



What We Heard

Community Conversations

Submission to the
Let's Talk Housing
national consultation

Acknowledgements

Maytree would like to acknowledge the contributions of our partners in developing this submission:

- Lived Experience Advisory Council
- United Way Centraide Canada

In addition, thank you to the 41 organizations that provided input into this process and submission, and that organized, hosted or supported conversations in their communities. (Please see Appendix 1 for a complete list.)

Finally, we are grateful to the 334 participants who contributed ideas, experiences and valuable time to these community conversations. Your insights are the guide for, and the foundation of, this submission.

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About Maytree

Maytree is committed to advancing systemic solutions to poverty and strengthening civic communities. We believe the most enduring way to fix the systems that create poverty is to have economic and social rights safeguarded for all people living in Canada.

What We Heard

Submission to the *Let's Talk Housing* national consultation

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[C]hanges will only be possible if our priorities and insights are brought to the forefront. We are calling for adequate and affordable housing for all; wages and social assistance rates that provide a decent standard of living; and accessible, appropriate supports for all who need them.

These are basic human rights to which everyone in Canada is entitled.

- Lived Experience Advisory Council

*Nothing about us without us:
Seven principles for leadership & inclusion
of people with lived experience of homelessness*

Introduction

The Government of Canada's *Let's Talk Housing* consultation and the development of a national housing strategy are an important opportunity for Canadians to shape a powerful element of a poverty reduction strategy.

The voices of people who are homeless or experiencing insecure housing are an essential part of any national conversation on housing. Maytree, in partnership with United Way Centraide Canada (United Way) and the Lived Experience Advisory Council (LEAC) set out to engage people who face housing barriers or have experienced homelessness in an in-person “community conversation” process. Our goal was to support people who might not be able to access the online consultation in sharing their insights and ideas with the Government of Canada, to contribute to the development of a National Housing Strategy (NHS).

Many organizations, groups and individuals were eager to participate in the community conversation process and contribute to policies that affect them directly. They were interested in engaging the long-absent federal government in a process that they hoped would result in an effective, stable and adequately funded long-term housing strategy.

This document is a compilation of themes and issues that emerged from these community conversations. The conversations and topics were driven by the participants themselves. The distinction between levels of government and areas of responsibility can be complicated and was not a focus of the conversations. As a result, participants talked about issues and solutions that span federal, provincial and municipal jurisdiction, and indeed, they spoke about the need for all levels of government to work together on housing.

The groups that organized the local conversations were encouraged to make individual submissions directly to the *Let's Talk Housing* online consultation.

Engaging local communities

The community conversations process was designed to be flexible and adaptable to the needs of local communities, participants and organizations. Maytree, along with United Way and LEAC, designed a *Community Conversations* discussion guide designed to support and facilitate local conversations with and among people facing housing barriers. The expertise of people with lived experience was vital to developing the engagement framework and discussion guide. This input helped ensure the community conversations respected and promoted the dignity of participants and was sensitive to issues of stigma, stereotypes and discrimination. The guide provides tools to decrease barriers to participation in the conversations, such as discussion questions, worksheets as well as more information on the *Let's Talk Housing* consultation. The discussion guide is included in Appendix 2.

Maytree, United Way and LEAC reached out to our networks to initiate local community conversations. As a result, 39 organizations and informal groups coordinated and supported 30 local conversations across Canada in September and October 2016. These conversations engaged 334 people who face housing barriers. The participants shared a broad cross-section of experiences, with:

- homelessness
- insecure housing
- gender-based violence
- physical disability
- poverty
- a range of shelters
- transitional housing
- community support programs
- mental health and addictions
- social housing
- immigration and refugee systems

In addition to the local community conversations, two groups shared their submissions, developed through their own process of engaging with community members, to be included in this collaborative process.

A pre-existing base of strong relationships among peer leaders, community organizations, housing and shelter providers and local government made organizing local community conversations possible within a short time frame. For a complete list of community conversation hosts, see Appendix 1.

The discussion guide encouraged local facilitators to incorporate LEAC's *Nothing about us without us: Seven principles for leadership and inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness* in their planning and conversations (see Appendix 3 for more information). Maytree, local United Ways and the host organizations identified and provided support for participants, including:

- meeting space
- child-minding
- refreshments and meals
- transit funding
- interpretation
- honoraria for peer facilitators and note-takers
- honoraria for participants

The conversations ranged in size from two to 25 people in a session and focused on the experiences and issues that the participants raised as relevant. The conversations were intended to be small so that all participants would have an opportunity to share their feedback in an environment that would encourage discussion. Facilitators were encouraged to choose elements of the conversation guides that were relevant and appropriate for participants in their sessions, rather than forcing each question, tool and exercise into each conversation. This approach enabled participants to talk about matters that were most important to them and their communities. The guide encouraged facilitation focused on using strategies that put people first.

Peer-led and peer-facilitated conversations provided an important layer of trust and comfort for people to engage in what can be difficult conversations. Peer facilitation also helped to create an environment where people might speak more freely about the challenges they experience, and their relationships with the local agencies and organizations that are funded to support them. In many cases, people with lived experience, including members of LEAC, led the design and

facilitation of local conversations, as well as the follow-up with each of the groups.

Most of the conversations were initiated through local United Ways, which were familiar with local relationships and connections to communities. For a full list of participating United Ways, see Appendix 1.

ONGOING ENGAGEMENT

“Nothing about us, without us.”

- Lived Experience Advisory Council

Engaging people in effective and meaningful ways means including people in the design, implementation and evaluation of the engagement process. Participants in the local community conversations were asked to provide feedback on how people who face housing barriers should be involved in further shaping and monitoring the national housing strategy, and the policies and programs that emerge from the strategy. People were clear that they want to play an active role, in collaboration with all levels of government, in shaping the system that has such a profound effect on their overall well-being.

Many people expressed that they want to be meaningfully engaged from the outset and throughout the process, from policy and program development to implementation and evaluation. For many, meaningful engagement includes transparency, so that people with lived experience can be aware of and understand issues, policies and processes as they arise. Participants said that it also means expanding the term “expert” to include people with lived experience in policy and program design, implementation and evaluation, alongside policy and program staff. In addition, they noted that including people broadly in a process will provide governments, decision-makers and other stakeholders with insight into the realities that many individuals live.

People said that they want a respectful and dignified process that enables them to engage in an active and meaningful way, and to claim their space in the decision-making process. They include online surveys and written statements as part of this process, but also want opportunities for in-person conversations in their communities to address local issues and solutions. For them, local conversations must move away from a time-limited consultation model and towards ongoing engagement.

Participants described ongoing engagement as the opportunity to:

- be updated on the progress of the strategy
- provide input into resulting policies and programs
- provide feedback on the efficacy of resulting policies and programs

They identified that online forms of communication should complement (not replace) in-person meetings hosted by their local Member of Parliament or Government of Canada staff. Further, they wanted to see elected representatives from each level of government included in the engagement process.

People encouraged the use of smaller, place-based conversations hosted by local, trusted organizations and peer-led groups, similar to those used in this community conversations process. They also encouraged the use of larger public forums as a method of updating people on any progress made, and of soliciting input on monitoring and evaluation. Some suggested that these types of meetings take place annually or biannually, though opinions varied on this point. They suggested that regular meetings would allow organizers to build on successful efforts and learn from problems they encountered in previous meetings.

Participants named the use of regional and national advisory committees as a way to include people with lived experience in the monitoring and evaluation of housing strategies but cautioned against the creation of committees that don't engage a broad group of people with lived experience in a meaningful way. They suggested that committees, led by people with lived experience, would be one way to promote meaningful engagement. These committees would need a budget to provide the means and supports to do their work (see Appendix 4 for a detailed list of possible supports).

Further, people do not want to feel that their participation in a process is merely a token gesture. They are seeking an outcomes-oriented process. Participants explicitly stated that they want to see that the government is taking actions that will have immediate impact. They pointed to information that has already been gathered in past housing consultations, research and reports that can inform its work. They noted that while the government must seek both long- and short-term solutions, people need decent housing now.

People want to see that their past engagement is respected. They want to see a commitment to future engagement. They want to see people with lived experience involved in local, regional and national planning, implementation and evaluation. They want to ensure that what is done will meet the needs of the community.

Participants noted that this ongoing engagement of people with lived experience will go a long way to increase trust between governments and communities.

What we heard

“Every Canadian needs a home. It takes more than a community to make that happen. It takes you, the government, as well.”

- Participant, Regeneration,
Brampton conversation

“The government should realize that sometimes it's not only housing people are struggling with. People may be struggling with addictions, family issues. But housing is the first step in becoming a better person. Stability is key.”

