourage the construction of more affordable housing options.
- **Support non-profit organizations** who work with seniors **to develop new housing** by providing knowledge and resources to help them undertake the housing development process. One solution can be to increase its provision of affordable, long-term leases to nonprofit housing providers on City-owned land.
- **Maximize the use of vacant land** for new housing projects. For example, the City can develop a policy that sets a deadline for developers and landowners to utilize empty land or complete construction after demolition.
- **Explore new pilot sites** that create intergenerational, flexible, and affordable housing. These pilot sites can serve as models for pre-approved building solutions that can be deployed more rapidly. For example, pilots could look at adding housing in low-density neighbourhoods or developing apartments that foster social connectedness through the design of common spaces.
- **Prioritize development that creates intentional community** through incentives and regulation. This housing could focus on mixed-use or intergenerational buildings to support residents of all ages to be resilient and socially connected.





## 5.2. Directions for further exploration

### 2. Streamline and improve access to housing and support services

To help people find the right housing and supports, the City can advocate for and help implement streamlined processes that meet people where they are and make it easier to navigate the system. In improving access to housing services, the City should support and collaborate with existing community-based organizations. Actions to explore include:

- **Centralize housing information and services** to help seniors know their housing rights and options and plan for their future housing needs. These services could include a City-run physical drop-in location that acts as a knowledge resource for housing information, guidance, and immediate assistance for tenants who have been evicted.
- **Collaborate with community-based organizations to create neighbourhood service hubs** that disseminate resources, provide services or referrals, and serve as centres for social activities and community connection. While neighbourhood houses already fulfill much of this role, the City can provide further support to help ensure that resources are distributed throughout Vancouver, reaching people in the places they already frequent and without requiring them to travel far distances to access information. These hubs can also support emergency preparedness among older adults in their community.
- **Advocate for and support community-based organizations to conduct seniors outreach services.** Outreach is essential to reach ‘invisible’ seniors and help meet people where they are at—particularly those who have mobility challenges, language barriers, or are socially isolated. The City can support by offering and coordinating resources, such as office space and consolidated information. There is potential for neighbourhood service hubs to act as a base for outreach services to vulnerable seniors who are not currently receiving support.
- **Advocate for consistent, core funding for community-based organizations** from all levels of government to help address operational challenges for organizations operating on short-term grants and terms. Long-term, consistent funding will help increase organizational capacity to expand program offerings, serve more seniors, retain staff long term, and supplement volunteer hours with more paid staff.
- **Ensure housing information, services, and supports are accessible** by accommodating diverse language needs, accessibility needs, and varying levels of digital literacy among seniors.
- **Encourage non-profit and for-profit building operators and landlords** to work with community organizations to get resources to tenants living in their buildings.
- **Advocate for an integrated approach** to providing housing and related support services. Participants mentioned that because funding is separated into different streams, it is difficult to meet the holistic needs of individuals. A case management approach was suggested by some groups to help reduce referrals, which can be difficult to navigate and access.

## 5.2. Directions for further exploration

### 3. Improve housing design standards

To address the current housing gaps in terms of accessibility and liveability, the City can promote stronger building design standards. Actions to explore include:

- **Improve accessibility standards for new buildings and developments.** Building on its Accessibility Strategy and its Building By-law, the City can strengthen guidance around universal design in housing, including accessible and adaptable units, to increase the supply of housing that meets the needs of people of all ages and abilities.
- **Create design standards that reflect best practices around aging in the right place, social connectedness, resilience, health, and safety.** Incentivized or regulatory guidelines can help encourage the inclusion of best practices in new developments.
- **Equip housing with cooling measures for extreme heat.** Strategies include installing air conditioning in more affordable units, promoting cross-ventilation and daylight in courtyard buildings, and creating community spaces that can serve both as emergency preparedness hubs and social spaces.
- **Explore technology solutions to improve safety for seniors.** Consider pilot programs, which could be completed in collaboration with other levels of government, to increase safety for seniors, such as providing low-cost or free emergency buttons for seniors who live alone.

#### Innovative idea: Dementia-inclusive planning and design

Dementia-friendly communities benefit all community members, while helping reduce stigma and increase awareness around living with dementia.

Local example:

- Researchers from the Simon Fraser University Department of Gerontology engaged municipal planners, advocates, and people with lived experience to create **Dementia-inclusive Planning and Design Guidelines**. The Guidelines include strategies and actions that cities and developers can implement to ensure that the built environment supports comfort, safety, and accessibility for older adults living with dementia.

