

PULL TOGETHER:

ADDRESSING HOUSING INSECURITY IN NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



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INTRODUCTION

Across Canada, collecting data to understand the true scope and scale of homelessness presents a challenge. In rural, remote, and Northern contexts, these challenges are significantly greater. The difficulty of collecting accurate data on homelessness in rural areas has historically led to minimal efforts to do so, and consequently, a lack of understanding of the magnitude of the issue of rural homelessness and housing insecurity. This gap in data results in an asymmetrical allocation of funding to urban centres for homelessness and housing interventions. (Schiff, 2015)

Further, service providers in rural contexts are tasked with offering supports to smaller populations over a large geographic area, which can increase the per-capita cost of service delivery. This is augmented by the imperative to, as much as possible, retain the connections of people at risk of or experiencing homelessness to their home communities and the support networks therein, in particular for Indigenous communities.

Meanwhile, municipalities in Newfoundland and Labrador struggle with scant resources, as well as a lack of information and expertise as to how to address issues of housing insecurity and homelessness in their communities. Knowledge, financial, capacity, and jurisdictional constraints such as the proscriptive nature of the Municipal legislation leave municipalities with little means to address problems which bear a very immediate impact on the wellbeing of their communities. While some federal capital funding programs are open to municipalities, the application process itself is costly and time-consuming, making it inaccessible for rural municipalities. These programs offer no ongoing subsidy for the operation of non-profit housing, and decision-makers are often reluctant to take on additional ongoing financial obligations in the face of rising costs and shrinking tax bases. Municipal councils must also confront “not in my backyard” (NIMBY) attitudes and the onerous process of rethinking development regulations which restrict many kinds of higher-yield, lower-cost development which could facilitate the creation of affordable housing. In NL, municipalities are further constrained by provincially-mandated development approval processes which involve multiple levels of provincial scrutiny on municipal decisions, at times with significant delays at each stage.

There is an increasing interest on the part of municipalities concerning homelessness and housing insecurity. Understanding the nature of these issues in a rural NL context is a critical compo-

nent of developing a response that co-ordinates existing resources and articulates strategies for filling gaps therein. This project seeks to establish a baseline understanding of the scope and scale of rural homelessness and housing insecurity in the province and recommend strategies to address these issues. To put it plainly: we cannot solve a problem we do not understand, so the goal of this work is to build that understanding.

Our research endeavors to ascertain the scope and scale (per Schiff, 2023) of housing insecurity in rural NL, and the viewpoints of stakeholder groups on the dimensions thereof and potential solutions. This project will generate insight into rates of housing need in the identified communities as well as the perspectives of those with lived experience. Further, this research examines the perspectives of municipal stakeholders as to the challenges in their communities with respect to housing and their role in creating solutions. Likewise the perspectives of service providers in rural communities regarding their observations of the magnitude and trajectory of homelessness and housing insecurity as well as their internal challenges in addressing the needs of those whom they serve form part of this analysis.

Acknowledging that a true enumeration of populations experiencing homelessness in rural areas is an enormous undertaking and outside the scope of this research, our considerations of homelessness focus on qualitative contexts, with the addition of the available data on homelessness. We acknowledge that it is well-documented that numerical data falls far short of capturing the true extent of this issue (Schiff, 2023; Forchuk, 2023), and as such seek to understand the experiences of those who are unhoused and the trajectory of the extent of this aspect of housing insecurity.

This research contributes to a comprehension of the current state of housing insecurity in rural NL, which to date has not been quantified. We wish to understand trends in the recent past which have influenced changes in the housing experiences of residents, as well as expected changes for these communities in the coming years. This allows for a greater ability on the part of municipalities, other levels of government, and community organizations to tailor responses to housing insecurity which best fit the needs of those living that experience.



METHODOLOGY

This project utilizes a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were gathered using a desktop review of available sources including Statistics Canada's Census of Population, CHMC's Rental Market Data Tables, the Province of NL's Labour Market Information Report, and others.

Qualitative data was gathered through surveys to municipal councils and staff. Key informant interviews were conducted with participants from municipalities, service providers and people with lived and living experience.

This research engaged directly with 18 unique individuals from municipalities and community service providers, and 13 individuals with lived and living experience of housing insecurity. Information was also gathered through facilitated discussions at Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador's Urban Municipalities Conference in August, 2023, and annual conference in October, 2023.

LIMITATIONS

It is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of our research. Foremost, we need to recognize that many factors beyond the simple availability and affordability of housing contribute to the capacity of individuals to attain and maintain housing. It is necessary to acknowledge the essential consideration of adequate wraparound supports and in particular, mental health and addictions services, in creating conditions for success for vulnerable people to be permanently and appropriately housed. The availability and effectiveness of these supports is not the core focus of this research but cannot go without mention in a conversation about homelessness.

Second, we recognize that hidden homelessness is a major issue in our communities which is difficult to quantify, particularly in those communities which might lack services for people experiencing homelessness. Recent research from the Lawson Institute (2023) indicates that overall estimates of populations experiencing homelessness underestimate the magnitude of these populations by two thirds. This is to say that community-level data on the number of people experiencing homelessness should be multiplied by at least three to give a more accurate understanding of the true scope of the issue.

SCOPE

The communities studied are:

- Burgeo
- Port aux Basques
- St. Anthony
- Grand Falls-Windsor
- Pasadena
- Gander
- Corner Brook
- Placentia
- Fogo
- Happy Valley-Goose Bay
- Marystown

In a NL context, people experiencing homelessness may be forced to leave their home communities to access necessary services, preventing them from being included in an analysis of the current state of their home community despite their experience being a relevant part of the discussion. This is of note for the purposes of locating services where they are most needed, knowing that preventing homelessness is more durable, humane, and cost-effective than reactive solutions once a person is already experiencing homelessness. (Gaetz, 2012; Jadidzadeh, 2020)

Third, the availability of data varies widely depending on the size of population centres, and data is not published as quickly as circumstances in the housing market occur. In NL, rental market data from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), aggregated annually, is available for only a handful of communities, and in some cases the data quality is poor. CMHC data also only tracks properties with three or more rental units, which are comparatively rare in the NL market, and therefore these data capture less than half the renter households for a given community. For example, in Gander, there are 1,870 renter households, while CMHC reports data for 780 units. Statistics Canada census data is, at this writing, four years from

LIMITATIONS (CONTINUED)

the reference year and does not reflect substantial changes in the NL rental market during the intervening time. Consumer price index data offers some insight into shelter costs but is not available at the community level. Specific, community-level data on rental market costs and vacancies can be gestured at by triangulating varying data sources, but more tools are required to understand these markets in real time. Further, data on shelter utilization in rural NL was difficult to access, with only a single point in time for multiple years available. Turnaway rates are not tracked by the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC), thus it is not possible to quantify whether and by how much the demand for shelter service may exceed the availability. As well, data for length of stay groups all individuals staying in shelter beyond 91 days together, making it challenging to track the chronicity of individual experiences of homelessness.