- Participant, Saskatoon conversation

While experiences with housing affordability and accessibility are largely localized, several common themes emerged across the country. What follows is a compilation of the major themes as well as some of the voices of participants. This submission organizes the themes that arose in community conversations according to the *Let's Talk Housing* consultation themes of inclusivity, flexibility affordability and sustainability. Of course, many of the issues are interconnected and span two or more of the *Let's Talk Housing* themes.

Let's Talk Housing Theme: Inclusivity

WHAT WE HEARD: DIGNITY AND RESPECT

"Dignity is not tied to a set of keys."

- Participant, Calgary Homeless Foundation,
Calgary conversation

"Racism is the addiction I just can't beat."

- Participant, Winnipeg conversation

In more than half of the local conversations, participants talked about the need to link housing with dignity and respect. People identified a desire to be part of a community where there is "a sense of belonging" and to feel "welcome," "safe," and "at peace." They spoke about living in a home that is "actually affordable," "healthy," and "stable;" places where repairs are done on time," "family can visit" and that provide "tranquility" and "hope" for the future.

People spoke candidly about the discrimination they experience when attempting to access housing for themselves or their family, and in some cases when accessing community supports. In many conversations, racism and discrimination were named as barriers to finding an appropriate home. In multiple examples, people spoke about visiting potential spaces to rent, but being denied the option to rent the home because they were of Aboriginal descent, people of colour, homeless or on social or income assistance (i.e. "welfare"). In other examples, they could not even make it to the visit – instead they were dismissed on their initial phone call. They reported that even when affordable, housing is still out of reach for too many people. Instead, people placed an emphasis on mixed communities with "no divisions," where "everyone has a place to call home."

When participants were able to get housing or shelter, the desire for “privacy” and “a place of my own” were common priorities for people. For some, this is space that is without judgment. Many felt that while shared accommodation is an important part of the housing system, it should be seen as a temporary solution. Many stressed that shelters and rooming houses are not adequate housing and should not be considered long-term solutions – though they concede that these types of housing can temporarily address immediate and emergency needs for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. People expressed that we need more transitional and supportive housing for people who are leaving the shelter system but who might not be ready to enter the private rental housing market. Participants emphasized the need for a place to call their own, such as a private bachelor apartment or larger homes.

People shared many experiences when they felt like they were “just a number” in a larger system that was more about filling out paperwork than helping match people with appropriate supports. In some cases, participants recognized that individual staff members might have positive attitudes but are limited by resources; as a result they don’t have the time to provide the necessary support. In other examples, staff attitude towards individuals were seen as perpetuating negative labels. They highlighted that some staff “don’t look at us as people with different experiences and needs.”

Ultimately, participants identified that the lack of appropriate housing options for both individuals and families with diverse housing and support needs forces many to live in unhealthy, unsafe and undignified situations. They spoke at length about the lack of repairs, upkeep and accountability in private sector housing, and how they fear that raising issues with landlords or authorities would result in eviction. People spoke about feeling powerless and being made to feel like they should be happy just to have a roof over their head.

WHAT WE HEARD: ACCESSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

“It’s more than just a ramp.”

- Participant, Ottawa conversation

Participants spoke about expanding the breadth of accessible homes for individuals with physical disabilities and their families. They talked about waiting for years on a list for accessible housing and being forced to live in a home in which the only room that was accessible to them was the living room, and being unable to use the kitchen or bathroom and relying on neighbours or programs for basic support. Others noted that many people with physical disabilities are forced into long-term care homes for seniors because of the lack of accessible housing options.

People noted that “accessibility” must be more than adding a ramp in front of a building. They identified the need to move towards design that takes into account the size, location and design of hallways, kitchen counters and cupboards, bathrooms and living quarters. They spoke about the core of a good system being one that puts people and living with dignity at the centre of the design. Participants identified the need for greater use of universal design and “VisitAbility” design principles when building new homes or retrofitting existing homes.

Let's Talk Housing Theme: Flexibility

WHAT WE HEARD: CHOICE

“Spent eight years on the list of subsidized housing with two children with disability. No sensitivity toward this.”

- Participant, The Redwood, Toronto conversation

People reported that they need and want choices in housing. In many of the conversations, participants talked about feeling forced to rent a space because of the lack of choices available to them, such as renting a room or shared accommodation in a home, part of a basement without access to a window, an apartment that needs major repairs or a home that is far away from work, school or programs for themselves or their children. The length of the social housing waiting list was raised in multiple conversations; people talked about long waiting lists ranging from five to 10 years. Others identified the lack of rental housing generally, and of affordable rental housing specifically. Many people spoke about living in unsafe buildings and communities, but said that it was their only option because it was the only home they could afford. Others reported living in rooming houses, often unlicensed, though said that they would not if they felt they had any choice.

Many women who participated in these conversations identified concerns with the lack of affordable housing choices resulting in unsafe, unhealthy and isolating environments for them and their children. They identified that women and families fleeing violence can face greater complexity in finding housing. Many women noted the lack of larger or multi-bedroom housing options for families with children. Women talked about being on the priority housing waiting list, but being offered housing that did not meet the needs of their family and then finding themselves facing the dilemma: lose their spot on the list or accept an inadequate home for their family. For some women, their only choice was to take a place that they knew was inappropriate but which they perceived to be their only option. As a result, women said that they faced being re-traumatized in an unsafe environment. They added that the

vulnerability of escaping violence requires a stronger integrated system of supports that builds on housing and includes:

- dedicated health and mental health support
- financial programming, services and support
- local access to focused programming for their children, who are often dealing with the effects of growing up in and out of shelters

Without access to appropriate housing and integrated supports, some women reported choosing to stay in abusive situations.

Let's Talk Housing Theme: Affordability

WHAT WE HEARD: INCOME AND AFFORDABILITY

“People are compromising their health and happiness just to have a place to live.”

(translated from Cantonese)

Participant, Agincourt Community Services Association,
Toronto conversation

The lack of affordable and appropriate housing options was of great concern to everyone who engaged in community conversations across the country. Participants shared their experiences with lack of available rental options due to low vacancy rates, spending much more than 30% (often more than 50%) of their income on rent and the increasing cost of utilities. Participants expressed an urgent desire to see immediate solutions.

Problems with housing affordability were described in two ways: 1) as a lack of income, which in turn was a result of low wages or inadequate income supports; and 2) as a lack of affordable housing options.

Participants spoke at length about the need for government to increase the housing component of social assistance programs so that people can afford rent and utilities without needing to use the money intended for food, transit and other basic needs. They noted that inadequate income results in homelessness for many people. Many participants spoke of

the challenge of paying their rent while also paying for food, without the ongoing support of food banks or meal programs. They shared their experiences of multiple families living in a single home – one participant spoke about a family that shared a two-bedroom apartment with two other families. Others talked about friends who are homeless, who are causing self-harm or who are committing crimes in the winter months so that they can have a warm place to stay and regular meals.

Families identified additional challenges providing for their children. Some suggested the need for a basic income program, or suggested that social assistance programs should allow people to save money so that they can transition to better housing and plan for their future. This inability to control personal income and finances has left many participants feeling helpless and trapped in a cycle of poverty. For people who did not identify as being on social assistance, low-wage and precarious employment were barriers to accessing appropriate housing. Some participants identified the need for a basic living wage as part of the solution to help people afford the homes they need. A number of people identified that increasing the availability of rent supplements and housing benefits would increase people's access to private sector housing.

Increasing the supply of diverse, affordable housing was a priority for many people. Building additional rent-geared-to-income homes was deemed a priority for many, with some linking it directly to more social housing. This was identified as a solution that the federal government could implement immediately, while it explores additional solutions to more complex issues that might require additional research. Participants felt that building new rent-geared-to-income housing is an urgent, fundamental, and obvious solution.

Inclusionary zoning policies were named in a few conversations as a way to increase the availability of affordable housing in mixed communities. Participants identified that long-term, sustainable funding to manage the affordability of homes is key. For other people, rent control is an important component to maintain the affordability of homes.

Let's Talk Housing Theme: Sustainability

WHAT WE HEARD: ACCOUNTABILITY AND ENFORCEMENT

"I would rather sell my things and move to a shelter because it almost seems like your living situation can be worse once you are housed."

Participant, Agincourt Community Services Association,
Toronto conversation

For most participants, health and living conditions cannot be separated. People spoke at length about the challenges of living in homes where repairs take a long time and people are therefore forced to live in unhealthy and unsafe living conditions. Mould, cockroaches, bed bugs, poor repairs and lack of maintenance were reported as all too common. For some, asking for repairs and reporting pests to their private market landlords was often unsuccessful – work went undone and pests left untreated. People expressed frustration about annual rent increases without any improvement or maintenance of the conditions of their homes. Some living in social housing acknowledged that a lack of resources led to the lack of repairs. Participants reported feeling stuck and powerless, without the freedom or choice to move onto something better. Some spoke about moving frequently in an attempt to find a home that is affordable and well kept, spending a fair amount of their income on the search and transition.