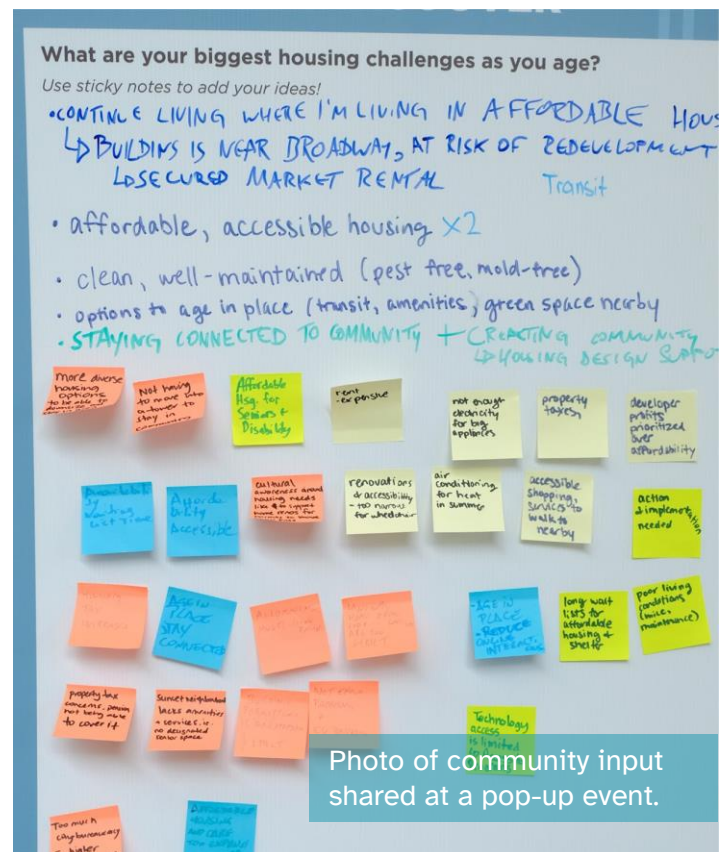


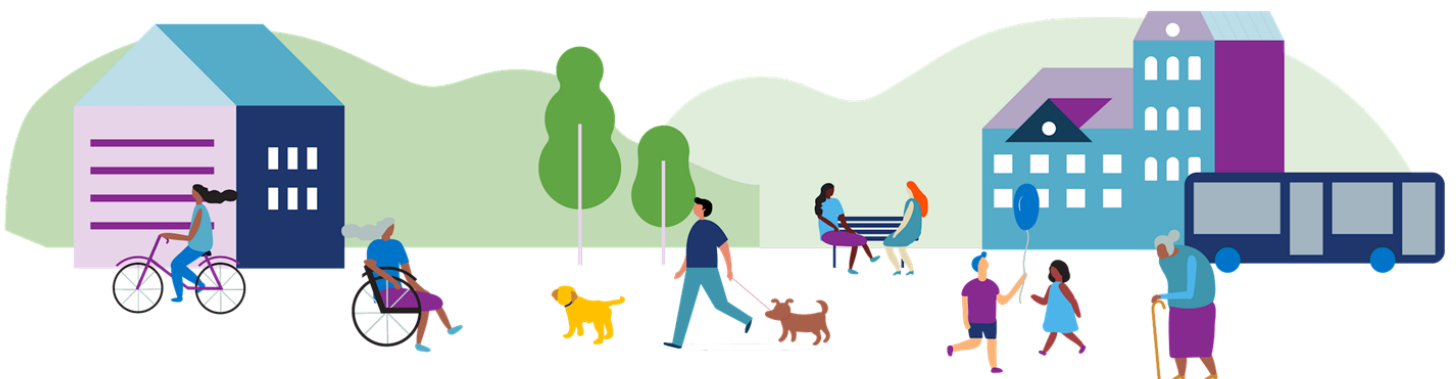
Photo of community input shared at a pop-up event.