DEFINITIONS

This work defines homelessness based on the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness' 2012 typology. Homelessness for our purposes includes individuals who may be:

- Unsheltered
- In temporary shelter
- Provisionally accommodated in ad hoc arrangement such as couchsurfing or staying in a hotel with no permanent home
- Displaced due to fleeing violence, natural disaster, or other crisis leaving them without a permanent home
- In a location not intended for permanent human habitation such as a car or tent
- In an institutional setting such as a hospital without permanent housing

It is critical to bear in mind that experiences of homelessness can be complex and non-linear, and that individual circumstances and options may fluctuate frequently.

We define housing insecurity for our purposes as households living in housing which is any one, or a combination, of:

Our focus groups with people with lived and living experience were convened through community organizations, and as such, our contact with first voice is from individuals who are accessing various services. Therefore, the perspectives of individuals who either do not have access to services, or who choose not to access services for various reasons, are not captured in this analysis. Their perspective would offer a significant contribution to understanding service gaps and barriers to access.

These elements contribute to an overall challenge in gathering recent, relevant data on current rental market conditions and the economic reality of renter households, as well as data on homelessness. Where both CMHC and Statistics Canada information is available, both were used in our analysis, but Statistics Canada's data has been used in calculations for affordability due to its more widespread availability.

Unaffordable: costing over 30% of pre-tax household income

Unsuitable: of insufficient size for the number of occupants

Inadequate: in need of major repairs. These would include defective plumbing or electrical wiring, or structural repairs to walls, floors or ceilings, etc.

Other circumstances can also place individuals at risk of homelessness, such as :

- Eviction
- Sudden unemployment or employment precarity
- Intimate partner violence and/or fear of violence
- Family breakdown
- Discontinuance of supports necessary to maintain housing
- Persistent mental health and/or addictions issues

We differentiate between populations currently experiencing homelessness and populations living in conditions of housing insecurity as this differentiation allows for appropriate interventions for each group to be fit to the corresponding need.



CONTEXT

As of the 2021 Statistics Canada census, 32.5% of renter households and 8.9% of owner households in the province of NL were spending more than 30% of their income on shelter. An additional 5.9% of households were living in housing that was either unsuitable or in need of major repairs. 72% of households in very low income (making less than \$14,000 per year) lived in unaffordable housing in the province, but households in low income (32%), moderate income (4%) and median income (0.4%) also found themselves in these circumstances as of the 2021 Census. Households led by refugee claimants (22%), those under age 25 (13.5%) and single mothers (13%) experienced the highest rates of housing insecurity. (UBC HART Lab, 2023)

Rental rates in NL have increased 15% since 2021 according to Consumer Price Index data. Interest rates have likewise climbed 4.5% in the past year, to their highest point since 2007. Home energy increased in cost by 22% overall between August 2022 and August 2023.

Meanwhile, NL has announced its consideration of several wind energy projects, and programs to train personnel for those projects at campuses of College of the North Atlantic. Several other large resource development projects are under consideration in the vicinity of the communities studied. The tourism industry remains a significant economic driver in many areas of the province, and these areas have seen a large portion of what was once affordable rental housing become short-term rental accommodations targeted at tourists. NL experienced record-high immigration in the past year. (Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, 2023) All these factors have contributed to rapid, sharp changes in the housing market, with vacancy rates for the province falling precipitously from 2020-2023 and rental rates climbing substantially. (CMHC, 2023; Statistics Canada, 2023)

Our quantitative data analysis shows that rural areas vary greatly in their rates of housing insecurity. Overall, rates of homeownership exceed the provincial average in the communities studied. Shelter costs for rented dwellings in most of the communities studied sit below the provincial average. Incomes are likewise lower, with many workers employed part-year or part-time. In communities which rely on seasonal industries such as tourism and fishing, well over half of the working population can fall into this category. In

general, the percentage of rental households living in unaffordable housing in the communities studied tracked near the provincial average— about 1 in 3— but climbed to as high as 43% in some communities. Fogo represents an exceptional case here, with 0 renter households in unaffordable housing, but 17.6% of renter households (15 out of 85) in core housing need due to inadequacy or unsuitability. Happy Valley-Goose Bay also differs from this trend, with 11.8% of renters in unaffordable housing; in the interviews for this research, participants from this community reported a significant problem with homelessness related to a combination of factors including availability and affordability of housing as well as mental health and substance use.

The communities studied often have a greater median age than the provincial average of 48.4, in some cases as high as 60 years. Notable exceptions were found in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, with a median age of 39.2, and Gander, with a median age of 45. Household size is heavily concentrated in one-and-two-person households. The vast majority of dwellings are single detached homes, these forming almost the entire housing stock in smaller communities. A small number of semi-detached homes represents the second most prevalent dwelling type. Larger population centres have a greater diversity of housing types, including some subsidiary apartments and a small number of purpose-built rental apartment buildings, the majority of the latter being owned by real estate investment trusts.

Comprehensive homelessness data for rural NL was not available at the community level from NLHC. However, a single point-in-time snapshot— meaning on the same single day, counted over four different years— of total shelter utilization in rural NL showed that since 2020, the number of individuals accessing shelter had increased nearly tenfold, from 10 in 2020 to 97 in 2023. The number of families accessing shelter across the province at that point in time in 2020 was zero; in 2023 it was 16. There were 383 total unique individual shelter users in rural NL over the six-month period from April to November, 2023; their average age was 37, compared to the provincial average age for shelter users of 39.

MUNICIPAL PERSPECTIVES

Our conversations with municipalities revealed a diversity of perspectives and levels of interest in housing. Some had identified key issues and root causes and taken some action within their authority, while expressing a desire for the legislative authority to do more. Others were unsure about the scope and scale of issues and unclear about whether housing represented an area of concern in their communities at all.

Municipalities reported hearing extensively from residents with housing issues who were seeking help, and expressed frustration at the minimal tools at their disposal to aid them. Largely they relied on information from constituents and local businesses to form their perspectives on housing issues in their local areas. They mentioned that a lack of usable data was a barrier to understanding what was needed, as well as to accessing available funding through programs from CMHC and other national and provincial funders. Several municipalities serve as unofficial connectors between those looking for housing and landlords, keeping a list of rental properties and property owners which is shared with those who contact the town hall looking for housing, which they reported is a frequent occurrence. One municipal stakeholder interviewed said:

“WE KEEP A LIST OF EVICTIONS, AND A LIST OF RENTAL PROPERTIES. WHEN PEOPLE CALL, WE GIVE THEM THE NAMES OF LANDLORDS, BUT THERE’S NEVER ANYTHING AVAILABLE.”

