



**Ontario
Human Rights Commission**
**Commission ontarienne des
droits de la personne**



Neighbourhood housing tip sheet

Elected and municipal officials often need to respond to questions about rental, affordable, social and supportive housing. These questions often involve human rights. Here are some human rights points to consider.

General responses to concerns expressed about the people living in certain types of housing:

- We don't get to choose our neighbours, and municipalities have an obligation to create inclusive communities.
- People with disabilities, students and young people, newcomers and older persons, tend to have lower incomes and are more likely to need affordable housing.
- These people are all part of the community, and have the right to live anywhere in it
- They should not be treated differently than anyone else in a neighbourhood – which means they should not face restrictions to their housing based on stereotypes and assumptions.

Students and young people:

(For more discussion see Room for Everyone, pp.8-9)

- Students and young people may be more mobile than some other community residents in a neighbourhood, but they are still part of that neighbourhood.
- They contribute a great deal to the economic and social life of the community.
- They have the same rights as any of their neighbours to choose the type and location of their housing.
- Students are generally younger, single adults, and many receive public assistance.
- The *Human Rights Code* prohibits discrimination based on age, marital and family status, and receipt of public assistance.
- Single people, young people and households made up of unrelated adults must not be singled out for different treatment than “families” or older people.

People with low incomes

(For more discussion see Room for Everyone, pp.9-11)

- Some groups may have lower incomes and are more likely to need affordable, supportive, or low-cost rental housing. These groups, which are protected under the *Human Rights Code*, include:
 - People with disabilities
 - Aboriginal people, racialized people and newcomers
 - Young or lone-parent families, and larger and growing families
 - Older people with low, fixed incomes
 - People who receive public assistance
 - Students
 - Transgender people
 - Women.
- People with low incomes have the same right to housing as anyone else and should not face additional barriers to getting housing.
- These groups are disproportionately affected when affordable housing options are reduced, restricted or not developed.
- Providing stable, low-cost housing improves health and inclusion, and enables people to fully take part in their community.

People with disabilities

- People with disabilities are more likely to experience poverty, and to need affordable housing.
- Many of us have, or will develop, physical disabilities, mental illness, developmental disabilities, cognitive or sensory disabilities, or have family members or friends with disabilities.
- People with disabilities must not be subject to different treatment than other residents, aside from what's needed to accommodate their disabilities.
- They have the right to be integrated into the community, and to choose where they wish to live.
- Group homes are important housing options for many people with disabilities, enabling them to live in the community of their choice, with the necessary supports.

Older people

- Many older people have already lived in a neighbourhood for many years, but may need different housing as they age.
- Restrictions on affordable housing often limit their options, and can force them to sever important neighbourhood ties when they need them the most.

Restricting affordable housing causes human rights concerns

Lodging houses, group homes, rental housing and other affordable housing are much-needed options for many people who are protected under Ontario's *Human Rights Code*. As well, the Government of Ontario's and Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy and Provincial Policy Statement strongly support creating and maintaining affordable housing.

People who often rely on these forms of housing include people with low incomes, Aboriginal people, racialized people, large families, lone-parent families, people who receive public assistance, single people, newcomers, older people, students and young people, and persons with disabilities (including mental health disabilities).

Affordable housing is often discouraged because of stereotypes about the people who will live there, incorrect labelling of the housing as non-residential, or behavioural, health and safety or other concerns that may be better dealt with through other means.

The challenge is to move the debate away from discussion of the characteristics of the residents, and toward the value of affordable housing and inclusivity, other measures to address behavioural concerns, legitimate planning and health and safety rationales, and other municipal interests.

Some key points to consider are:

- Affordable housing is a residential use.
 - While some forms of affordable housing provide services to their residents, many homeowners also receive services at home – care-giving, cleaning, meal delivery, and so on.
 - Group homes and other supportive housing are homes for their residents, and should be allowed as of right in residential neighbourhoods, consistent with the same land use principles as any other housing.
- Affordable housing and group homes should be subject to the same considerations as other housing.
 - They should be zoned according to built form and land use principles.
 - They should not be subject to zoning restrictions, or different design requirements based on stereotypes about the people who will live there.
 - Just as homeowners can choose which neighbourhood they prefer to live in, affordable housing should be allowed as of right throughout the municipality.

- Licensing:
 - Where there is licensing of forms of housing, it should focus on legitimate planning, health and safety, Building Code, property standards and maintenance issues.
 - Effectively enforcing existing municipal bylaws for issues like parking, noise and property standards is often the best way to address problem behaviours in housing and residential areas. Using these existing options ensures that inappropriate behaviour is targeted and addressed consistently and fairly – for renters, landlords, visitors and homeowners alike.
 - Renters are entitled to the same privacy and enjoyment of their homes as homeowners. Licensing should not over-scrutinize renters, violate their privacy, or treat them differently than anyone else living in the neighbourhood.

Responding to common concerns, dispelling the myths

(For more information see In the Zone, pp. 8-10)

Property values

Concern: This housing will make my property value go down.

Response: Many studies show that affordable housing has no impact on property values.

Traffic

Concern: This housing will increase traffic in my neighbourhood.

Response: Just like any new development, higher-density or infill housing proposals must meet planning and engineering standards. Also, affordable housing and multiple family housing near transit services attract residents who are less likely to have cars.

Infrastructure

Concern: This housing will put a strain on public services and infrastructure.

Response: Higher-density housing needs less new infrastructure than other types of housing, because it can use existing water and sewer systems, and there are already roads and nearby schools. Also, the new density can support local businesses and increase the range and availability of services, such as transit.

Integration

Concern: This housing will attract people who don't fit into the neighbourhood

Response: People who need affordable housing are part of every community. They're often already in the neighbourhood, just under-housed or struggling to pay rent by cutting corners on food or other costs. When communities are inclusive, they meet the needs of more residents, and provide more opportunities and choices for everyone.

Neighbourhood character

Concern: Affordable housing won't fit the character of the neighbourhood.

Response: Both affordable and market-rate housing must meet the same building restrictions and design standards of the neighbourhood, and can be designed to fit in with the character of the area.

Concern: Rental housing is not well maintained and brings down the look of the neighbourhood.

Response: Several property standards bylaws can be used to maintain the upkeep of properties.

Crime

Concern: Allowing development of affordable housing will increase crime in my neighbourhood.

Response: A Canadian study of 146 supportive housing sites found that there was no real increase in crimes in general, or in violent, property, mischief or disorderly conduct crimes in the areas (Alice de Wolff, *We are Neighbours: The Impact of Supportive Housing on Community, Social, Economic, and Attitude Changes*, Wellesley Institute, 2008). People who need affordable housing are already part of the community, and this housing can provide more stability and security.

Tenant health and safety

Concern: This housing will not be safe for the people who will live there.

Response: Several laws and bylaws, such as property maintenance bylaws, Fire Code, Building Code, etc., are already in place to ensure safe housing.