Landlord accountability in both the private and public sectors was identified as a crucial component to a strong housing system and people spoke about it as more than repairs and maintenance. Many said that they cannot enjoy privacy in their home because landlords and property managers enter without the proper advance notice. People who spent time in shelters shared similar experiences.

The power imbalance between landlords and tenants was apparent in a number of the conversations. Many people talked about being reluctant to raise issues of repairs, maintenance and privacy with their landlords. For some, the imbalance begins when some landlords ask for multiple months of rent in advance to secure the home, and make it clear that they expect rent to be paid in cash, without receipts – which can jeopardize

some people's social assistance. Because of low vacancy rates in many communities, participants reported feeling that they don't have other options and so they accept the landlords' terms. Many fear they will be evicted if they ask for repairs.

Many participants reported a lack of knowledge or understanding of their rights as tenants, which results in their inability to claim their rights, even when they want to. Other people are living in shared accommodation homes that are not covered by landlord-tenancy regulations and are left on their own to seek accountability from landlords.

People identified the need for a faster and more tenant-friendly landlord-tenant board or agency that could enforce existing regulations and provide more supports for tenants. Many participants perceived that these boards are more focused on supporting landlords. In addition, some identified the need for a landlord program that would include landlord education about tenant rights, in addition to strong enforcement and accountability mechanisms for ensuring basic standards are met in rental homes. Some people called for a formal landlord licensing system.

WHAT WE HEARD: SUPPORTS FOR SUCCESS

"I feel like I am isolated in a place where I can't find anything near and affordable for my kids."

Participant, The Redwood, Toronto conversation

For many participants, access to community supports, including mental health services, individual and family programming, trauma supports, food banks and meal programs, and housing workers are all key components to housing accessibility, security and stability. People spoke about how the lack of affordable and accessible housing, in addition to inadequate income and income support programs, has created a reliance on community support. Many identified using food banks and meal programs as the only way to overcome the combination of low income and high rent. Others talked about how transportation supports from local community agencies allow them to search for housing and attend other community-based programs.

For some people, having access to a housing worker who could act as their agent or with their landlords is an important contribution to their housing stability. Participants talked about how housing workers provide proactive eviction-prevention support and increased their legitimacy in the eyes of landlords. They reported that this gave them greater peace of mind.

Expanding the supports available to a broader group of people was named as necessary to increase their effectiveness. Some identified that Housing First programs are reducing the number of housing and support workers and day programs available to people who aren't in a Housing First program. Others identified that some supports, such as caseworkers, were only available to people receiving social assistance, while other programs, such as rent banks, are only available to those who are working. Participants spoke about addressing some of these eligibility barriers as a way to increase the supports available to a larger number of people.

People identified that positive and supportive staff are the core of any successful program. An understanding of cultural practices and culturally appropriate supports for Indigenous communities were explicitly mentioned in some conversations and participants called for these programs to be expanded. Many mentioned that these staff can help foster much-needed hope for their own situations.

Participants were concerned that time-limited programs that emerge from project-based funding can be too focused in scope and not reflect diverse needs and the unpredictability of life. People expressed the need for ongoing, stable programs that support access to the homes they need, and also provide after-care support to prevent relapses.

Conclusion

By consulting Canadians, the Government of Canada has taken an important first step in developing a national housing strategy that aims to produce better housing and socio-economic outcomes for people across the country. These conversations hosted in communities across the country provide insight into the diverse challenges faced by people struggling to find decent housing.

In these conversations, people expressed a desire for choice. They want homes that meet their physical needs. They want supports that can help them be successful. They want landlords to live up to their obligations, and for the housing system to provide help for tenants when they don't. They want to be treated with dignity and respect.

Moreover, they don't want to stop here. Participants in these conversations call on the government to continue on a path of engagement. They ask for the government to include people with lived experience in its efforts. They want their engagement to be meaningful and ongoing.

Through ongoing engagement, the Government of Canada can work with communities towards short- and long-term solutions that ensure affordable, quality and secure housing for all.

List of Appendices

- Appendix 1: Participating organizations
- Appendix 2: *Let's Talk Housing* Community Conversations: A discussion guide to support local community conversations
- Appendix 3: Nothing about us without us: Seven principles for leadership & inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness (Lived Experience Advisory Council)
- Appendix 4: Checklist for planning inclusive and accessible events (Lived Experience Advisory Council)

Appendix 1

Participating organizations

Participating organizations

The following groups organized, hosted and/or supported conversations in their local communities:

CALGARY, AB

- United Way of Calgary and Area
- Calgary Homeless Foundation

SASKATOON, SK

- Lived Experience Advisory Council
- United Way of Saskatoon & Area
- Mumford House
- Saskatoon Food Bank and Learning Centre

WINNIPEG, MB

- Lived Experience Advisory Council
- United Way of Winnipeg
- End Homelessness Winnipeg
- Lived Experience Circle, Winnipeg

OTTAWA, ON

- Lived Experience Advisory Council
- Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa

PEEL REGION, ON

- United Way of Peel Region
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Dixie-Bloor Neighbourhood Services
- Elizabeth Fry Community Justice Program
- Elizabeth Fry Ellen House
- Knights Table
- Our Place Peel
- Peel Living
- Polycultural Immigrant and Community Services
- Regeneration Outreach Community
- Salvation Army Cawthra Shelter
- Salvation Army Peel Family Shelter
- Salvation Army Wilkinson Shelter
- The Journey

TORONTO, ON

- United Way of Toronto & York Region
- Agincourt Community Services Association
- COSTI, North York Housing Help Centre
- Sistering
- The Redwood
- Women's Habitat of Etobicoke

WATERLOO REGION, ON

- Lived Experience Advisory Council
- Awareness of Low-Income Voices ALIV(e)
- Region of Waterloo Housing Services
- STEP Home Participant Advisory Group

YORK REGION, ON

- United Way of Toronto & York Region
- Blue Door Shelter, Leeder Place Family Shelter
- Blue Door Shelter, Porter Place Men's Shelter
- Blue Door Shelter, Youth Shelter

MONCTON, NB

- United Way of Greater Moncton and Southeastern New Brunswick
- Harvest House Shelter
- Homelessness Steering Committee
- YMCA ReConnect Street Outreach

CANADA-WIDE

- Lived Experience Advisory Council

The following groups shared their feedback, which was compiled through their own process of engaging their communities, to be included in this document:

- ACORN Canada
- Super InTent City

Appendix 2

Let's Talk Housing

Community Conversations: A
discussion guide to support local
community conversations



Let's Talk Housing

Community Conversations

A discussion guide to support
local community conversations

Acknowledgements

Maytree would like to acknowledge the contributions of our partners in developing this guide:

Lived Experience Advisory Council

United Way-Centraide Canada

In addition, thanks to United Way of Toronto & York Region for their valuable input.



About Maytree

Maytree is committed to advancing systemic solutions to poverty and strengthening civic communities. We believe the most enduring way to fix the systems that create poverty is to have economic and social rights safeguarded for all people living in Canada.

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Let's Talk Housing

Community Conversations

A discussion guide to support local community conversations

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***Let's Talk Housing* – Context**

The Government of Canada is gathering people's thoughts and ideas on the development of a national vision for housing and a national housing strategy. On the *Let's Talk Housing* website (www.letstalkhousing.ca), you can provide feedback on four housing themes through an online survey and/or by uploading a written statement. The deadline for completing the survey or submitting a statement is **October 21, 2016**.

Community Conversations

For a variety of reasons, many people will not participate in the *Let's Talk Housing* consultation process. Maytree, United Way Centraide-Canada and the Lived Experience Advisory Council believe that consulting those directly affected is necessary for the success of the national housing strategy. The community conversations will address this gap in the *Let's Talk Housing* consultation process by creating opportunities for engagement. Community conversations are intended to be inclusive, transparent and accessible for people who have complex housing needs, who are experiencing homelessness or are precariously housed.

Local community conversations are designed to engage people who face barriers to participating in formal consultation processes, and whose complex housing experiences and ideas will provide crucial input for the creation of the national housing strategy.

This discussion guide is designed to:

- Support and facilitate local conversations that engage people who will be directly impacted by the national housing strategy;
- Provide tools that will decrease barriers to participation; and
- Contribute to a Canada-wide “What Was Heard” document compiling the input gathered from these local conversations; this document will be submitted to the *Let's Talk Housing* consultation.

