

AFFORDABLE HOUSING SUBMISSION



BE MIND FULL

CHAMPIONS FOR POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH SINCE 1918



**Canadian Mental
Health Association**
Edmonton
Mental health for all

Introduction

1 in 5 Canadians experience a common mental illness every year.¹

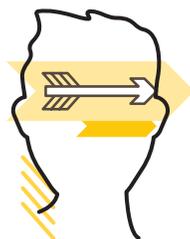
It affects people of all walks of life and backgrounds. At CMHA Edmonton, we believe affordable housing is an essential component of supporting people with a mental illness. Lack of safe, adequate, long-term affordable housing is understood to be one of the key socioeconomic determinants that affect a person's likelihood of developing a mental health challenge. An English study found that 1 in 5 adults said a housing worry had affected their mental health in the past 5 years. Of those with a housing worry, 3 in 10 said that not only had it negatively impacted their mental health, but they had no issues with their mental health previously.²

By addressing housing, we reduce costs to the health, justice, and social support systems in other areas, and better position people for meaningful activities and success in their professional and personal lives. Providing affordable housing makes a difference and promotes positive mental health.



OUR VISION

Mentally healthy people in caring communities



OUR MISSION

Building healthy and resilient communities by providing mental health services, education resources, and crisis intervention



OUR VALUES

Social justice and inclusivity
Empathetic, respectful relationships
Collaboration and partnerships

About CMHA – Edmonton Region

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), founded in 1918, is one of the oldest voluntary organizations in Canada. Each year, CMHA provides direct service to more than 100,000 Canadians through the combined efforts of more than 10,000 volunteers and staff across Canada in over 120 communities.

CMHA – Edmonton Region provides services across the Edmonton metropolitan region and a stretch of north-central Alberta ranging from Jasper and the Rockies in the west, east to the Saskatchewan border, and north to include Lac La Biche and Cold Lake. In addition to providing housing for people in need, we offer crisis support and navigation services through our 24-hour Distress Line and Seniors' Abuse Help Line, and by operating 211 throughout central and northern Alberta. Our programming also includes advocacy and wayfinding for people in need, peer and caregiver support, and suicide bereavement and grief support. CMHA has operated within this region since 1954 and offers a long, successful history of community programming and supports.

¹ Mental Health Commission of Canada. "Strengthening the Case for Investing in Canada's Mental Health System: Economic Considerations." https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2017-03/case_for_investment_eng.pdf. 2018.

² Shelter. "The Impact of Housing Problems on Mental Health." https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1364063/Housing_and_mental_health_-_detailed_report.pdf. 2017.

CMHA – Edmonton Housing

CMHA – Edmonton manages 146 units in 7 apartment buildings we own or manage. In 2019, we had 152 tenants. We are a designated Housing Management Body under the Government of Alberta. We operate under two different funding models:

- Subsidized housing (with direct to landlord rent supplements)
- Affordable housing (rent set by landlord at 10-20% below the market rent set by CMHC for that neighbourhood).

Tenants in our buildings are both living on a low or fixed income and with the effects of serious mental illness. These two models have proven to be successful in supporting them, with more than half of tenants having a long-term tenancy of over 10 years. Additionally, all of our properties are registered as Crime Free Buildings by the Edmonton Police Service.

The Need

The 2016 census found approximately 11-12% of households in both Edmonton and Alberta to be in Core Housing Need, lacking in adequacy, suitability, or affordability. CMHA-Edmonton's experience has been that the need for the housing it provides always exceeds the availability. Year-to-year, we carry a waitlist of approximately 100 people, about 2/3 the capacity of the housing we manage. We are often put in a position of telling a person in need that there isn't a foreseeable hope of providing them a place to live in one of our buildings.

