

Queer Identity & Housing: Understanding Holistic Housing Experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ Adults in Canada and Recommendations for Action



Project Overview

What is needed for adults in the 2SLGBTQ+ community to thrive in housing? The objective of this qualitative research project was to better understand the holistic housing experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ adults in Canada and to produce recommendations for action to ensure that more queer and trans adults can truly thrive in housing. The study included:

- A literature review and environmental scan;
- Engagement with an informal reference group of community members (n=20);
- In-depth qualitative interviews with 2SLGBTQ+ adults with lived experience of housing challenges (n=20) and housing stakeholders (n=14);
- Creative submissions (n=15) to an online community Padlet board; and
- Two interactive community workshops (n=18 attendees).

Who was involved?

This study was conducted by a team of researchers at the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), a non-profit research organization, in partnership with collaborators at the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and Mentor Canada.

The study was funded by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation.



Key Research Findings



Research findings offer nuanced insights into the lived experiences of queer and trans adults, including pervasive experiences of discrimination which must be understood through an intersectional lens. 2SLGBTQ+ adults are particularly vulnerable to the cost-of-living crisis currently affecting Canada. Inadequate income and employment insecurity, coupled with rising costs of living and deeply unaffordable housing, force people to make impossible choices to survive.

Participants in this study described persistent housing instability over the course of their lives, interwoven with experiences of trauma, conflict, and compromised safety. They navigated housing challenges in resilient ways, but often at a cost to physical and emotional health and well-being.

Some participants described their experiences accessing formal supports in their housing journeys, though frequently encountered barriers while doing so. Participants emphasized the importance of informal supports, including advocacy and support from within the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and from friends, family, and chosen family.

Overall, a compelling vision for what it means to thrive in housing as a 2SLGBTQ+ adult emerged from the research, including physical/environmental, economic, emotional/psychological, social/community, and cultural/political dimensions of thriving.

Implications for Housing for 2SLGBTQ+ Adults

This research identifies several potential solutions, developed in collaboration with 2SLGBTQ+ adults and housing stakeholders. Actionable recommendations that might inform the work of practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers going forward include ideas around integrated service hubs, basic income, livable wage, rent caps, landlord certification, tenant rights, cooperative housing and mutual aid.

At a systemic level, this research raises important considerations around the need to decommodify housing as well as address widespread social and structural cisheterosexism (and transphobia in particular) to support a true vision of thriving for the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

Review of the Literature

A common theme throughout the literature was the negative impact of homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia in the lives of 2SLGBTQ+ adults. Discrimination based upon gender identity and/or sexual orientation impacted their entries into homelessness, experiences in housing programs and emergency shelters, and exits out of homelessness. As a result, 2SLGBTQ+ adults and older adults seek community and mutual aid from other 2SLGBTQ+ adults as a means to create safer spaces. Emergency shelters and housing programs may have anti-discrimination policies in place, but these are not necessarily enforced or effective.

2SLGBTQ+ adults and older adults require a diversity of housing options. Some 2SLGBTQ+ individuals may want to live with other 2SLGBTQ+ adults, while others may prefer to live in more generalized housing. Regardless of the housing type, supports specific to 2SLGBTQ+ individuals are necessary.



Research Approach

Our approach to the research emphasized **participatory engagement**. We built in multiple points to engage in member checking, validation, and collaborative meaning-making in the research. By adopting participatory elements to our project, we sought to ensure that the most meaningful and pressing issues – as defined by 2SLGBTQ+ adults themselves – drove our research, that data collection and findings were grounded in community contexts, and that research results were shared back effectively and inclusively with communities.

Our first priority was to undertake a round of initial engagement with the community, including 2SLGBTQ+ adults with lived experience of housing challenges and housing stakeholders (n=20), establishing an informal project reference group. We continued ongoing engagement with reference group members (sharing regular updates, receiving feedback) at key project milestones. We completed data collection in February 2025, having conducted a combined total of 34 in-depth qualitative interviews (see Table 1 for summary by group and community), including 2SLGBTQ+ adults with lived experience of homelessness or housing challenges (n=20) and housing stakeholders (n=14).