Canada's National Housing Strategy

Housing is crucial to the wellbeing of Canadians yet can be one of the most difficult things for people to access and maintain. For 1 in 7 Canadian households, adequate housing is unaffordable, leaving individuals and families in housing that doesn't meet their needs and with too little left over to pay for other necessities.

Housing disadvantage is not distributed evenly across the population. Tenants experience a much higher rate of affordability problems and overcrowding than homeowners. Women, persons with disabilities, Indigenous people, racialized communities, immigrants and refugees, youth and older adults face a disproportionate risk of housing insecurity and homelessness. Systemic solutions to poverty depend on ensuring that people can access affordable housing and the appropriate supports to meet their needs.

The Government of Canada has committed to developing a new national housing strategy for Canada that will map the path for "better housing, socio-economic and environmental outcomes for people, including those living in Indigenous and Northern communities." The national housing strategy aims to meet the needs of all Canadians while recognizing that everyone's situation is unique.

Addressing the diverse housing needs of Canadians will require the participation of all levels of government. After a long absence, the federal government has recognized that it can and should play a more active role, one that seeks to complement and augment the role of the provinces, territories and municipalities.

The development of Canada's national housing strategy over the coming year creates an exciting opportunity to engage people who will be directly impacted by the strategy, along with housing experts, the non-profit and private sectors, and other levels of government so the strategy meets the needs of all Canadians.

The federal government's consultation focuses on the following four themes:

- Affordability;
- Inclusivity;
- Sustainability; and
- Flexibility.

Suggested Action:

To prepare, please review the *Let's Talk Housing* website (www.letstalkhousing.ca) to get acquainted with the consultation's **proposed vision, principles, themes** and **outcomes**. These are also included in the Appendix section of this guide. You might want to include additional themes and principles, such as equity and human rights. You can also invite participants to name other principles they believe are important to a national housing strategy.

Conversations, Considerations & Engagement

A consultation process that includes people with diverse housing needs will strengthen the outcomes of the national housing strategy. It will give people an opportunity to identify their needs and priorities, while also providing first-hand, experiential insights into the potential successes and challenges of any proposed strategy.

EXPANDING PARTICIPATION

This guide is designed to make the consultation process more inclusive by engaging people who face housing challenges, including those who are homeless or have experienced homelessness. In many cases, people with the most profound housing needs also face significant barriers to participating in formal consultation processes. Barriers include, but are not limited to: low income, disability, experiences of abuse, health issues, or various forms of discrimination.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT

The Lived Experience Advisory Council (LEAC) has developed resources to help others plan inclusive and accessible events. These include a document that outlines seven principles for inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness, as well as a detailed event planning checklist. You can find these resources at www.homelesshub.ca/NothingAboutUsWithoutUs.

For example, LEAC advises event planners to:

- Dedicate as much funding as possible to lived experience inclusion
- Choose a barrier-free venue and accommodations that are in or near the lived experience community
- Compensate participants for their time; ensure that compensation will not impede the income source of a person with lived experience of poverty

Here are some other things you can do to reduce barriers to participation:

- Choose a time of day that works best for the people you hope will participate in the conversation (for example, seniors often prefer meeting during the day; try to avoid conflicts with drop-in programs or other activities)
- Provide food and drinks - while refreshments are a welcome addition to most community events, in some cases, this might be the only nutritious food that people have access to that day
- Cover transit costs or provide alternate transportation as appropriate
- Consider whether to include staff from community agencies - in some cases, they are part of a familiar support system; however, some participants might feel more comfortable speaking about their concerns about existing housing and supports if agency staff are not present
- Give participants the option of using a fictitious name, as anonymity will make some people feel more comfortable
- Determine what other types of supports would reduce barriers for the participants you hope to engage: for example, child-minding, attendant care, translation/interpretation (including for ASL), scribes to help participants provide written feedback, etc.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPARKING COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Successful community conversations will reflect the local needs, wants and culture of a community. Consider what conversation format will provide a supportive environment to spark and encourage discussion on a potentially difficult topic. Sample formats and environments include:

- Small-group roundtable discussion of 8 to 12 people sharing a particular housing experience, facilitated by a local organization with an established relationship with the community
- Peer-facilitated small group discussion of 8 to 12 people
- Informal conversation integrated into existing programming, such as community kitchens, English as a second language programs or drop-in programs
- Informal storytelling session with a facilitator who engages participants in a journey of sharing their individual stories, guided by the discussion questions
- One-on-one conversations
- Other formats that work well for the participants

Be conscious of the language you use throughout this process, so that conversations are accessible to all participants. Be creative with the conversation and focus on what works best for the people participating. Use the sample discussion questions as a guide in your conversation, rather than as a script. Focus on the intent of the questions and use language that is accessible for people participating in the conversation.

Consider using existing community-based work and research to support the local community conversation. Being aware of recent consultations, research and engagement can help you avoid duplicating previous efforts. Where possible, these community conversations should build on previous work.

You can find tools to support the local community conversations, including a sample agenda, feedback form, note-taking form and an art-based feedback form, in the Tools section of this guide.

Consider including some time at the end of the community conversation for people to explore next steps, including what to do with the feedback from the conversation. As much as possible, this exploration should reinforce the value of the ideas and experiences shared.

Suggested Action:

Review the tools provided in this guide, as well as community engagement tools you have used successfully in past community conversations to develop your tailored strategy for engaging people in the housing consultation. Also, refer to the resource documents developed by the Lived Experience Advisory Council to plan a people-centred strategy for engagement (www.homelesshub.ca/NothingAboutUsWithoutUs).

SHARING THE RESULTS OF YOUR CONVERSATION

As the Lived Experience Advisory Council highlights in its *Nothing About Us Without Us* documents, “the people who are living it usually have the best understanding about what the problem is and what needs to be done to address it.”

Sharing the results of your community conversation has the potential to increase the effectiveness of housing and homelessness policies and programs in your community and across the country.

Maytree and United Way Centraide-Canada will be submitting a cross-Canada compilation of the feedback from local community conversations to the *Let's Talk Housing* consultation process. If you want your community conversation to be included in this larger submission to the Government of Canada, please email it to Maytree (evlachoyannacos@maytree.com) by **October 7, 2016**. We will share the final document with the communities participating in this initiative.

In addition, you can:

- Submit the thoughts, ideas and results of your conversation to the Government of Canada's *Let's Talk Housing* conversation process on the www.letstalkhousing.ca website, using the "Upload a written statement" button. **The deadline to submit your ideas to the government is October 21, 2016.**
- Share your *Let's Talk Housing* submission with your local elected representatives from all levels of government and, if conversation participants are interested, consider meeting with your elected representatives to talk through your submission.
- Share your *Let's Talk Housing* submission with other people in your community.

Suggested Action:

Encourage the facilitator and note-taker of your community conversation to review the sample submission form found in the Tools section of this guide in advance of the conversation. This can give them a sense of how the information gathered will be provided to Maytree by October 7, 2016, directly to the Government of Canada by October 21, 2016, and how it might be shared in other ways.



**Community
Conversations**

Tools

Sample Questions

These questions are designed to support the conversations of people who will be directly impacted by the national housing strategy, and the submission of their first-hand experiences, thoughts and ideas into the Government of Canada's consultation process. The questions focus on people's experiences and are broadly framed so that they can be adapted to diverse experiences. Discussion prompts can act as a guide to help focus or expand the conversation.

