

# Understanding the Inclusive Housing Index



## **Introduction**

In the National Housing Strategy (NHS), the federal government affirmed housing as "a cornerstone of inclusive communities." The NHS also established a goal to create 2,400 new affordable, **inclusive** housing units for people with developmental disabilities. This affirmation reflects increasingly widespread recognition of the role one's housing situation plays in either advancing or hindering social inclusion: Our homes are the basis from which we make meaningful personal connections to friends, family and neighbours, access schools and jobs, and engage with the community around us.

We also know at least 24,000 Canadians with developmental disabilities are in core housing need, while approximately 100,000 Canadians with intellectual disabilities are unable to access housing that meets their support needs, makes possible a home of their own, and offers social and economic inclusion in their communities. For decades, group homes and other congregate living arrangements, have been one of the only housing options available. Such limited housing options hamper choice, dignity, and opportunity to contribute to society for people with developmental disabilities. There is growing recognition that dispersed-individualized housing options – when paired with appropriate supports – provide the best outcomes for both persons with a developmental disability, their family, their community and for society at large.

Until now there has been no evidence-based way to assess exactly *how* housing contributes to inclusion, or whether a proposed housing development is likely to foster inclusion for its residents.

To address this gap, *My Home My Community* — a national initiative of Inclusion Canada and People First of Canada that creates pathways to inclusive, affordable housing — has developed an **Inclusive Housing Index**: a framework and practical tool to assess and improve the potential for a housing development or redevelopment to advance inclusive outcomes for residents. This brief provides an overview of the Inclusive Housing Index, how it was developed, and how it can be used by a range of housing actors. As the federal government and its housing partners invest in developing and preserving housing to meet the needs of Canadians, the Inclusive Housing Index offers a tool to ensure that these investments work to advance - rather than impede - inclusion.

## **Measuring inclusive housing**

*Inclusive housing* is the degree to which a person's home either contributes or presents barriers to their full participation in the broader community.<sup>1</sup> When *My Home My Community* set out to determine how to measure inclusive housing, we started with people. Through a person-centered lens, we identified the different domains through which an individual person experiences day-to-day life and pursues what matters to them.<sup>2</sup> Within these domains, we identified critical factors that can either foster or stand in the way of someone's participation in the broader community. We were

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<sup>1</sup> My Home My Community. (2019). Conceptualizing 'Housing Inclusivity' A review of literature on housing, inclusion and developmental disability, 17.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed review and analysis of the literature identifying the nexus of housing and inclusion, please see Conceptualizing 'Housing Inclusivity' A review of literature on housing, inclusion and developmental disability, also produced as part of My Home My Community.

then able to examine these critical factors within the context of housing, to understand how the home in which someone lives impacts their level of inclusion in society.

Each of these steps were informed by a rigorous examination of existing multi-disciplinary research on housing and inclusion, interviews and workshops with subject matter experts, and focus groups with people with developmental disabilities - a population that has historically experienced particularly low levels of housing inclusivity. Through this process, *My Home My Community* was able to produce a model for measuring inclusive housing that is evidence-based, person-centred, and informed by a holistic, multi-disciplinary view of how our housing influences how each of us engages in the community around us. The model recognizes that simply being present within the community is not enough for an individual to experience inclusion.

## What the Inclusive Housing Index does

The Inclusive Housing Index is a tool for developers, housing providers, funders/financiers, city planning officials, and others with a stake in housing and inclusion to assess and improve the potential for a housing development or redevelopment to advance inclusive outcomes for residents. Fully developed, for example, the tool could be used by funders as a lens to screen housing proposals to measure for inclusion.

The Inclusive Housing Index can be used to evaluate the degree to which a housing development is likely to either foster or hinder inclusion for its residents, regardless of whether the development is currently occupied, whether it is a single home or multi-building project, and whether it is in the pre-build or built stage. This evaluation is based on specific design elements that are within the developer's influence, whose presence or absence has an impact on inclusion.