SERVICE PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES

Service providers interviewed for this project all noted that the situation faced by the individuals they serve has become more acute in the years since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many cited increases in the cost of living as a key pain point. Housing, they said, has become drastically more unaffordable, and the supply of available units has decreased, putting their clients at a disadvantage as landlords often discriminate against individuals facing barriers. Some service providers noted that their presence as an intermediary between clients and landlords could be a positive thing, by providing assurance to the landlord that they would receive rent on time and any issues could be managed with the organization’s

Municipalities seemed keenly aware, through their contact with residents, of individual housing issues. Numerous municipal stakeholders mentioned cases of residents relocating to other communities due to a lack of available and affordable housing.

Municipalities expressed frustration with what they perceived as insufficient understanding of their particular issues and engagement from higher levels of government. They felt that the focus for funding programs and other kinds of support was unfairly concentrated in St. John’s.

Municipalities sometimes described feeling that responsibility for housing and other related issues was being unfairly downloaded onto them without sufficient resources or authority to address these problems. Nearly all the municipalities we spoke with pointed to vacant NLHC units in their communities as an example of solutions they felt should come from the province. A sentiment was expressed that an effort should be made by NLHC and the province more broadly to be actively working on this issue alongside municipalities.

support. At the same time, the presence of service providers could raise questions from landlords about the client’s circumstances, leading to discrimination.

Service providers interviewed generally indicated that the demand for their services was markedly higher in recent years than in the years prior to the onset of the pandemic. Service providers also described an increase in both the occurrence and severity of mental health and substance use issues among the populations whom they serve. They reported feeling under-equipped in terms of financial and human resources to address these changing needs, given that



their operating funding has not increased to match this increased workload. The need for more supportive housing and wraparound service for clients housed in market units was a common refrain; there is simply not enough capacity to meet existing needs for supportive services. One service provider said,

Service providers interviewed expressed a desire for more interest and engagement on the part of municipalities as well as other levels of government. There was a sentiment that the circumstances of their clients and the work that they do is not well understood

“IT’S WORSE THAN IT’S EVER BEEN. IF YOU ASKED ME IF I THOUGHT WE’D EVER HAVE THIS MANY CASES A YEAR OR TWO AGO, I’D NEVER HAVE SAID IT WAS POSSIBLE.”

The need for a variety of kinds of services, especially around substance use, was a common theme. Both service provider and lived experience interviewees underlined the need for harm reduction housing services for clients actively using substances, as well as access to detox, treatment, and recovery-based programming for those wishing to avail of them. It was pointed out that a diversity of approaches is important for achieving their individualized goals with respect to substance use.

Co-locating these services can force those in recovery to make a choice between accessing the support services they need and sustaining their recovery. It was repeatedly emphasized by service providers that while access to housing is essential for their clients, in many cases it is not sufficient to address the root causes of homelessness and housing insecurity.

by municipal and other government officials. These participants conveyed a wish for more understanding and collaboration, as well as financial and in-kind support.

Service providers echoed the sentiment from municipalities that attention and funding were unduly concentrated in St. John’s and that a more equitable distribution of funding, respecting the challenges of delivery services over a large geographic region, was needed. They viewed municipal governments as lacking a feeling of responsibility to address the problem and wanting homelessness and related challenges to “just go away.” Not unlike municipal stakeholders interviewed, some service providers communicated the sense that they were being tasked with jobs beyond their organizations’ mandates by governments, without adequate resources to do so.

LIVED EXPERIENCE PERSPECTIVES

Thirteen people with lived experience were interviewed. These included people who identified as currently homeless or housing insecure, as well as those who had past experiences of housing insecurity. Individuals engaged came from all over Newfoundland and Labrador. Three identified as Indigenous and two identified as being from other racialized backgrounds.

The circumstances of the lived experience participants varied widely. The most common situations of housing insecurity and homelessness were sleeping in vehicles, living in structures not intended for year-round habitation such as uninsulated cabins or trailers, and couch surfing. Several individuals had left their rural communities to access services in St. John's, due to lack of affordable housing, lack of services, or lack of stable support networks. Lived experience participants cited income, mental health and addictions, conflict in families, and availability and affordability of housing as major contributors to their experiences of housing insecurity. One interviewee said:

“I WAS YOUNG WHEN I WAS FIRST OUT ON MY OWN, DIDN'T HAVE A LOT OF SKILLS, AND YOU GET IN TROUBLE BECAUSE OF THAT.”

Lived experience participants reported rents having gone up drastically in the recent past, while their incomes have remained static. They pointed to both the quality of housing, the availability of housing, and the cost of housing as all being challenging aspects of their experiences. One lived experience participant described moving into what they expected to be temporary accommodations:

“WE MOVED INTO OUR [RENTAL UNIT] A YEAR AND A HALF AGO. WE LOOKED FOR FOUR MONTHS [...] WE TOOK THIS BECAUSE IT WAS THE ONLY THING WE COULD GET, AND WE PLANNED TO MOVE IN A YEAR. NOW, EVERYTHING WE CAN FIND IS HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS

MORE EXPENSIVE. IF WE WANTED TO PAY THE SAME AMOUNT, WE'D BE MOVING TO SOMETHING MUCH WORSE.”

Many pointed out that the cost of utilities was a necessary part of maintaining their housing and very difficult to afford along with increased costs for rent and food. Participants explained that finding a rental unit at the maximum amounts available through income support and NLHC rent supplements was nearly impossible. On the matter of affordability and availability, one person said:

“I'M LUCKY NOW THAT I HAVE AN AFFORDABLE PLACE TO LIVE... IF I EVER HAVE TO MOVE OUT, GOOD LUCK TO ME WITH THAT, EVERYTHING IS \$2000 A MONTH.”

These challenges, and their increasing prevalence and severity, was similarly reflected in conversations with service providers. Lived experience participants and service providers alike discussed the difficult choices necessary with drastic increases in the cost of living, such as that between paying rent or buying food or paying for utilities. Services such as food banks were seen as an inadequate measure to bridge the gap between incomes and the costs of these essentials. These challenges were faced by both individuals on income support and those who were employed. The minimal service options available in rural areas posed a barrier here, as well: one participant reported experiencing racism at the only food bank in their community, leading to them struggling to access food security programming in the absence of other places to go.