Summary of Research Interviews

Group	Halifax	Alberta	Saskatchewan	Manitoba	Total
2SLGBTQ+ adults	10	5	4	1	20
Housing stakeholders	6	4	0	4	14

Research Findings: Lived Experiences

Experiences of Discrimination: Transphobia, Racism and Xenophobia, Homophobia

Participants encountered a range of different types of discrimination in different contexts and situations. Experiences of transphobia were common, including instances observed by housing stakeholders providing social supports. Experiences of racism were also described as a recurring issue identified by housing stakeholders and by racialized participants with lived experience. Homophobia was less commonly discussed. However, there was a general fear and apprehension of sharing information about sexual identity with landlords, roommates, and/or service providers.

Intersecting Identities, Issues, and Systems of Power



Participants navigated intersecting systems of power and oppression in their housing journeys. They reflected on the interwoven aspects of identity – including those related to gender and sexual identity, race, disability, age, and newcomer and immigrant status – and the lived experience of these intersecting social locations as fundamentally shaping their housing journeys.

Beyond identity, participants revealed the messy web of complex - and often deeply unjust - systems and issues inextricable from 2SLGBTQ+ individuals' housing experiences. An examination of intersecting identities, issues, and systems in 2SLGBTQ+ housing journeys shows how they shape experiences of discrimination and access to resources, compounding and amplifying material inequities for those at the intersection of multiple systems of power.

“Many of the folks that I worked with would experience systemic discrimination when they tried to access government services like a government provincial subsidy specific to households where the government is paying a certain amount of money towards people's rent... Folks have issues where they would have to use their dead name in order to do the legal paperwork, they would put down a gender marker or pronouns, and then they wouldn't be used by government service providers... And when I try to correct them, my file somehow gets lost or I end up getting flack from the person on the phone because I'm asking them to use a different name... That was a huge part of my work was trying to engage with government services that were inherently transphobic as a trans person. - *Housing Stakeholder*”

Research Findings: Housing Experiences



Cost of Living Crisis

Participants' housing was deeply influenced by financial instability, systemic discrimination, and insufficient social support systems. Many reported extreme difficulty in securing affordable housing, often spending most of their income on rent while struggling to cover essential expenses like food and healthcare. These challenges are further intensified by employment discrimination, low wages, and inadequate social assistance programs.

Addressing Housing Affordability

Participants called for systemic changes to address housing inequality. Solutions included deep, permanent rent control, stronger tenant rights, regulations to limit short-term rentals, cooperative housing models, and redistributive policies to make housing accessible to all.

Experiences of Housing Instability

Housing instability was a complex, multi-faceted issue, often compounded by a range of intersecting factors such as trauma, unsafe housing conditions, family rejection, and personal crises like relationship breakdowns, intimate partner violence, tenant conflicts, inadequate tenant protections, and unstable employment. These challenges disproportionately affected participants with intersectional identities from additional marginalized communities. Participants described how overlapping dynamics contributed to their housing insecurity, including both personal trauma and structural barriers, which combined to create significant obstacles.

Navigating Housing Challenges

The journey to find safe, stable, and affordable living spaces was described as fraught with obstacles that go beyond financial barriers, touching on issues of discrimination, safety, emotional well-being, and the struggle for acceptance. Many participants faced unique challenges in shared living spaces, where they must contend with both overt and covert biases, and the additional stress of trying to find a place where they can feel secure enough to live authentically.

Living in Smaller Communities

Some participants intentionally lived in smaller (presumably more affordable) communities, but sometimes found limited resources and more conservative attitudes, leading to practical issues accessing limited housing and emotional and social challenges from living in a community context where their identity was not fully embraced.

Research Findings: Thriving in Housing

Participants articulated what it would mean to thrive in housing, both individually and for 2SLGBTQ+ communities more broadly. In reflecting on their ideal or desired housing experiences, participants identified several common themes that support a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the conditions contributing to positive housing experiences and outcomes for queer and trans adults, summarized below.