While the Index was designed with the needs of people with developmental disabilities in mind, its design and application are broadly applicable, and relevant to all NHS priority populations. For example, factors in one's housing situation like proximity to services, access to individualized supports, or tenure stability also foster inclusion for seniors, newcomers, people dealing with mental health and addictions issues, and other vulnerable groups. **When we design housing and communities to include the most marginalized, we create environments that offer benefits and opportunities for everyone.**

## How the Index works

The Inclusive Housing Index begins with five **pillars** of inclusive housing. These are the domains through which an individual experiences inclusion, and areas that are within a developer's influence. Each pillar contains **indicators**, the specific factors that impact inclusion. In order to gauge the presence or absence of these factors, each indicator contains one or more **measures**, which have been designed to be as simple as possible.

# Components of the Index

The five pillars of inclusive housing are:<sup>3</sup>

- 1 Participation:** The involvement of end-users and those with lived experience in the design of a housing development they may be living in one day.

In keeping with the principle of "nothing about us without us," people with developmental disabilities and other populations who face barriers to inclusion, as well as those in their support networks, have critical input to offer into the process of designing housing that achieves inclusion for its residents.

- 2 Neighbourhood:** The area surrounding one's home, where an individual conducts daily errands like grocery shopping and sees familiar faces.

Neighbourhoods are fundamental to quality of life for all of us, and especially for people with developmental disabilities and other populations who face barriers to inclusion. They provide access to essential services and provide an environment where social connections naturally form.

- 3 Support Arrangements:** The arrangement through which a resident accesses the supports they require (e.g., from an agency, from roommates, from assistive technology).

Support arrangements that reflect individual needs and choice enable people with support needs to live independently in the community, with the autonomy to participate in and pursue what matters to them.

- 4 Structure:** The building that houses the units in which residents live (e.g., a condo building).

Physical barriers in a building's structure can impede residents' movement and ability to participate in the life of their community.

- 5 Dwelling:** The type of private living quarters in which a person lives.

The size, type and condition of a dwelling will impact daily living, health outcomes, facilitates visitors or leaves an individual isolated.

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<sup>3</sup> Two of the five pillars, Structure and Dwelling, are already in use by CMHC and align with current definitions.

## PARTICIPATION

The indicators in the participation pillar assess the degree to which people who face barriers to inclusion have input into the design of the development. The measure within this indicator identify whether people with developmental disabilities or their networks were involved in the design and development process and had the opportunity to provide feedback on elements such as safety measures or accessibility requirements. The absence of input from stakeholders with developmental disabilities and representatives from support providers would negatively affect a development's inclusive housing assessment.

The indicator and measure within this pillar are:

**Indicator:** Participation

**Measure:** Participation from individuals with intellectual disabilities

**Measure:** Participation from partnering support provider

## NEIGHBOURHOOD

Mixed-use neighbourhood development results in communities with integrated services and opportunities for social interaction, which are fundamental to the inclusion of people with developmental disabilities. The indicators in this pillar assess how easy it is for individuals to access essential community services and feel safe in their neighbourhood.

The indicators and measures within this pillar include:

**Indicator:** Proximity to services

**Measure:** Walkability

**Indicator:** Safety

**Measure:** Crime rate

**Indicator:** Transportation

**Measure:** Access to public transit

**Measure:** Access to accessible public transit

**Indicator:** Community readiness for inclusion

**Measure:** Organization(s) in the neighbourhood ready to work with housing developers and providers to facilitate community connections and access to needed disability-related or other supports

## SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS

The support arrangements pillar includes indicators that assess the ability of individuals to exercise agency and autonomy and access the supports they need to live independently in the community. Facilitating agency and autonomy for people with developmental disabilities means enabling choice regarding their living arrangements and the supports they receive. Having basic control over one's living space and the ability to make decisions about what one does in that space are integral to inclusion.