Many lived experience participants discussed traumatic experiences both in street-based homelessness and in the shelter system, and reported that homelessness and housing insecurity had a negative impact on their mental health, in addition to the mental health issues that were often cited as an originating cause of becoming homeless or housing insecure. In other words, some had lost their housing due to mental health issues, and the experience of being unhoused had caused these conditions to worsen.



However, participants often pushed back against the conflation of homelessness with mental health and addictions issues, and noted that the associated stigma was a challenge in its own right, in particular when these issues were not part of their own story. There was a desire for greater understanding that the contributors to homelessness are complex and multifaceted, and that individual experiences may or may not align with these. One participant said, Multiple lived experience interviewees self-identified as neurodi-

vergent and explained that a lack of support for the issues caused by their neurodivergence was a barrier to maintaining housing. Related to this, several lived experience participants had pets who played an emotional support role for them in the context of mental health challenges and trauma, and policies around pets in both social housing and market rentals posed a barrier to them becoming securely housed.

“WE’RE JUST PEOPLE, YOU KNOW. THINGS HAPPEN IN YOUR LIFE, THEY CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE. I DON’T USE DRUGS BUT EVERYONE ASSUMES THAT I DO JUST BECAUSE I’M IN THE SHELTER.”

KEY THEMES

The topics which arose during key informant interviews with all three stakeholder groups fall broadly into seven key themes, discussed below. They are housing supply, market composition, income and affordability, demographics, economic development, mental health and substance use, and geographic challenges. There are many intersections between these topics, just as many factors influence individual experiences with housing insecurity.

We invite readers of this report to consider these as a Venn diagram, as opposed to seven circles. Lasting solutions to housing issues in a rural NL context will need to consider each of these factors, and the interplay between them, to have a meaningful and sustainable impact.

HOUSING SUPPLY

Qualitative data indicates an increase in competition for rental housing units. Contributing factors cited include:

- Increased cost overall leading to greater competition for housing offered at lower rates
- Changes in interest rates limiting access to mortgages for individuals who might have exited the rental market into home ownership in different circumstances
- Pressures related to industrial development
- Population growth due to educational programming, economic development, immigration, or other factors
- Housing units being removed from the rental market for use as short-term rentals

Some communities noted challenges in attempts to incentivize housing development, including notably issuing RFPs for plots of land which received no responses. There is a perception that the cost of building materials is contributing to an unviable business case for developing rental housing. In some cases, site servicing costs were cited as a barrier to interest in programs through which towns offered land via RFP for development. On incentivizing development, one municipal stakeholder said,

“DEVELOPERS DON’T WANT TO DEVELOP! IF THEY CAN’T SELL A HOUSE FOR MORE THAN \$300,000 AND IT COSTS \$400,000 TO BUILD, WHAT DO YOU EXPECT THEM TO DO?”

Some municipalities also noted an issue with vacant rental properties, speculating that the owners were waiting for major industrial projects in the area to yield an opportunity to charge higher rates than the market would normally bear.

CMHC estimates that NL will need to build 60,000 new units of housing by 2030 to maintain status quo housing affordability levels. This requires a concerted effort from all levels of government, community organizations, and the private sector to construct unprecedented amounts of purpose-built rental housing. Community housing groups across Canada have emphasized that simple supply, however, is an inadequate solution to housing insecurity, and that this infusion of supply must be paired with programs that

facilitate and require affordability considerations to be integrated into new builds. Beyond this, the provision of sufficient services such as education, employment, and mental health and substance use supports are essential considerations in creating a supply of supportive housing that will respond to the housing needs of those most at risk of homelessness.

The supply of social housing was a major issue in all communities. In nearly half the communities studied that had some portfolio of NLHC units, the waiting list exceeded 60% of the number of units. In Gander and Bonavista, the number of households on the waiting list is 90% of the total number of units in the communities. In Pasadena, the number is 160%. (NLHC, 2023)

NLHC vacancies were an issue of concern to many interviewees, citing this as an underutilized asset. It was noted by many that unoccupied NLHC units were in poor repair and there was some frustration that given the significance of the housing challenges faced by the communities, these were not being used to house residents in need.

For example, in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, where the waiting list represents 60% of the total number of units in the community,

there is a 16% vacancy rate in NLHC units. This means 13 units in the community are currently unoccupied, despite there being 42 households waiting for social housing. In Corner Brook, 60 units are vacant and 135 households are on the waiting list. Marystown has 35 vacant units, representing 30% of the total NLHC portfolio. Gander has a 6.6% vacancy rate for its NLHC units, more than double the provincial rental market vacancy rate, despite there being 117 households on the waiting list. In Grand Falls-Winsor, the number of vacancies (6 units) exceeds the waitlist (5 households). Bonavista, Port Aux Basques, St. Anthony, and Placentia all have a 100% occupancy rate for NLHC units.



MARKET COMPOSITION

The communities studied varied in their mix of tenure types, but the majority exceeded the national average for rates of homeownership. Homeowners experienced lower rates of housing unaffordability across the board, possibly attributable to income testing requirements to secure a mortgage. Rental markets overall were small, with rates of homeownership well above the national average; this fact alone renders them very sensitive to change due to population growth, changes in income, or loss of units to other uses such as short-term rentals. (Czerniak, 2018) In these small markets, mentions of new employment opportunities or educational programs, which could be considered a positive thing for population growth and retention, as well as income, were cast in a negative light due to their impacts on the housing system.

In an economy with significant labour market mobility and large projects in the works, paired with shifts in the wider economic context such as increased interest rates, demand for rental housing has increased. As such, competition for a limited number of units was significant and was mentioned in most of the key informant interviews conducted. One dimension of this increased competition was an increase in experiences of discrimination, as reported by both service providers and people with lived experience. This could take the form of discrimination against people with children (especially single parents), people on income support, people accessing wraparound supports through community organizations, or racial discrimination. One interviewee from a racialized background described their experience of discrimination:

“WE WERE WORKING WITH AN AGENT, WHO WAS, YOU KNOW, WHITE WITH A CANADIAN NAME. WE WERE OFFERED THIS PLACE,

“HAVING FULL DEAD NEIGHBOURHOODS IS NOT WHAT’S BEST FOR THE TOWN. WE DON’T WANT TO HAVE TO BE SENDING OUT A NOTE IN SEPTEMBER ASKING PEOPLE TO PLEASE LEAVE YOUR LIGHTS ON WHEN YOU LEAVE SO THE WHOLE TOWN’S NOT DARK ALL WINTER.”

AND WHEN WE WENT TO SEE IT, IT WAS FINE [...] AN HOUR LATER THE LANDLORD CALLED US AND TOLD US SOMETHING CAME UP AND THEY COULDN’T RENT US THE HOUSE.”