The questions can be used in a small group discussion format, or in another discussion format that will be most comfortable for the participants. We encourage you to focus on the housing areas that have a direct impact on participants' experiences, and not attempt to discuss the overwhelming breadth of potential housing issues impacting all Canadians. Depending on who is present and who is organizing the discussion, your local conversation might focus on, for example, the housing needs of young parents, tenants living in social housing, women and families fleeing violence, persons with disabilities, urban Indigenous communities, and/or other specific experiences, needs and groups.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The Government of Canada has identified four themes that inform its consultation: affordability, inclusivity, flexibility and sustainability. Consider using the four themes to spark conversation.

| Question | Possible prompts |
|---|---|
| <p>1. What is our vision for a national housing strategy?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do we consider home? • What does it look like? (e.g., everyone has a roof over their head; we have enough money to pay for rent and food; we are welcomed in our community) • What does it feel like? (e.g., it feels healthy because repairs are done well and on time; it feels safe because I know my neighbours and feel a sense of community; it feels welcoming because we don't feel ostracized in our community) • Who is included? (e.g., everyone has the home they need - women and their kids can leave abusive relationships and still have a safe community to live in without fear; pets are welcome and encouraged; harm reduction principles are valued and integrated; we have autonomy to shape our lives and homes) |
| <p>2. What are some of the things that make it difficult for people to have the home they need that the Government of Canada needs to be mindful of when developing the national housing strategy?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there supports and services that we can't access that make it difficult to find and keep housing? (e.g., are there reliable transit/schools/social services where you can afford to live? is the social housing wait list too long? are harm reduction programs available?) • What are some of the reasons that people can't afford healthy and safe homes? (e.g., social assistance rates, minimum wage and unreliable jobs, other responsibilities like food, child care, school?) • Are there enough different types of homes for people with different needs? (e.g., homes with larger number of bedrooms, supportive housing, accessible housing options, housing that operates with harm reduction principles, shelters and transitional housing?) • Are there certain groups in our community who have less access to the homes they need or who are more likely to become homeless? (e.g., do some groups experience discrimination and other barriers when they are looking for housing or jobs?) |

| Question | Possible prompts |
|---|--|
| <p>3. What are some of the things that we have seen or experienced that work well in supporting people to have the homes they need that the Government of Canada should include in the national housing strategy?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role of housing supports, including rent banks, housing workers and harm reduction programs, in these successful experiences? • Have other programs or services, such as health clinics, community centres, settlement programs, or schools, helped people find or keep their home? • What made it feel like a good experience? (e.g., does it feel safe and healthy? is it space people can afford while also having enough food to eat? is it accessible?) • What are the roles of individuals and the community in these successful experiences? (e.g., is it directly linked with Indigenous groups and cultural practices? is there a tenant council where individuals can share their concerns? is there a peer support program linked to the shelter drop-in program?) |
| <p>4. How should people who will be impacted by the national housing strategy be involved in further shaping and monitoring the national housing strategy, as well as the policies and programs that come out of it?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was missing from this current consultation process and vision that could have engaged us more effectively? • How could we help with the evaluation of the policies and programs to make sure that they actually work for the people they're trying to help? (e.g., are there advisory groups, satisfaction surveys or other ways this can happen?) • How often should people who will be directly impacted by the strategy be engaged in shaping it? (e.g., once a year? any time changes are made?) • Who should be responsible for engaging people? (e.g., one level of government? every level of government? local housing and service providers? our peers?) • What would help people engage in these types of conversations? (e.g., time and space for conversations with government staff, ongoing conversations, translated materials, honouraria for time?) |
| <p>5. What other advice would you give the Government of Canada as they develop the national housing strategy?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit thoughts and ideas raised in past questions where people want to spend more time exploring. • Check in on areas that haven't been discussed |

Sample Annotated Agenda

| Timing | Agenda item | Details |
|------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| 10 minutes | Welcome and introductions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome to the community conversation and review goal of the gathering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial goal: To participate in the <i>Let's Talk Housing</i> consultation and provide feedback into the development of a national housing strategy. • Ask participants if they have any other goals they want to add, discuss viability and work towards consensus. • Give each participant, facilitator and note-taker an opportunity to introduce themselves. • Confirm that notes will be taken in the conversation, but that no comments will be attributed to anyone. • Consider developing a common set of ground rules for the group conversation with participants at this point. Have the group develop and write it on flip chart paper so that you can refer to it throughout the conversation as needed. • Consider using the Government of Canada's vision, principles and themes to provide clarification on what a national housing strategy could include. • Consider using a small "icebreaker" activity to relieve any nervousness some participants might feel. |
| 15 minutes | Question 1: Vision for housing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This question can be used to start the entire conversation as a larger group. • This could also include space for individuals to document their thoughts on their own worksheet (in the attachments) before the larger group discussion. • Consider documenting people's feedback on flip chart paper as it may be helpful to refer back to these visions in subsequent questions. |

| Timing | Agenda item | Details |
|------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 60 minutes | Questions 2-4: Challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each question can be allotted 20 minutes, but be flexible and let the group prioritize what they see as important. This may result in more time spent on a particular question, thought or idea. • If a lot of time is being spent on a particular issue/ thought, check in with the group to see if they're ready to move onto another topic. |
| 15 minutes | Question 5: Recap & new ideas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit thoughts and ideas raised in past questions where people want to spend more time exploring. |
| 10 minutes | Wrap up & next steps | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank everyone for their participation and important feedback into this conversation. • Outline the process you will use for pulling the notes together and submitting them into the consultation process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will participants be able to give feedback into the submission? • Will participants get a copy of the submission? • Talk through any next steps participants want to take: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the group want to meet with their local Member of Parliament to present the submission? |
| 10 minutes | Feedback forms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide some time at the end of the meeting for people who may want to give additional feedback into the process by writing their thoughts and ideas onto the attached feedback form. • Use as appropriate for your group. |

Further suggestions:

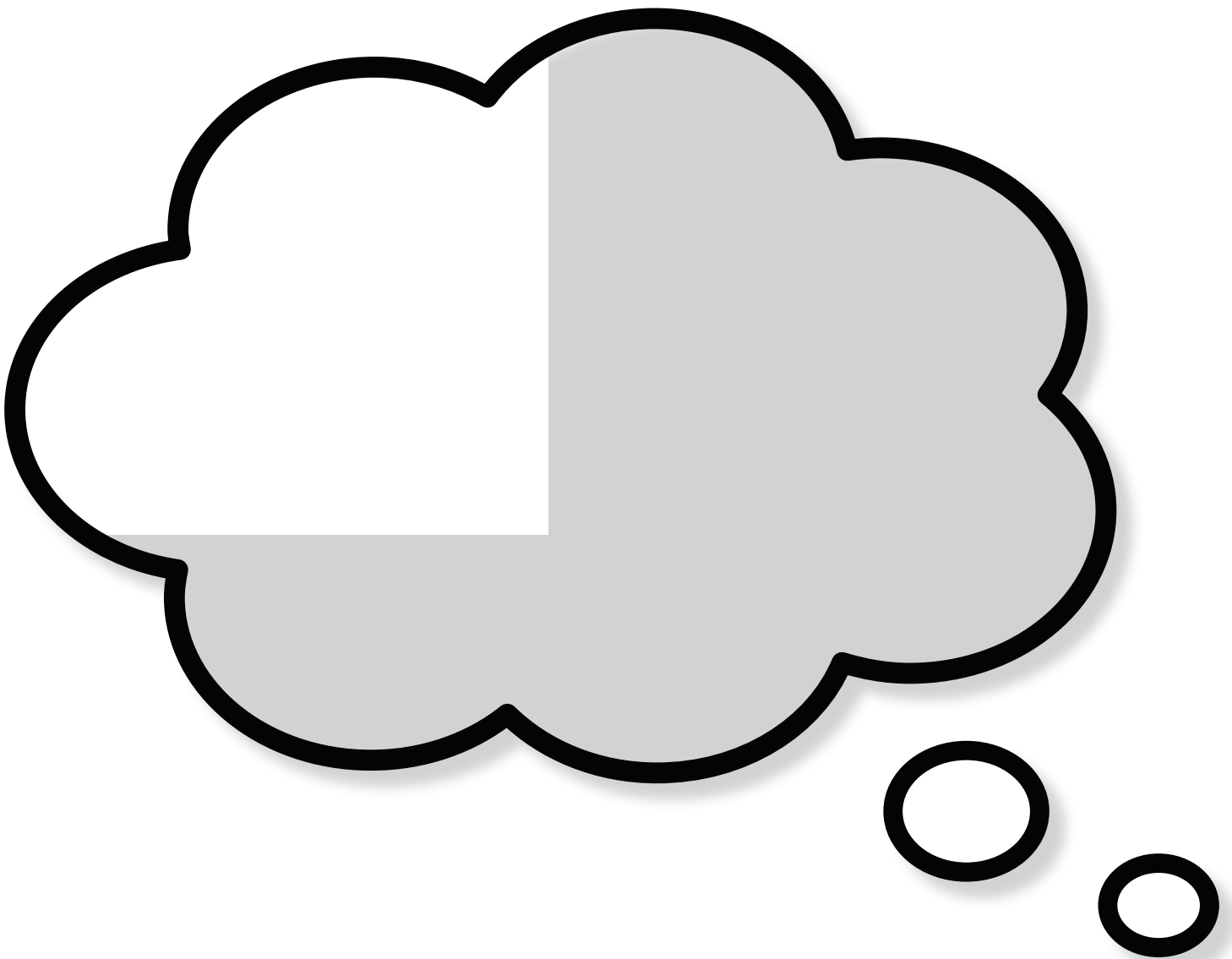
Include an appropriate amount of time before and after the facilitated conversation for people to enjoy refreshments as well as for informal conversations among participants, facilitators and note-takers.

Include time for facilitators and note-takers to talk before and after the conversation to make sure that information is accurately gathered.