The indicators and measures within this pillar include:

**Indicator:** Personal Choice

**Measure:** Choice to live in the residence

**Measure:** Unrestricted overnight guests

**Measure:** Able to come and go as desired

**Measure:** Choice in who to live with

**Measure:** Choice in who visits

**Indicator:** Community linkage plan for supports

**Measure:** Strategy for inter-agency collaboration

**Indicator:** Tenure Stability

**Measure:** Resident cannot be moved or relocated against their will

**Indicator:** Individualized support

**Measure:** Portable Supports attached to the individual, and not to the dwelling or structure

## STRUCTURE

This pillar focuses on how buildings that include multiple units impact accessibility and opportunities for social connection. For example:

- If an individual's living environment presents accessibility issues or requires major repairs, living within and leaving the unit become challenging.
- If people with developmental disabilities or other marginalized populations are clustered together in the building, they are more likely to experience stigmatization - whereas if units are dispersed, an individual with a developmental disability or from other marginalized populations is more likely to be seen simply as a neighbour within the community.

- If the built form of a housing development has been designed to facilitate spontaneous or planned interaction among residents (e.g. common rooms, benches), residents have more opportunity for social connection.

The indicators and measures within this pillar include:

**Indicator:** Dispersion

**Measure:** Number of unrelated people with developmental disabilities living together in same dwelling

**Measure:** Congregation of dwellings occupied by people with developmental disabilities or other marginalized population

**Measure:** Total number of dwellings in a structure designated for people with developmental disabilities or other marginalized population

**Indicator:** Safety

**Measure:** Lighting plans

**Indicator:** Social Connection

**Measure:** Indoor/Outdoor common space

**Measure:** Lobby as social connection point

**Measure:** Presence of green space

**Measure:** Play space for children

**Measure:** Common space unlocked when not formally in use

**Indicator:** Visitability<sup>4</sup>

**Measure:** Clear opening width at exterior doors

**Measure:** No-step entry

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<sup>4</sup> Consistent with CMHC definition of visitability.

## D W E L L I N G

The dwelling pillar examines the impact that one's immediate living environment has on inclusion. Access to affordable and deeply affordable housing is foundational to inclusion. Issues related to unaffordability, such as repair difficulties, dealing with challenging landlords, frequent moves, or the stigma associated with poor housing quality can result in social exclusion. Additionally, housing should be adequate, accessible, and provide sufficient space for daily living.

Dwellings should allow for visitors to come and go as they please, without disturbing other tenants. If units are insufficient, inaccessible, or in need of repair, individuals may become socially isolated or experience poor health as a result. This pillar includes measures that identify barriers that could hinder residents from receiving and being visitors.

The indicators and measures within this pillar include:

**Indicator:** Visitability<sup>5</sup>

**Measure:** Clear opening width at all main floor interior doors

**Measure:** Main floor half-bath with turning circle

**Measure:** No-step entry

**Indicator:** Affordability

**Measure:** Affordable or Deeply Affordable unit<sup>6,7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Consistent with CMHC definition of visitability.

<sup>6</sup> Approximately 80% of median market rents for unit type.

<sup>7</sup> Approximately 30-40% of median market rents for unit type.



## **Next steps**

The *My Home My Community* Inclusive Housing Index is the first framework in Canada that identifies how a housing development or redevelopment can advance inclusive outcomes for residents who face barriers to inclusion. By providing a tangible set of elements within a developers' influence that impact how likely a specific housing development is to foster inclusion, the Index equips developers, housing providers, funders/financiers, city planning officials, and others to plan for inclusion from the start.

We know the difference that housing can make in someone's life. The right housing can open doors to a life of connection and belonging. Research has shown that when people who are isolated have real opportunities for inclusion, our neighbourhoods become safer, our communities more vibrant, and our society more connected. The Inclusive Housing Index will help accomplish this.

This framework will inform the creation of a functional tool that will quantify the measures and provide weighted scoring based on the impact on inclusive outcomes for people with developmental disabilities. This will enable developers and others to assess tangible features and generate an 'housing inclusion score' for a project, and to see how combinations of features can maximize a score – and ultimately, maximize inclusion outcomes for people with developmental disabilities and the community as a whole.