With respect to social housing, it was often noted by those interviewed that the units available were misaligned with the needs of the community. For example, many of the units available were larger units, many with stairs, which were too large and did not meet the accessibility needs of residents in the context of an aging population and shrinking household sizes. In all but three of the communities studied, households in core housing need were one or two-person households. The exceptions were Marystown, Corner Brook, and Grand Falls-Windsor, with three-person households representing 15%, 8.6%, and 7% of the total households in core housing need, respectively. This misalignment may explain some of the vacancy rate-waitlist comparisons noted earlier.

Short-term rentals emerged as an issue in conversation with most municipalities, in particular in areas where tourism is a significant economic driver. This was reported to have a significant effect on both the cost and availability of housing, due to removing homes from the long-term rental market and increasing the economic value of property. The choice of property owners to rent out their property for, in some cases, hundreds of dollars per night compared to what they might get in rent from a long-term tenant was seen as an obvious incentive to convert properties into short-term rentals. This was noted as having a negative impact not only on housing availability and affordability, but on the social fabric of communities by creating a highly seasonal population. One municipal stakeholder said:





INCOME AND AFFORDABILITY

As discussed, quantitative data which reflects the current reality relating to housing affordability in a rapidly-changing context, especially for smaller population centres, is difficult to obtain. Stakeholders reported increased rental costs across all communities in our analysis. CMHC data indicates an overall increase in rental rates from 2021-2022, however, the greatest change in rental markets described by stakeholders has taken place in the last 18 months. Consumer price index data reflects a 15% increase in rental rate in NL over the past two years. Lived experience participants reported a still higher rate of increase in housing costs in recent years. They also remarked that as costs of housing had increased, the quality of the housing had not.

All stakeholders mentioned housing affordability as a key factor in increased rates of housing insecurity and decreased wellbeing for residents. Housing affordability was mentioned by municipalities as a barrier to population growth and retention, as well as economic development. Some municipalities reported large vacancies in service and other lower-paying industries due to a combination of lack of affordable housing in their communities and increased gas prices rendering commuting from adjacent communities financially unviable for those working in these industries. In brief, the wages of these industries do not provide adequate income to afford housing costs in these communities.

Energy costs were likewise cited as a factor in both affordability and quality of life concerns, in particular for seniors. At the current average furnace oil price, an income of \$181,000 is required for a household burning half a standard tank of oil per month— an extremely conservative estimate of oil usage— to be above the energy poverty threshold of 6% of income spent on energy costs. A senior making the average CPP amount, combined with the maximum OAS amount, lives on 10.2% of that amount, or about \$18,500 per year. At this rate, seniors would spend a staggering 58.8% of their income on home heating fuel alone. (Government of Canada, 2023a; Government of Canada 2023b; NL Board of Commissioners of Public Utilities, 2023; the author's calculations)

Areas prone to boom-bust economic cycles noted that rental rates expand and availability contracts with the onset of new major industrial projects, and this trend reverses at the projects' conclusion. The expected development of new wind energy projects is anticipated to augment this trend over the coming years.

Areas with high recent rates of migration from urban areas and other provinces noted an impact on the price of housing, mentioning that home prices had increased radically in the time since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The decoupling of housing prices from local incomes that both migration and the acquisition of property as financial assets by investors from outside the province creates has a negative impact on housing affordability for locals. Taken as raw figures, consideration of rental rates in rural NL relative to median incomes may not raise alarm. However, there is significant income disparity between part-year or part-time workers and those employed full-year, full-time (sometimes as much as two-thirds of workers in a community). This, coupled with high rates of unemployment and the fact that renter households overall are three to four times more likely to be living in unaffordable housing than owner-occupied households, a different perspective emerges. One lived experience interviewee said:

“THERE’S ABSOLUTELY NO OPTIONS WITHIN MY PRICE BRACKET.”

Social assistance shelter allowance falls well below even the lowest average shelter costs. Social assistance rates for the same reference family used to calculate the market basket measure— a modest standard of living for a couple with two children— represent of the MBM. In other words, a family with two children on social assistance receives one-third the income they require for the necessities of life, including housing. Those employed part-year or part-time in the communities studied, presuming they received Employment Insurance for the weeks not worked during the year, would have made an average of \$20,340 per year, or 41.6% of the MBM— well below half what they would need.

Given this, it is unsurprising that lived experience participants, both those employed and those receiving social assistance, noted that their incomes were insufficient to afford both rent and basic necessities such as food and utilities. Even those living in rent-geared-to-income housing described these costs as prohibitive. Notable among these discussions was that of internet access, which was mentioned as an important tool to facilitate education and employment opportunities. The inability to afford these other costs was pointed out as a threat to housing security.



DEMOGRAPHICS

The median age in all the communities studied exceeds the provincial average, in some cases by as many as 17 years. Stakeholders described situations in which seniors occupy larger, single detached homes in which they have raised children who now have homes of their own. In some cases, these homes are too costly or outside the capabilities of their occupants to maintain; in some cases, they may not meet the residents' needs for accessibility. The idea was prevalent that if there were appropriate housing options for seniors, the homes currently occupied by older residents for whom they are no longer suitable would become available.

Stakeholders noted that aging populations had access to few alternatives to the larger, single-family homes in which they currently reside. There was an impression that an absence of options for this group presented a barrier to younger families moving to the area, and that by providing appropriate housing options for seniors, there was an opportunity to “free up” their homes for a younger contingent to move in. This was seen as important from a population as well as a labour force perspective.

There is mixed evidence on this phenomenon, known as “filtering:” the idea that by providing housing for a particular group, greater equilibrium is introduced into the housing system more broadly. (Suttor, 2016) There is some evidence that this works from an affordability standpoint, in the sense that creating more social housing units targeted at low-income populations increases the affordability fit in the private rental market. However, evidence that filtering is effective outside of social housing contexts is mixed and requires further study, and this should not be taken as a complete solution to housing insecurity.

Availability of affordable housing has been shown to have an effect on population growth and retention. This holds especially in cases of suppressed household formation, meaning households want to relocate to an area or those living with relatives would prefer to start households of their own, but cannot do so for a lack of affordable, suitable housing options. This is to say that filtering

may be a likely scenario in regions with unmet demand for housing due to job opportunities. Conversely, creating affordable housing options may be a necessary, but not sufficient, factor in facilitating population growth and retention in areas without significant economic activity.

Educational programming was mentioned as a factor in spikes in demand for rental housing. While these programs represent an essential infusion of younger populations into these communities, there appears to be a bi-directional relationship between the viability of these programs and housing shortages; each has an impact on the other. Examples were cited of programs which had to move online due to insufficient housing options for students in the area; likewise, implementation of new in-person programs was noted as having “eaten up” almost all the available rental housing in one community.