Physical & Environmental Dimensions of Thriving



Tangible and spatial aspects of housing contribute to a sense of thriving, including the location and geography of housing, proximity to essential services and natural environments, and the design and layout of the physical space with a view to ensuring safety, accessibility, and the ability to accommodate diverse needs and lifestyles.

Economic Dimensions of Thriving



Housing affordability is critical. Thriving in housing means 2SLGBTQ+ individuals can secure shelter *and* meet other essential needs without financial strain. Long-term affordability matters: individuals need housing they can continue to afford for the foreseeable future, to feel a sense of stability. Beyond merely "getting by," truly thriving in housing would mean having the economic stability and financial means to personalize living spaces and make them comfortable.

Emotional & Psychological Dimensions of Thriving



Thriving in housing hinges on a sense of safety, security, and comfort. Freedom from discrimination and harassment is a key condition for thriving, along with the alleviation of hypervigilance associated with anticipated discrimination. For 2SLGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities or chronic health conditions, stable housing plays an even more crucial role in supporting well-being through continuity in medical care and the ability to build local support networks.

Social & Community Dimensions of Thriving



Supportive networks – whether chosen family, co-op neighbours, or broader community ties – provide crucial emotional support, practical assistance, and collective resilience, transforming houses into homes where queer and trans individuals can flourish. Several participants described actively evaluating potential neighbourhoods to assess both safety and community acceptance.

Cultural & Political Dimensions of Thriving



The cultural and political conditions for thriving require substantively challenging norms, processes, and systems that enable and sustain homo/bi/transphobia, particularly where it intersects with those that villainize poverty and those experiencing it. Participants advocated for a shift away from tokenistic engagement toward approaches led by the communities affected. Housing planning and policy spaces must better address the needs and integrate the perspectives those whose perspectives have been historically marginalized in housing decisions.

Research Findings: Supports, Resources, & Policy Solutions

Experiences with Formal Supports

Social assistance programs

Housing stakeholders noted emergency financial assistance programs they were aware of in their respective communities, including government grants, top-up funds for eligible clients, and emergency funding and “small one-time short-term loans” from community organizations to assist individuals leaving intimate partner violence. Government financial assistance programs used by 2SLGBTQ+ adults included income assistance programs and disability support programs.

Harm reduction programs

Harm reduction programs were offered through Friendship Centres as well as partnering community organizations that also provided emergency housing resources. Individuals could be connected to a range of community resources and receive safe sex supplies and food.

Emergency services

Emergency services, such as shelters and emergency health care, were most often used by 2SLGBTQ+ adults as a matter of survival. Some 2SLGBTQ+ adults managing emergent needs, such as injuries and traumatic events, first sought health care and mental health services prior to seeking housing support, sometimes moving to shelters. As they tried to continue their recovery and navigate living at shelters, some felt their safety was put at risk again because of the threats they felt from other shelter users.

Case workers and housing support workers

Case workers and housing support workers were described as playing a central role in connecting individuals to wrap-around services and providing housing navigation supports, including helping individuals find grants, understand different housing options they were eligible for, and assist them in filling out paperwork. Wrap-around services and relationship building were described as critical not only to finding but also maintaining housing.

Supportive housing

Supportive housing models included transitional housing, emergency funding for parents or seniors to stay in hotels or Airbnbs, and safe home stays for newly arrived refugees (i.e., volunteer host homes for one month or more) managed through partnerships with newcomer centres. Housing stakeholders noted that a series of short-term tenancies can create suspicion among landlords who may be skeptical of trusting a client they think may have a cycle of leaving housing after a short period.

Community based organizations offering wrap-around services

Food banks, legal aid, and settlement services, were used by some participants as they navigated housing challenges. Food banks were used by several participants at different points throughout their housing journeys and were especially helpful for younger people, while others used food banks to supplement shelter meals.