My Vision for a National Housing Strategy Worksheet

Use words or pictures to describe your vision for Canada's National Housing Strategy. What does it look like and feel like? Who is part of it?

Use the space inside and outside the thought cloud to express your thoughts.



Sample Feedback Form

Community Conversation:

Date:

My vision for a national housing strategy includes:

What are some of the **things that make it difficult** for people to have the home they need that the Government of Canada needs to be mindful of when developing the national housing strategy?

What are some of the things that we have seen or experienced that **work well** in supporting people to have the home they need that the Government of Canada should include in the national housing strategy?

How should people who will be impacted by the national housing strategy **be involved** in further shaping and monitoring the national housing strategy, as well as the policies and programs that come out of it?

What other advice would you give the Government of Canada as they develop the national housing strategy?

Sample Note-taking Form

Community Conversation:

Date:

Facilitator:

Note-taker:

Number of participants:

| Question # | Responses | Observations (e.g., level of agreement in the group, other information that could suggest support or frustration, like body language) |
|-------------------|------------------|---|
| | | |

Sample Submission Template

Submission to the *Let's Talk Housing* consultation

This is the title of your submission. You can adapt it to reflect your local conversation.

To Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development

This is the space where you list who you are sending it to. You can add your local Member of Parliament to this list as well.

Introduction

This is where you can give some background information on your community conversation, including:

- How many people participated and a very brief description of the structure of the conversation (e.g., was it a discussion group or did you use a different format to gather feedback?)
- General description of participants without compromising confidentiality and respect (e.g., most participants were single women in private rental housing; all participants lived in social housing; all participants identified as LGBTQ2)
- The focus of the conversation (e.g., homelessness; violence against women; transitional housing)
- A statement that identifies that the submission is a reflection of the thoughts and ideas of individuals who will be directly impacted by the results of the national housing strategy

Conversation findings

This is where you will list the results of the conversation. The more that you can do to help the reader understand the outcome of the conversation, the easier it is to have the feedback incorporated into the national housing strategy. You can share the results in a number of different ways - for example:

- Question and answer: Simply listing each discussion question with the corresponding cleaned-up notes below.
- Thematic: Structure the feedback using the vision and themes of the *Let's Talk Housing* consultation (sustainability, affordability, inclusivity, flexibility) by doing an analysis of the discussion notes and categorizing responses into each of these areas.

- **Mixed:** Draw major trends or highlights from the conversation (similar to the thematic format), and combine with a question and answer format.

Summary or closing statement

This is where you can provide a summary of the community conversation and/or make a closing statement which may or may not include recommendations.

Attachments

This is where you can add any additional information that you want to include in your submission. If participants in your conversation filled out individual feedback forms or if your group has seen another document that you think the consultation should consider, you can include these as attachments to your submission. Attachments can be actual documents or website links.

Appendix A: *Let's Talk Housing* Vision for Housing

FROM WWW.LETSTALKHOUSING.CA

The Government of Canada is asking people to help develop a vision for Canada's national housing strategy and believes that the vision should:

- Speak to all Canadians
- Address a full spectrum of needs, from people who are homeless to those who rent from the private market or own their own home
- Improve the lives of people in greatest need
- Place housing at the centre of communities
- Recognize the importance of housing to achieving other social, economic and environmental goals

The government is seeking feedback on a *draft* vision for Canada's National Housing Strategy. The draft vision it has developed is:

All Canadians have access to housing that meets their needs and they can afford. Housing is the cornerstone of building sustainable, inclusive communities and a strong Canadian economy where we can prosper and thrive.

This information was taken from the Government of Canada's *Let's Talk Housing* website on August 29, 2016. We have included it here for background only.

Appendix B: *Let's Talk Housing* Key Principles

FROM WWW.LETSTALKHOUSING.CA

The Government of Canada's *Let's Talk Housing* consultation is being developed according to the following principles (you can also find them online at www.letstalkhousing.ca):

1. RESULTS-BASED

- Environmentally sustainable: we want housing to contribute to a cleaner environment and support a greener tomorrow
- Performance tied to results: we measure our performance; evaluate our outcomes; and base our decisions on the best evidence of what works
- Self-reliance: we seek to support greater self-reliance for individuals, families and housing providers, where possible
- Fiscally responsible: we seek fiscally responsible housing responses and leverage support from others
- Flexibility: we recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to addressing housing needs
- Community-centred: we believe housing should be community-based and consider access to public transit, proximity to work, amenities and services
- Economic stability: we want a stronger housing system that supports stability in the Canadian economy and helps withstand fluctuations in the economic cycle

2. PROCESS-BASED

- Innovation: we encourage innovative new approaches
- People-centred: we remember that people are at the heart of all housing solutions
- Collaboration: we value collaboration and build respectful relationships

This information was taken from the Government of Canada's *Let's Talk Housing* website on August 29, 2016. We have included it here for background only.

Appendix C: *Let's Talk Housing* Themes for Discussions

FROM WWW.LETSTALKHOUSING.CA

AFFORDABILITY

Affordable lands and financing

Housing is driven by demand and supply factors. How can housing supply challenges be better addressed to meet the needs of future demand across Canada, including the needs of future homeowners.

Affordability pressures in cities

The individual choice of homeownership and rental may vary from market to market. How can data and evidence-based policy making support a better understanding of the drivers between the choice of homeownership and market rental? Is there a need to better balance homeownership and rental options in all markets across Canada?

New and renewed rental housing

Rental housing is home to 30% of Canadians. Canada needs a greater supply of new affordable rental housing, including through increased private sector involvement and the maintenance and preservation of our existing rental housing stock. Supporting more affordable rents can help reduce poverty and grow the middle class. In many cities, developers are building more condos than affordable rental units. In addition, existing rental housing is aging and in need of repair. How can we support a stable supply of rental housing that is affordable?

First-time home buyers

First-time buyers (FTBs) with mortgages accounted for just over 40% of all home sales from 2010-2014. What factors have an impact on first-time buyer access to housing over the next decade compared to the last decades? For example how does level of income, house prices and interest rates impact access to housing? Is homeownership within reach?

INCLUSIVITY

Low-income and vulnerable Canadians

About 20% of Canadians require assistance to meet their housing needs. Some groups have distinct needs that require unique solutions, including: the homeless, recent immigrants, lone-parent families, persons with disabilities, victims of family violence, seniors and Indigenous households. What new approaches can make a difference?

SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental sustainability

Housing has a big impact on our environment. Sustainable solutions are needed. New approaches can build more resilient homes and communities. Reducing energy consumption in housing will also help Canada reach its climate change goals. How can we build a greener future through housing?

Social housing renewal

Canada's investment in social housing is an important asset for all Canadians. Much of our social housing stock is aging and in need of repair and renewal. Long-term government subsidies that have supported our social housing are also set to expire by 2038. As a result, many of the low-income individuals and families who live in these buildings may lose the safe and affordable places they call home. In addition, there are also opportunities to make Canada's affordable and social housing sector more financially viable and less reliant on government funding.

How can we build a strong and financially healthy affordable housing sector that attracts private investors, increases the supply of affordable housing, ensures that our investment in affordable housing is "paid forward" to future generations, and renews Canada's social housing to promote well-being and socially-inclusive communities?

Creating a better quality of life

Housing is more than shelter. It helps Canadians gain access to important socio-economic opportunities, including jobs, education and services. Moving from social to market housing is possible for some. What approaches can help?

Economic growth and stability

In light of overall household debt levels and sustained period of low interest rates, what alternate financing approaches can ensure Canadians continue to have access to housing finance across the country that both meets their needs, and they can afford (e.g. shared-equity mortgages; loan-to-income ratio, etc.)?

Supportive institutions and regulations

Strong housing institutions and effective regulations and laws are needed to meet the housing needs of Canadians. Better integration and alignment of policies, programs and regulations across all levels of government will help achieve better housing outcomes for Canadians. What changes are required?

FLEXIBILITY

Use of data-based evidence

Housing initiatives and approaches should be built on the best evidence available and the achievement of desired outcomes. We need to close data gaps to better inform our decisions and policies. Actions need to be measured and tied to results to ensure success.

Continuum of housing options

People's housing preferences and choices continue to evolve. How can future homeownership options meet changing preferences (single detached to multi-unit/high density/sustainable options)?

This information was taken from the Government of Canada's *Let's Talk Housing* website on August 29, 2016. We have included it here for background only.