A 2015 study of Edmonton's Sub-Region Housing Needs forecast the need for non-market housing, including that serving people with mental health challenges, to grow by 1,300 units by 2021.³

Creating Connections, Alberta's mental health and addictions strategy, identifies housing as one of its key strategic directions.⁴ It states:

*Emphasis is placed on the importance of adequate housing as a fundamental determinant of health, i.e. the "housing first philosophy." Similarly, since individual choice and self-determination are positively correlated with good client outcomes, a person's fundamental rights and desire to live as independently as possible must be a primary consideration.*⁵



Alberta has made significant strides in providing housing for people in need, but the demand has not been met. Economic challenges exacerbated by the pandemic threaten in the near to medium term to drive up demand for safe, affordable housing even further.

“ I’ve never lived in one place this long before and I’ve just started to become accustomed to the space being my own. It means more to me than you can know to have a home. ”

³Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Board (Capital Region Board). Edmonton: Sub-Region Housing Needs Assessment Report: <http://emrb.ca/Website/files/30/30090d08-387b-4659-92e0-8d1256686658.pdf>. 2016.

⁴Creating Connections: Alberta's Addiction and Mental Health Strategy. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/9ab4e813-6731-4f6c-b517-57637ad440c3/resource/bebad5b6-5e87-4627-bef4-9589790a0aad/download/54546662011creatingconnectionsAlbertasaddictionmentalhealthstrategy.pdf>. 2011.

⁵Ibid. pp.25

What is Working

Put simply, housing has proven to be an effective investment in supporting people with serious mental health challenges. A 2011 study from the United Kingdom found that providing supported housing for individuals with moderate mental health needs who were being discharged from the hospital saved an estimated £22 000 (\$35,000) in costs to the public elsewhere through savings in health and social support.⁶ In Canada, it is estimated that each dollar invested in housing for individuals with mental health concerns generates more than \$2 in savings elsewhere.⁷ Investing in housing for people with mental health concerns is an effective public investment.

Affordable, safe, secure housing has proven to be a successful model to support people with a limited income and serious mental health challenges. More than 50% of CMHA-Edmonton tenants have a long-term tenancy of more than 10 years. Tenants also participate in activities such as community gardens, casual or part-time work to assist in the maintenance and upkeep of their buildings, and peer support programs. Providing affordable housing, combined with opportunities for meaningful activities, works.

Some of our successful models include:

- Partnerships to provide housing first units at Edward Street (25%) and Northern Arms (2 for youth), combining support and tenant models that complement each other.
- Activities and programming, including community gardens at Citrus Court and one planned for Northern Arms. The community gardens, in particular, build community in the neighbourhood and are a strategy to address food insecurity.
- Advocacy and wayfinding for tenants, including access to supports and connections to community resources.

Creative Models That Work

Inside and outside of Alberta, there are examples we can adapt to our own communities:

- The **Hong Fook Mental Health Association** serves East and Southeast Asian communities in the Greater Toronto Area, supporting people who have mental health issues as well as linguistic and cultural barriers. They use a head lease model to assist clients in finding a home in their neighbourhood of choice. They also use a culturally responsible model of support, matching each tenant with a case manager who shares their culture and language. Hong Fook has also formed neighbourhood support groups where their program participants can meet and get to know each other. This is a strong example of how a culturally responsive approach can overcome barriers and support people in need.⁸
- In **Sault Ste. Marie**, the local housing corporation and CMHA partnered to provide 10 units for residents with high mental health needs within a 61-unit building. These units are located close to an on-site CMHA office that provides them with support. Combining types of affordable, non-market housing is one way to provide housing opportunities.⁹
- **L'Abri en Ville**, a Montreal non-profit, arranges housing for people with a significant mental illness. 3 people share each apartment and are supported by a community of volunteers who work with them on daily management skills. Residents maintain structured daily activities, such as part-time work or volunteering, and participate in group activities with other residents. Building community and helping residents build their own skills and capacity helps them successfully maintain housing.¹⁰
- In Vancouver, **Coast Mental Health** collaborates with housing providers and devises creative solutions to find people in need a place to live. One example is their providing two temporary modular buildings with on-site supports and services. This is a quick, cost-effective way to get more affordable housing on the market.¹¹
- In Lethbridge, CMHA Southern Alberta has partnered with the **Lethbridge Housing Authority** on the Castle Apartments, a 79-unit complex offering safe, affordable housing downtown. This partnership between non-profit housing providers combines types of affordable housing, creating a mix and partnership that supports each party.