With respect to homelessness, service providers observed an increase in the number of both youth and seniors experiencing homelessness. Single men exiting incarceration were noted as one of the most difficult groups of people for whom to find housing, and it was mentioned that in this case, individuals often were forced to remain in urban areas, away from their support networks, for want of housing options in their home communities.

The absence of affordable and available housing options prevents those exiting the criminal justice system from returning to their home communities and the support networks therein. This separation, general housing insecurity, a lack of stable income, and the fact that residing at a particular address is often a condition of release, was noted as a factor in recidivism and a continuous (and preventable) cycle of incarceration for these individuals. A lack of mental health services targeted at young men in particular was also noted as an unmet need in conversations with people with lived experience, as well as programs for male single parents.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

There appears to be a bi-directional relationship between the availability of suitable, affordable rental housing and economic development opportunities, as well as factors which influence population growth. Industrial development was cited, along with other economic activity, as a major contributor to housing challenges. In some instances, companies had purchased large amounts of what had once been rental housing in order to house their incoming workforce. In others, those seeking employment opportunities for a particular project had occupied the majority of the town's rental housing supply, leaving little else available for locals.

In areas where major projects were expected, interviewees also noted speculation on the part of landlords who were leaving properties vacant in the expectation of renting them to companies for workforce housing rather than to local residents at lower rates. It seems that economic development in the absence of adequate pre-planning to assure a sufficient supply of appropriate rental housing options can contribute to housing shortages.

Meanwhile, other municipalities cite housing shortages as an impediment to economic development initiatives. For example, in regions with natural resources industry opportunities such

as potential mining projects, a dearth of housing options for the workforce required to develop the projects led to stalled development. These shortages placed increased pressure on the housing environment for locals, creating a challenge for those already living in the community. In short, these two narratives seem to suggest that economic development can contribute to housing shortages, and that housing shortages can stand in the way of economic development. As such, economic development planning which fails to account for housing is incomplete.

Particular types of economic activity seem to be associated with specific housing pressures. Areas reliant on tourism as their main economic driver experience challenges around the conversion of the already limited stock of available rental housing short-term rentals, as well as extreme seasonality of housing demand, with high demand in summer and low demand in winter. Areas with anticipated industrial development projects, on the other hand, experience a sharp increase in demand and cost, as well as longer-term supply pressures, often followed by a significant drop in price and demand at the projects' conclusion. Land speculation was noted in areas where such projects are planned but not yet under development.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE

Many community organizations interviewed cited mental health and substance use as major factors in their clients' experiences of homelessness, and lived experience participants reported mental health as a major contributing factor to their own initial experiences of housing insecurity. Availability of adequate supports for these issues can be a significant challenge in rural regions, where fewer options are available and what options exist may be at some distance from individuals' home community. Discussions with both service providers and people with lived experience indicates that access to these services can be a driving factor in migration for people with mental health and substance use issues.

In other cases, access to substances themselves may be a driver; in areas where alcohol is not available (such as dry communities) or prohibitively expensive, people with substance use issues may move to a place where accessing it is more viable. While housing options may exist in their home communities, in the absence of

adequate supports for mental health and substance use, these housing options do not adequately address the needs of individuals and cannot facilitate stable housing.

Several community organizations observed a change in the acuity of their clients' mental health and substance use issues; for example, injection drug use was noted as a relatively new phenomenon, causing heretofore unseen challenges with respect to maintaining a safe environment in emergency shelters. A need was noted for individuals at all stages of substance use: those who are actively using substances need spaces to be housed that take a housing-first perspective. At the same time, services are needed for those wishing to seek treatment for mental health and substance use issues. Co-locating these services can be problematic for those wishing to maintain their recovery, who may find the presence of safe supplies and proximity to those using drugs triggering. One lived experience participant said:



“I CAN’T GO TO SHELTER. I KNOW IF I GO THERE THERE’S GONNA BE PEOPLE USING. I’M CLEAN NOW AND I WANT MY KIDS BACK, AND I’M NOT PUTTING MYSELF IN THAT SITUATION AGAIN.”

In areas with limited supports available, as is the case in most rural areas, individuals may find themselves unable to access supports due to behaviours contravening the rules of service providers, for example, violence toward other shelter users. In these instances, individuals may be forced to resort to sleeping rough or relocating due to a lack of available options.

In many areas, hotels, motels, and other kinds of temporary accommodations are used as temporary shelter, often without a significant degree of support services attached. Many stake-

GEOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES

Both municipalities and community agencies expressed the sentiment that funding and attention was unduly focused on the Avalon Peninsula, and specifically in St. John’s. There was an expressed desire for more direct engagement with provincial and federal governments in the regions, with the hope that this would lead to increased understanding of their particular challenges.

Transportation was repeatedly cited as a major issue particular to the geography of rural NL. These costs can be significant, and many of the communities studied lack public transportation at all. This can be costly for community agencies trying to support their clients. It can also mean there are simply not viable options for people in need of services to be able to travel to avail of them. In cases where people are relocating to access services, it can make a return to their home communities, and the support networks located there, difficult or impossible.

Lived experience participants noted the long distances they would have to travel for services, in some cases many hours drive away from their home communities. In some cases they noted a total absence of support services in their regions. One lived experience participant, when asked about support services, said:

holders noted this as a flawed, costly, and temporary solution, providing minimal lasting benefit. Stakeholders expressed the perception that the resources required for this type of accommodation could be better used to promote more sustainable solutions if more wraparound supports were provided.

Finally, the negative impacts of housing insecurity on mental health, which has been well-documented by research in the last decade, was noted by several interviewees. One service provider said:

“THEY’RE STAYING IN A SITUATION IN WHICH THEY CAN BARELY SURVIVE, AND THAT’S CAUSING THEM TO HAVE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES.”

“I WOULDN’T EVEN KNOW WHERE TO FIND THAT. THAT DOESN’T EXIST HERE.”

Lived experience focus group participants mentioned having made the choice to migrate from towns with more services available to smaller communities for reasons related to the availability and affordability of housing, but that by making this choice, they then faced difficulties accessing things like education and employment. Others were aware of services but could not access them due to the cost of transportation:

“THEY’VE GOT ALL SORTS OF GREAT PROGRAMS, BUT I’VE GOT NO MONEY TO GET TO ST. JOHN’S.”