Appendix D: Frequently Asked Questions

1. What's the difference between the Government of Canada's *Let's Talk Housing* consultation process and the *Let's Talk Housing* community conversations supported by Maytree, the United Way and the Lived Experience Advisory Council?
 - Maytree and the United Way Centraide-Canada are working with community groups to support the participation of people who will be directly impacted by the national housing strategy in the *Let's Talk Housing* consultation by supporting local community conversations. Maytree and the United Way will compile feedback from community conversations and submit it to the Government of Canada's *Let's Talk Housing* consultation process. If you want the results of your community conversation to be included in this compilation, please email Maytree (evlachoyannacos@maytree.com) **by October 7, 2016**.

2. Why did Maytree, the United Way Centraide-Canada and the Lived Experience Advisory Council get involved?
 - Maytree and the United Way Centraide-Canada want to support the participation of people who will be directly impacted by the national housing strategy in the Government of Canada's *Let's Talk Housing* consultation by decreasing barriers to participation. We are also interested in the feedback of people from across the country to better understand people's experiences so that it can also shape our own work.

3. I have more to say. Where I can give my personal feedback into the national housing strategy?
 - The Government of Canada's *Let's Talk Housing* consultation process has two ways that you can give feedback into the national housing strategy: by filling out a brief online survey, and by submitting a written statement through the website (www.letstalkhousing.ca). You can complete both the survey and written statement if you choose to.

-
4. What is the deadline for giving my feedback into the Government of Canada's *Let's Talk Housing* consultation process?
 - The deadline to complete the online survey or to submit a written statement is **October 21, 2016**.

 5. Where can I find more information on the Government of Canada's national housing strategy consultation process?
 - You can find more information, such as its vision, principles, themes and key dates at www.letstalkhousing.ca.

 6. Who in the Government of Canada is responsible for the *Let's Talk Housing* consultations?
 - The Ministry of Families, Children and Social Development is responsible for the *Let's Talk Housing* consultation process. You can find more information on the consultation process at www.letstalkhousing.ca.

 7. When will we find out the results of the Government of Canada's *Let's Talk Housing* consultation?
 - According to the *Let's Talk Housing* consultation website, the Government of Canada will release the results of what it heard through the consultation on November 22, 2016. The information will be released through an online Town Hall, and a report will be posted to the website.

Appendix 3

Nothing about us without us:

Seven principles for leadership
& inclusion of people with lived
experience of homelessness
(Lived Experience Advisory Council)



Nothing about us without us: Seven principles for leadership & inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness

LIVED EXPERIENCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

During the 2014 Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness conference in Vancouver, a group of individuals came together with a common goal: to ensure that individuals with lived experience received equitable representation from service providers, researchers, policy makers, and others, so that they can better understand and tackle the problem of homelessness.

We believe that without including individuals with lived experience in the decision making process, in research, and in all other endeavours, it creates an unbalanced approach to ending homelessness in Canada.

To that end, our council was formed. Our first action was to articulate principles for the inclusion and leadership of people with lived experience in organizations and initiatives that aim to address homelessness. We presented these principles to the conference plenary under the banner, “Nothing About Us Without Us.”

These principles point to the importance of first voice inclusion in all endeavours to end homelessness. This is true of any social issue – the people who are living it usually have the best understanding about what the problem is and what needs to be done to address it. Inclusion is especially vital in the context of homelessness, though, because being excluded and silenced is a huge part of the experience of homelessness and poverty. The belief that people who are homeless do not have the competence to participate as equals in organizations is layered on top of the other stereotypes directed at us because of racism, sexism, ableism, poor-bashing, and other oppressions.

Many organizations are learning to value lived expertise, but overcoming outdated, paternalistic beliefs and practices doesn't happen overnight. Service providers, researchers and policy-makers need to work alongside people with lived experience to create new structures in which we come together as equals. We hope this document can provide support to professionals and people with lived experience as we all work together to plan and implement these changes.

Principles

1. Bring the perspective of our lived experience to the forefront

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT:

Homelessness is an issue of injustice. People are homeless because of deep inequalities and oppressions in our society. For people with lived experience, these injustices and inequalities are clearly visible, while for those with privilege, they may be more difficult to perceive. Decades of top-down research, service provision, and policy-making have not ended homelessness, because ending homelessness requires fundamental changes to our economic and social system. These changes will only be possible if our priorities and insights are brought to the forefront. We are calling for adequate and affordable housing for all; wages and social assistance rates that provide a decent standard of living; and accessible, appropriate supports for all who need them. These are basic human rights to which everyone in Canada is entitled. We need organizations to support these demands.



HOW TO DO IT:

- Join us in creating awareness of the issues.
- Stand beside us, not behind or in front.
- Help us make sure that no one is left out or misrepresented.
- Ensure that your organization's communications, fundraising, research, and programs do not reinforce the misconceptions that homelessness is caused by individual problems, or can be solved by charity.
- Use professional influence to help advance the goals identified by first voice people.
- Dedicate time and resources to advocacy, and support grassroots social change efforts.

2. Include people with lived experience at all levels of the organization

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT:

For too long, people with lived experience have been confined to a limited role—as service recipients, objects of policy-making, or research subjects—in efforts to end homelessness. But policy, research and service organizations require the insight and leadership of people with lived experience at all levels in order to achieve the kind of transformative change that is needed.



HOW TO DO IT:

- Hire us in positions at all levels – front-line, administration, and management.
- Invite us to join the organization's Board and committees.

- Include lived experience of homelessness as a dimension in your organization’s equity and diversity policies.
- Create a liaison within municipal and provincial governments, including city councils and police boards.
- Work towards sustainability and advancement for “peer” positions, so that those hired on as “peer counsellors,” “peer researchers,” etc., can advance to permanent positions.

3. Value our time and provide appropriate supports

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT:

The value of a person with lived experience is the same as that of any other social worker in the field dealing with aspects of homelessness. Trust is so much a key when working with those living in a homeless or marginalized world.



Some organizations do use first voice people in an advisory role, often without regard for the time taken by the person. This leads many times to no pay for the time involved or too little compensation. This is something that needs immediate change. The people who are asking us for consultation are receiving their pay for their time spent with us, so we should also have our time and expertise honoured. They are using our advice to build policies moving forward, so what we say has great value.

In addition to compensation, we may require other kinds of supports in order to enable our equitable participation in organizations. Barrier-free access, childcare, and transit fare are just some examples of what may be needed to make participation accessible to all. Our emotional needs, and our often limited time and energy, must also be taken into consideration. Finally, like any member of an organization, we might need information and training to be able to participate effectively.

HOW TO DO IT:

- Anticipate the compensation and supports that will be required to properly include people with lived experience, and include those costs in funding applications.
- Compensate us well for the time spent in consultation, not only with token gift cards or minimal honorariums.
- Remember that these issues have a huge impact for us, because we can relate to the experience. Create a welcoming environment in which it is safe to express emotions.
- Develop new ways of doing business - long meetings and bureaucratic procedures can be very draining and alienating, not only for people with lived experience!
- Provide training and capacity-building to all members of the organization, including those with and without direct experience of homelessness.
- Ensure that the timeframe for an initiative includes the time required to form a good working relationship and do things at a reasonable pace.

4. Challenge stigma, confront oppression and promote dignity

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT:

As already discussed above, homelessness is caused by injustice, inequity, and oppression. Transforming our organizations, our society, and our economy to truly end homelessness will require confronting and changing all unequal relations of power, including racism, sexism, and ableism. In addition to the exclusion and marginalization we face on the basis of our race, class, gender, dis/ability, Indigenous identity, sexual orientation, age, immigrant status, and other factors, people with lived experience also face stigma and discrimination because of homelessness and poverty. Poor-bashing attitudes and practices, which are present in many organizations, undermine the dignity of people facing homelessness. Everyone in our unjust society learns oppressive ideas, and we all need to unlearn them. Stereotypes, discrimination, and violence divide us all from each other and prevent us from coming together to eradicate homelessness.



HOW TO DO IT:

- Give us a common ground to work from by providing Anti-Oppression 101 training to all members of the organization, from participants to volunteers to front-line staff and management.
- Confront oppression through the use of anti oppression models, which are inclusive.
- Educate around intersectionality – that is, the ways that oppressions such as racism, sexism, classism and ableism work together and reinforce each other.
- Review organizational policies and practices to ensure they promote equity, dignity, and rights of people facing homelessness.

5. Recognize our expertise and engage us in decision-making

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT:

People with lived experience are often put on committees for our expertise, and to bring reality to the group, but how often are we really listened to. Most committees are comprised of people with no experience of the homeless situation. Lived expertise is needed to help steer policy and decision-making in the appropriate direction. We need to stay very much in the picture reminding others that we offer something that they do not have, and that is the expertise of our knowledge of homelessness and marginalization. Too often we are given lip service to placate us, and not enough say when the rubber hits the road. Slowly government departments are taking more seriously the role of people with lived experience. There are so many decision-making committees and organizations that really have no lived experience representation, so we have to maintain a very strong voice. The recognition is there about our value in the process, but there is such a long way to go.