⁶ Mental Health Commission of Canada: Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health in Canada. <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2017-03/Making%20the%20Case%20for%20Investing%20in%20Mental%20Health%20in%20Canada.pdf>

⁷ Andre Picard: "Housing is Most Cost-Effective Treatment for Mental Illness: Study". The Globe & Mail. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/health/study-shows-housing-the-most-cost-effective-treatment-for-mental-illness/article17864700/#:~:text=Providing%20housing%20and%20support%20is,average%20of%20%2419%2C582%20per%20person.&text=For%20people%20with%20less%20severe,is%20saved%20for%20every%20%241.> April 8, 2014.

⁸ Addictions and Mental Health Ontario (AMHO), Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Ontario, and the Wellesley Institute. "Promising Practices: 12 Case Studies in Supportive Housing for People with Mental Health and Addiction Issues." <https://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Promising-Practices-in-Supportive-Housing-Resource-Guide.pdf.2018>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ L'Abri en Ville website: <http://www.labrienville.org/>

¹¹ Coast Mental Health: Housing. <https://www.coastmentalhealth.com/what-we-do/pillar-housing/>

“ I can’t express how happy I am daily to come to a beautiful home. I am thankful for the home I have and the joy you have brought into my world. ”

– SONJA

What’s Missing

Government funding programs and regulatory frameworks create challenges for all housing providers to fund, build, and operate buildings. Proponents need to work to align different funding programs and priorities which may not always align in focus or timing. This requires a significant effort that does not always pay off in new units. It is also on top of the need to address all the regulatory requirements that any builder – non-profit or profit – has to address in the application and development process. Less red tape will facilitate the development of all types of housing.

For non-profit providers, government funding and subsidy program are necessarily subject to qualifying criteria which require on-going analysis and reporting. No stakeholder entirely understands the others’ framework. This produces three consequences:

- First, the costs for proponents – in time and revenue – to try to translate and coordinate the rules of multiple organizations or orders of government.
- Second, projects never get off the ground or ultimately fail because of a lack of resources available to create the framework to support capital and operations.
- Third, by not recognizing the problem and mitigating it, policies continue to create barriers to organizations trying to build affordable housing.

This problem exists within all orders of government. Municipal policies create barriers to development, while provincial and federal programs do not always align in focus or timing.

There is also an underinvestment in non-market affordable housing, that is to say housing without on-site supports. While there may be an assumption that market affordable housing can meet this need, this area continues to be underserved. We see this in the lengthy affordable housing wait lists – including our own – and the overall housing crunch that much of Alberta has experienced for the past two decades. It is very difficult for private developers to effectively serve the market for affordable housing; government subsidies and grants are a proven effective way of doing so, and a proven effective investment.

Summary

CMHA Edmonton believes that to ensure safe, affordable housing, governments and funders should:

- Provide predictable, sustainable funding sources to management bodies that operate affordable housing.
- Coordinate funding activities with other orders of government.
- Ensure a streamlined regulatory process that does not create additional expenses and investments of time for proponents.

In doing this, we will see many positive outcomes, including:

- A reduction in costs elsewhere to the health, justice, and social support system that outweighs the investment in housing.
- A more productive population able to contribute as employees and volunteers.
- Stronger communities as a result of these housing projects and their successful outcomes.

We thank you for the opportunity to share our experience and ideas, and welcome the opportunity to work together further to build a more effective affordable housing climate in Alberta.



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Mental health for all

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