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON SOLUTIONS

Conversations with the stakeholders engaged during this project brought up many suggestions to help solve the current crisis. The theme of aligning priorities was common across stakeholder groups; that policymakers ought to be leveraging their authority to the fullest extent possible to increase the supply and affordability of housing, the availability of support services, and provide an adequate income to residents of the province. One lived experience participant, when asked about solutions, said:

“GOVERNMENT ACTUALLY CARING ABOUT US [...] GOVERNMENT CAN STOP SPENDING A LOT OF MONEY THAT DOES NOT AFFECT THE GENERAL PUBLIC AND ACTUALLY DO SOMETHING FOR THEIR CITIZENS.”

The theme of distribution of resources was a common one in conversations concerning solutions. Many suggested that current expenditures on programs are not deployed in a way that generates lasting impact. Community organizations universally reported being under-resourced to contend with their caseload, and many added that their funding had been relatively stagnant as they had been called upon to serve a growing population facing increasingly complex issues.

Municipal stakeholders had varied views on their own role in resolving the housing crisis. Many expressed frustration with a perceived lack of co-operation from higher levels of government, while feeling constrained by both the expectations placed on them to fix the problem, and the restrictions placed on them by their legislative authority. Only one of the municipalities interviewed expressed an interest in providing housing directly, while others saw their place as mainly facilitators of development through mechanisms like RFPs for municipal land and using development control to support affordable housing development. Still others felt that they needed much more informational support to be able to meaningfully contribute to solutions; they were aware of a problem, but not sure how they could contribute to its solution.

The practice of leaving housing development to market forces was noted by some stakeholders as being a source of the lack of available and affordable housing. One municipal stakeholder noted:

“BUILDERS BUILD WHAT SELLS [...] WITH THE KIND OF DEMAND WE’RE SEEING, THERE’S NO INCENTIVE TO BUILD ANYTHING OTHER THAN 2000 SQUARE FOOT SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES THAT THEY SELL FOR \$300,000.”

However, some other municipal stakeholders took market leadership on the provision of housing as a given and stated that they expected that market forces would eventually equalize. Still others saw the solution in finding ways to incentivize private development through regulatory means or providing in-kind incentives.

Service providers and lived experience participants leaned heavily on the provision of funds for the creation of more social and community housing as a solution. One service provider put it simply:

“WE NEED MORE MONEY TO BUILD MORE HOMES.”

Meanwhile, other service providers underscored the need for supportive services to help their clients maintain successful tenancies, stressing that without these services, increasing housing supply will not be a complete solution for those most severely impacted by housing insecurity. Overall, several barriers were noted to this solution: 1) applications to federal capital funding programs are costly and time-consuming to prepare with no guarantee of success; 2) multiple funding streams are required to complete a single project, increasing the inputs of time and money required; 3) new operating funding agreements are all but impossible to secure and often inadequate to cover the costs of providing rent-geared-to-income housing in particular, as well as

the support services required to facilitate sustainable housing for higher-needs populations. Many service providers with existing operating funding agreements noted that their funding had not increased in years.

Service providers and lived experience participants also noted that the timing of the deployment of support services came too late. Several service providers noted situations when clients were at imminent risk of losing their housing and they placed calls to NLHC's shelter line to be told, "call us back when you're homeless." Service providers and lived experience interviewees suggested that preventing homelessness, rather than attempting to resolve it once a person has been forced into homelessness, was much more effective and supportive of well-being and dignity. Research also suggests that these interventions are significantly

less costly from both a financial and social standpoint in the long term than temporary interventions such as shelter. (Gaetz, 2012; Jadidzadeh, 2020)

Lived experience participants pointed out that the availability of services closer to their home communities in rural NL would make it easier to get the supports they need. Service providers reported that their outreach efforts to smaller, neighbouring communities were well-received but that resource constraints kept them from meeting all the needs of potential clients there. They expressed feeling like funding models that took into account the increased costs of outreach activities over larger geographical regions would help them improve the reach and depth of these services.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

By considering both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of this research, stakeholder perspectives, and a jurisdictional scan, we present the following recommendations. Each section includes short, medium, and long-term solutions with low (\$), medium (\$\$), and significant (\$\$\$) investments required.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

SHORT TERM

Reconsider models for per-capita allocations of funding to account for increased costs of service delivery for geographically dispersed populations (\$)

MEDIUM-TERM

Provide pre-application funding support to increase capacity of small municipalities and community organizations (\$\$)

Streamline application processes to expedite approval timelines, including pre-approval options for eligible proponents to facilitate property acquisition as opportunities arise (\$\$)

Create supply-side subsidy programs specifically for communities with populations under 10,000 with an application and approval process which respects capacity constraints of those working in rural areas (\$\$\$)

LONG-TERM

Increase supply-side subsidy programs, in particular with an eye to offering grants through a legible process attainable for those working in small communities (\$\$\$)

Divide supply-side capital subsidies into separate streams for urban municipalities, rural municipalities, community organizations, and private developers (\$)

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

SHORT TERM

Set targets for the development of community-based housing with the goal of reaching the CMHC target of 60,000 new units for the province by the end of 2030.

Allow expanded powers for municipalities to replace tax sales of properties with options to sell properties for a nominal fee to community organizations for repurposing or redevelopment (\$)
Include non-profit housing in the list of tax exempt properties under the municipal legislation (\$)

Amend the Urban and Rural Planning Act and/or the municipal legislation to allow for density bonusing (\$)

Amend the Urban and Rural Planning Act to allow inclusionary zoning, requiring a percentage of all new multi-unit construction to be affordable rental housing or an equivalent payment be made to the municipality, at the municipality's discretion, for affordable housing projects; consider the feasibility of permitting laneway housing (\$)

Eliminate rework and streamline the municipal approval process by decreasing requirements for both municipal and provincial approval for developments (\$)

Amend the Accommodations Act to limit short-term rentals to 180 days per year to facilitate tenancy opportunities (\$)

Eliminate no-reason evictions from the Residential Tenancies Act; align notice periods in the Residential Tenancies Act for notice of eviction and notice of rental increase at 6 months (\$)

Fast-track crown land approval processes for affordable housing projects (\$)

Increase data collection activities in shelters, including turnaway rates and long-term utilization tracking by unique individual users (\$)

Raise maximum allocation of social assistance shelter allowances and NLHC rental supplements to reflect current rental market conditions. Explore the streamlining of rental supplements, and the implementation of a single Housing Benefit (e.g. exploring the Finish housing benefit model). (\$\$)



PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

MEDIUM-TERM

Consider implementation of rental rate regulation, including an annual set rate increase calculated based on inflation, the building consumer price index, municipal property taxes, and other factors, with provisions for increases beyond this rate if reasonably justified by factors such as major renovations and a clear and legible process for applying for above-rate increases (\$)

Expand home modification programs for seniors and people with disabilities to include private rental housing; prioritize low-income people and seniors for programs to convert from oil to electric heat (\$\$)