## 5.2. Directions for further exploration

### 4. Prioritize impact and accountability in housing policy

To address the current challenges with housing processes, the City should explore partnerships and advocate for better communication, transparency, and engagement. Actions to explore include:

- **Use an equity lens to identify priority action areas** that provide relief for the most vulnerable, considering diverse needs such as cultural sensitivity, racialized seniors, people with physical and mental health challenges, and people with disabilities.
- **Ensure clear communication around the roles, resources, and responsibilities of different housing actors**, including the City, B.C. Housing, non-profit housing providers, landlords, and other organizations.
- **Conduct equitable engagement and consultation** that includes seniors, reduces barriers for people to participate, and considers best practices to meet the needs of an aging population. Report back to those consulted in several languages, and ensure that people can see how their feedback was incorporated. These practices can help build public trust and support, particularly among those who are vulnerable and not seeing solutions to their challenges.
- **Identify clear reporting and accountability outcomes in future housing strategies** to ensure that public processes and policies have the intended positive impacts.
- **Ensure that strategies are coordinated with existing municipal policies and plans** to avoid confusion, reduce silos, and ensure accountability. For instance, new neighbourhood plans should refer to the Seniors Housing Strategy, and the Seniors Housing Strategy should build on existing policy around accessibility.
- **Fund a temporary housing program** for people who get evicted or have recently been discharged from the hospital. Beyond shelters, this type of housing would provide a temporary unit where people can live while they figure out their next steps.



## 5.2. Directions for further exploration

### 5. Invest in advocacy and partnerships

To best address the current challenges facing seniors and adults 55+, the City should explore new partnerships and advocate on the behalf of Vancouver residents with different levels of government. Actions to explore include:

- **Facilitate and support partnerships among community-based seniors services**, including non-profit organizations, housing providers, and neighbourhood houses. The City can play a convening role to connect these organizations and help them provide better services.
- **Partner with local community organizations, housing providers, and health authorities** to address systemic health and housing barriers facing seniors and older adults. In particular, the City should explore partnerships with organizations including Vancouver Coastal Health, B.C. Housing, and the B.C. Non-profit Housing Association.
- **Advocate to the provincial and federal governments** to provide more funding for new affordable and supportive housing units.
- **Advocate to the provincial government** to increase SAFER rates so that qualifying residents do not have to pay more than 30% of their income on rent. Participants expressed that the maximum SAFER amount a person can receive is not adequate to live in Vancouver in the current market. Some would like to see the program have an inflator built in, and increase income limits so that more people can access SAFER.
- **Advocate to the provincial government** to reduce or remove home and community support user fees. This could help alleviate the demand for supportive housing and long-term care beds, which are much more expensive to provide.
- **Work with the Province, health authorities, and other municipalities to reform the long-term care model.** For instance, the City can help promote a pivot towards smaller care facilities and hubs that are integrated within neighbourhoods and offer community-based solutions.
- **Advocate to the federal government** to increase the Old Age Security Pension (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS).
- **Work with the Province and housing providers to study and understand the successes and challenges of buildings with mixed populations.** Currently, many seniors living in B.C. Housing or in lower-end market rental buildings live together with people who have mental health and/or substance use challenges, and expressed concerns with this model, due to safety and other challenges.

## 5.2. Directions for further exploration

### 6. Build complete neighbourhoods

Participants highly valued the ability to access shops, services, and community spaces nearby to their homes. The City can help support social connection, improve access to essential services, and support people to age in the right place by ensuring older adults can walk or roll to meet daily needs. Actions to explore include:

- **Create neighbourhood gathering spaces** in neighbourhoods, particularly where there are high concentrations of seniors or naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs). The City can ensure that zoning allows for third places such as restaurants, coffee shops, and parks in neighbourhoods of all scales.
- **Encourage missing middle density** by removing exclusionary zoning policies that primarily allow single detached homes in residential neighbourhoods. Instead, the City can legalize denser housing forms with modest unit sizes that are more attainable and easier for older adults to maintain.
- **Colocate seniors' housing**, across the spectrum, with community centres, neighbourhood houses, libraries, public plazas, and programming—all of which can help offer opportunities for seniors to engage with and get involved in their communities. Through zoning, the City can allow a greater mix of land uses and services near to multi-unit housing and seniors buildings.
- **Create design standards to promote accessible streets and paths** for older adults and people with disabilities, including guidance around frequent placement of seating, seating design, accessible sidewalks and intersections, signage, and more.

#### **Innovative idea: Integrate affordable housing with neighbourhood houses**

Co-locating affordable seniors housing with community services and hubs can help increase access to supports and build social connection.

Local example:

- **[Red Oak Place Housing](#)** is operated by Kitsilano Neighbourhood House on Vancouver's West side. There are 15 one-bedroom units for low-income seniors (55+) located above the Neighbourhood House and its Daycare. Tenants at Red Oak Housing are at the centre of an intergenerational and active community, with close access to programs, events, and activities.