HOW TO DO IT:

- Mandate people with lived experience into more decision-making roles in organizations dealing with issues of homelessness and marginalization.
- People with lived experience can put pressure on decision-makers to include us in influential roles by speaking when we can, by using social media, and all other methods at our disposal.

6. Work together towards our equitable representation

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT:

Realizing that the first person voice is important to all aspects of ending homelessness in Canada, lived experience representatives must have equal representation in the decision making process. This includes equal voting rights on boards and committees, staffing and all other roles. But, changing organizations to implement equitable representation doesn't happen overnight. It is a gradual process that organizations must commit to. It requires learning, trial and error, and often a change of the culture within the organization.



HOW TO DO IT:

- Include equitable representation as a goal in the organization's strategic planning process.
- Set concrete objectives and specific timeframes, and work towards them.
- Identify other organizations that have successfully implemented equitable representation, and get their advice and mentorship.
- Evaluate the organization's progress, seeking input from people with lived experience in the process.

7. Build authentic relationships between people with and without lived experience

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT:

Ending homelessness is not only about changing systems, it's also about changing relationships. Relationships of unequal power and influence must be replaced by authentic relationships. An authentic relationship simply means that each individual is treated equally. Lived experience individuals are not token members of boards, committees and staffing but are equal partners. A lived experience representative offers a unique perspective, however, our voices are only strong when we are working in concert with ALL voices in the decision making process. Don't just say we are being treated as equals, ensure that we are being treated as equals.



HOW TO DO IT:

- Cultivate an environment of caring, acceptance and openness where differences are celebrated and everyone's contribution is acknowledged.
- Ensure that all members of the organization are included in social activities, and that those activities are accessible to all.
- Break down rigid roles such as “service provider” and “service user.”
- Celebrate together.



DOWNLOAD THE

Checklist for planning inclusive and accessible events

www.homelesshub.ca/NothingAboutUsWithoutUs

ABOUT THE LIVED EXPERIENCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Lived Experience Advisory Council is a group of leaders from across Canada who share lived experience of homelessness and poverty. Our mission is to ensure the leadership and inclusion of people facing homelessness in all efforts to end it. Email us at leac.canada@gmail.com or find us on Facebook.

This document was prepared by LEAC members Janice Arsenault (Toronto ON), Leigh Burse (Brockville ON), Suzi Gursoy (Waterloo ON), Kym Hines (Victoria BC), Kaummajuk Holly Jarrett (Wakefield QC), Debbie McGraw (Saskatoon SK), Terrie Meehan (Ottawa ON), Emily Paradis (Toronto ON), Al Wiebe (Winnipeg MN), and Phoenix Winter (Vancouver BC). We also acknowledge the ideas and contributions of founding LEAC members.

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Appendix 4
Checklist for planning
inclusive and accessible
events

(Lived Experience Advisory Council)



Checklist

for planning inclusive and accessible events

LIVED EXPERIENCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

During the 2014 Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness conference in Vancouver, a group of individuals came together with a common goal: to ensure that individuals with lived experience¹ received equitable representation alongside service providers, researchers, policy makers, and others, so that we can better understand and tackle the problem of homelessness.

The Lived Experience Advisory Council (LEAC) has produced this checklist to assist event organizers in planning events that are inclusive and accessible to people living in poverty and people with lived experience of homelessness. This list is meant to be used in combination with our “Nothing about us, without us” principles, available at: www.homelesshub.ca/NothingAboutUsWithoutUs.

The recommendations included here are based on our own experiences with travel and participation in conferences, including CAEH. We encourage event organizers to consult with local lived experience consultants and other experts on accessibility well in advance of the event, and to adapt this list as appropriate.

HOST TERRITORY / INDIGENOUS

- ✓ As far as possible in advance, make connections and build relationships with Indigenous Peoples of the host territory. Follow protocols to seek permission for the gathering, and ensure appropriate Indigenous host involvement in planning and in the event itself.
- ✓ Consult with people with lived experience from the territory to find appropriate Indigenous cultural elders to provide a welcome from the host territory.
- ✓ Consult with people with lived experience and the homeless communities from host territory to ensure they feel included from the beginning and not like a token afterthought.

REPRESENTATION

- ✓ Engage and compensate Lived Experience consultants in event planning and promotion.
- ✓ Have LE consultants represented as fully as possible in all aspects of the conference/event: on panels, in plenaries, as keynotes, or MCs.
- ✓ Instead of lived experience sessions, consider including people with lived experience in every session.
- ✓ Ensure that people with current lived experience with poverty and homelessness are being represented – not only those who now live comfortably.
- ✓ Actively involve youth, especially those who are street-involved.

- ✓ Engage and compensate local Lived Experience hosts as conference support staff and guides.
- ✓ Engage and compensate local LE hosts to help visiting lived experience consultants navigate LE issues (e.g., if the conference is in a food desert, how do we find snacks in a way we are accustomed to?), local travel, etc.
- ✓ Dedicate as much funding as possible to lived experience inclusion. Without us, there would be no need for a conference / meeting / event on homelessness.
- ✓ Implement dedicated funding sources for lived experience inclusion, such as a fixed additional charge on each registration fee.
- ✓ Plan to include a “critical mass” of diverse lived experience leaders and participants in your event. People with lived experience should make up a large portion of attendees for visibility, comfort and to feel included, and to have influence on the atmosphere and content of the event.

FINANCES / TRAVEL

- ✓ Invite Lived Experience consultants many months in advance of the event.
- ✓ Negotiate all details of funding and compensation to be provided well in advance. Be transparent, ensure arrangements are clear, and consider equity – that is, delegates with different abilities and experiences may require different levels of support in order to participate equally.
- ✓ When possible, plan for LE to travel together and to have other LE meet them upon arrival.
- ✓ Ensure that funds for travel and compensation will not impede the LE consultant’s income source (for example, issue funds in cash, and / or classify them as honoraria, to ensure that they are not clawed back from welfare and disability benefits).
- ✓ Learn the rules about income supports and additional income in the provinces that LE consultants are coming from – they differ in every jurisdiction.
- ✓ Ensure that the funds needed for travel arrive at least two weeks in advance of planned travel, to enable consultant to make necessary arrangements at home.
- ✓ Send travel funds in an appropriate form (for example - sent to an agency or ally that the person trusts, if requested).
- ✓ Perhaps send funds needed for travel (childcare and elder care, costs of travel to and from airport and train station, per diem for day of travel, etc.) in advance, and arrange to give conference expense funds on arrival.
- ✓ Ensure that per diem amounts allow LE consultant to network with peers and have appropriate food for their personal health needs.
- ✓ Ensure that the event venue / hotel has a list of who not to ask for a deposit/credit card to access rooms.
- ✓ Have some options to deal with travel food issues (for example – include cost of a meal when purchasing plane tickets since airplane food can only be purchased by credit card).

VENUE AND FACILITIES

- ✓ Ensure that the meeting venue and accommodations are barrier-free.
- ✓ Consult local accessibility experts and Lived Experience consultants well in advance to ensure all accessibility needs (childcare, sign language interpretation, attendants, etc.) are addressed.

- ✔ Select a meeting venue and accommodations with the needs of LE attendees in mind. For example, many conference centres are located in business districts that are “food deserts” where healthy affordable food is not available for purchase.
- ✔ Consider locating meeting in close proximity to areas of the city where there is an LE community and homelessness services / organizations – where LE attendees can feel welcomed and at home.
- ✔ Ensure any known language issues are addressed. Perhaps have a ‘VIP’ station so that LE consultants are not intimidated when attempting to obtain equipment needed to participate.
- ✔ Provide a quiet/decompress room with healing tools such as blankets and soft music, and a support team.
- ✔ Provide a lived experience hang out room AND separate meeting spaces where we can plan our revolutions. This will enable Lived Experience delegates to hold meetings without taking over the hang out room.
- ✔ Engage and compensate local Lived Experience hosts to staff the LE hang out and meeting spaces to welcome participants and provide support.

HARM REDUCTION

- ✔ Have information available for the host city’s compassion clubs, access to needed ‘medications’, address for the Safe Consumptions Site (if there is one), any Harm Reduction Support Services, access to abstinence support as appropriate (AA, NA, etc.).
- ✔ Provide directions to any Tent Cities or Micro Housing Villages.
- ✔ Have a dry space for social functions so those in recovery are supported and feel welcome.

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1. In this document we use the term “lived experience consultant,” “LE consultant” and “LE” to mean people facing homelessness, poverty, marginalization and exclusion.