Research Findings: Supports, Resources, & Policy Solutions

Experiences with Informal Supports

2SLGBTQ+ community

Both in-person and virtual 2SLGBTQ+ spaces and social media (e.g., Facebook, Discord) create a sense of safety to gather and share resources and mutual aid through volunteering, community support groups, queer housing networks, employment opportunities, bulletin board postings, and local queer events. Community spaces were also an important location for movement building and activism. For some participants who identified as trans and/or racialized, 2SLGBTQ+ community spaces were not always viewed as safe or welcoming. More inclusive environments and a greater understanding of intersectionality within the community, particularly for community members who are racialized, elderly, have disabilities, and/or are new to Canada, are needed.

Friends, family, and chosen family

Friends were a key source of informal supports, such as temporary housing through couch surfing. Family was a source of support for some participants, yet for others, staying with family was cited as a last resort because they did not feel security or belonging. Chosen family, considered closer than friends and safer than families of origin, were identified as another key source of social support and resources.

Mutual aid

While not exclusively queer, mutual aid groups were inclusive and emphasized respect and kindness, creating a safe, "liberating and connecting spaces" that contribute to building community for queer folks, providing crucial connections and solidarity. Several participants talked about crowdfunding and mutual aid within the 2SLGBT+ community, but some stakeholders expressed skepticism about their sustainability and efficacy for securing long-term housing stability, highlighting the gaps left by a lack of inclusive formal support systems.

Desired Supports



Accessible housing and housing support services

Participants wanted to be consulted about the design of housing as well as housing support services. They described accessibility challenges living in subsidized homes and group homes, lack of privacy, and lack of transparency of accessibility on housing advertisements.



Universal basic income

A social safety net, such as UBI, was thought of as one solution that would relieve significant stress as well as lessen the impact of unforeseen events.



Holistic support services and inclusive resources

Participants wanted inclusive services and resources, possibly from a central organization that could create awareness of resources while also support in navigating health services, including mental health supports, primary care, and long-term care housing.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

CHALLENGING SOCIAL AND STRUCTURAL CISHETEROSEXISM

Improve queer political representation, and ensure all elected officials to meaningfully commit to addressing homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia, particularly where these intersect with housing insecurity.

HOUSING AS A HUMAN RIGHT, RATHER THAN A COMMODITY

Enact stronger tenant protections to prevent discrimination, retaliation, and arbitrary evictions. Introduce mechanisms like a landlord listing could be a useful form of public accountability to mitigate power imbalances. Further, renters could benefit from a housing ombudsman to report disputes or negligence to, as well as pro bono legal support, and an advocate to assist with interactions with landlords.

SUPPORTING CHOICES AND A RANGE OF INCLUSIVE HOUSING OPTIONS OUTSIDE OF THE PRIVATE RENTAL MARKET

Prioritize 2SLGBTQ+ adults as a distinct and priority population within housing policy and funding envelopes, including affordable and subsidized/rent-geared-to-income units. Emphasize community and social housing options as an important part of the housing puzzle for 2SLGBTQ+ adults. Member-run housing co-operatives are a potential mechanism to alleviate housing affordability challenges among 2SLGBTQ+ individuals.

ADDRESSING INCOME DISPARITY

Introduce policy responses to poverty and income insecurity, including the potential for direct and targeted income assistance (e.g., basic income guarantee, improving access to and adequacy of provincial social assistance). Providing 2SLGBTQ+ adults with direct and targeted income assistance at key moments in their housing journeys could change trajectories in the long term. This could include financial support for those leaving unsafe housing, facing intimate partner violence, renters (e.g., urgent rent support, money for security deposits), or first-time home buyers, and could be coordinated by government, non-profit, or community-based actors.

STRENGTHENING SERVICES AND SUPPORTS AND IMPROVING ACCESS

Provide more services and supports, better access, and increased competency in inclusive, affirming care. Service providers and staff must have appropriate training or otherwise may inadvertently reinforce barriers or create new ones for 2SLGBTQ+ individuals. Removing barriers, especially around strict eligibility criteria or conditions for accessing formal services, is vital to increasing access.