Implement programs for those about to be released from the prison system to secure housing prior to release, in their home communities where at all possible, as well as adequate income support and mental health supports if required (\$\$)

Commit to increasing existing funding allocations for wraparound supports and offering new operating funding for non-profit supportive housing providers; index ongoing operating funding for non-profit housing and support service providers to inflation (\$\$)

Create a capacity-building resource position, housed within NLHC, to support non-profit and affordable housing providers during the funding application and development process (\$\$)

Create an inventory of underutilized provincially-owned land and buildings and a transparent framework for offering these properties for redevelopment, prioritizing volume of units and affordability in the evaluation matrix (\$\$)

Align social assistance and minimum wage to Market Basket Measures (\$\$)

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

LONG-TERM

Implement a large-scale retrofit program to restore currently unoccupied NLHC units to appropriate conditions; consider opportunities to increase the density and energy efficiency of these units (\$\$\$)

Where the above is not possible or desirable due to low demand for the unit type or cost of renovations outweighing the cost of new construction, create a transparent process to dispose of units and reinvest all revenues in the construction of new social housing units more appropriate for current and future needs (\$)

Invest in mental health care and substance use support services in rural and remote regions; focus on creating separate services for those in active substance use and those in recovery (\$\$\$)

Create a plan to redeploy funds currently spent on private shelter without wraparound supports to community organizations to provide both shelter and supportive services to people experiencing homelessness in rural regions (\$\$)

Create unified inventory and application process for developable surplus provincial and municipal land with clear and transparent criteria and application process for interested non-profits and developers (\$\$)

RECOMMENDATIONS: (CONTINUED)

By considering both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of this research, stakeholder perspectives, and a jurisdictional scan, we present the following recommendations. Each section includes short, medium, and long-term solutions with low (\$), medium (\$\$), and significant (\$\$\$) investments required.

MUNICIPALITIES

SHORT-TERM

End single-family home zoning, making, at a minimum, subsidiary suites and townhomes a permitted use in all residential zones (\$)

Where none exist, create zoning provisions for the creation of smaller, more dense housing developments for seniors, including lowering minimum lot and dwelling sizes (\$)

Where no such provisions exist, create zoning and definitions for apartment zones (\$)

Prioritize development approvals for affordable housing projects (\$)

Implement a tax on vacant rental properties (\$)

Apply the tourism accommodation tax to short-term rental properties (\$)

Waive development fees for affordable housing projects (\$\$)

Consider offering in-kind contributions of servicing to affordable rental housing projects on surplus municipal land (\$\$)

LONG-TERM

With provincial co-operation:

Introduce inclusionary zoning for multi-unit developments at 10% of units or minimum 1 unit for developments of 10 or fewer units or cash in lieu at the municipality's discretion; in the case of cash in lieu, all revenues should be reinvested in affordable housing initiatives such as the site service program mentioned above (\$)

Replace tax sales with repurposing properties for redevelopment into affordable housing projects where those properties are appropriate for such development; create an evaluation matrix to identify which properties would be suitable for this purpose(\$\$)

Create unified inventory and application process for developable surplus provincial and municipal land and buildings with clear and transparent criteria and application process for interested non-profits and developers (\$\$)

Consider achieving this through the creation of a community land trust (\$\$)

MEDIUM-TERM

Establish inventories of municipally-owned land and underutilized buildings and a transparent process for their distribution for development of rental housing (\$)

Consider options for pre-emptive rezoning and advance development approvals for land and buildings identified in the inventory to expedite development once the land is awarded (\$)

Streamline municipal processes to expedite the approval of rental construction projects, especially multifamily housing (\$\$)

Create agreements with providers of purpose-built multifamily rental housing to offer rebates of municipal property taxes for an agreed-upon period during which affordability thresholds must be maintained (for example, a certain percentage of units at 80% of median market rent) (\$\$)



CONCLUSION:

There remain significant gaps in our understanding of the scope and scale of housing insecurity in rural NL. This research provides some insights into the magnitude of and main contributors to rural housing insecurity in our province, but further inquiry is warranted into applying new approaches, such as the analysis of health data, to give more concrete information.

Furthermore, each of the key themes identified in this research could warrant its own inquiry into the specific dimensions and local nature of the issues. For example, the particularities of tourism-reliant or resource extraction economies as they relate to housing needs, or the impacts of short term rentals on rural communities, are themes worthy of further exploration. The development of new business models is an area of potential further study, as well, such as for housing in highly seasonal industries, or for the delivery of supportive services in geographically-dispersed areas.

The information garnered through this work reveals a rapidly deteriorating situation with respect to the availability and affordability of housing. Measures are needed to rapidly stimulate the creation of large amounts of rental housing, as well as assure adequate income for the population, and increase the availability and diversity of services for mental health and substance use in rural areas.

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There is a strong desire from municipalities and service providers to work together with other government agencies and foster greater understanding and mutual action. There is likewise a strong imperative for economic and social well-being and a call from those experiencing the impacts of this crisis to address these issues with the urgency they deserve.

A lived experience participant said:

“WE ALL DESERVE SOMEWHERE SAFE TO LOCK A DOOR AT NIGHT AND SLEEP SOUNDLY. THERE COMES A POINT IN LIFE WHERE EVERYBODY CAN SLIP, STUFF HAPPENS— WHEN IT HAPPENS, WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE THERE FOR YOU?”

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APPENDIX A: KEY TERMS

Energy poverty: spending more than 6% of household income on energy costs

Inclusionary zoning: requirement to include a certain percentage of affordable housing in new developments

Housing insecurity: households living in conditions that are and one or a combination of the following:

Unaffordable: costing over 30% of pre-tax household income

Unsuitable: of insufficient size for the number of occupants

Inadequate: in need of major repairs. These would include defective plumbing or electrical wiring, or structural repairs to walls, floors or ceilings, etc.

Multifamily housing: umbrella term for housing with more than one unit, including subsidiary suites, apartment buildings, and other more dense residential developments

Rental rate regulation: a maximum amount (normally a percentage) by which rent can be raised annually by a landlord
Supply-side subsidy: funding at the development stage for the creation of new housing

Subsidiary suites: an apartment within another dwelling, such as a basement apartment

Shelter allowance: the portion of social assistance allocated for shelter; normally disbursed directly to a landlord on a tenant's behalf

Tourism accommodation tax: a 4% levy on tourism revenues paid by operators in NL

Turnaway rates: number of people unable to be accommodated in shelter due to capacity

Wraparound services or supports: services provided for the wellbeing of individuals, often in a way which increases their success in obtaining and maintaining housing; including and but not limited to mental health, substance use, educational, and employment supports



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