

## **Seniors Housing Issues for WSH Partner Action from WSH Quarterly Partners' Meeting June 12, 2024**

Brock House hosted this second consecutive quarterly Partners' meeting on seniors housing issues. The goal for the hybrid meeting was for Partners and Council to explore in more depth the 5 overarching themes that emerged from the February meeting; themes related to **the need for short- to medium-term affordable transitional housing specifically for senior tenants dealing with precarious housing.**

The meeting began with small groups focusing on two key questions: What collective action will make a difference, and What can WSH Partners do now to move this issue forward? Ideas were then shared and discussed by the larger group.

The notes below capture highlights under each of the five Housing Issues that are of immediate WSH concern. The "*Steps*" are the ideas put forward during small group discussion and "*Considerations*" are suggestions for further action to make progress on each Housing Issue. No timelines for action were suggested given the complexity of the housing issues and the many constituencies involved.

### **1. Shelters and shelter alternatives for seniors with appropriate places to go during the day.**

*Steps:* 1. Changing the language and consider using the term "short term transitional housing" rather than shelter. 2. Short term transitional housing may help preventing mental health issues in older adults that may be caused by being in an uncertain housing situation. WSH can contact MPA Society regarding this matter.

*Considerations:* Contact BC Housing and collect information on potential shelter spaces such as the redevelopment of Chalmers Lodge that will be operated by Connective. Other potential locations include the planned development around the Arbutus Broadway Skytrain station and the Jericho Youth Hostel.

### **2. Home sharing for either short- or longer-term rentals by matching those with space in their homes with those who need housing (rooms, secondary suites; congregate seniors housing).**

*Steps:* 1. Look for funding. 2. Explore home care services for both homeowners and renters participating in home sharing programs. 3. Training and support as well as public education will ensure successful housing matches for both participant groups.

*Considerations:* 1. There is interest in replicating the Hollyburn model (SFU Housing Solutions Lab [Case Study with the Hollyburn Community Services Society](#)) which is part of their more comprehensive Seniors Housing Navigator website at <https://www.seniorshousingnavigator.ca/>. The Westside has potential given its similar demographics and the number of single-family dwellings. Churches may be interested in exploring home sharing with their congregations. 2. Sharing your home with someone you do not know may be an obstacle itself, before any consideration of mobility or mental health. Based on that, what would be the initial contact and support if assistance is required? Would it be possible to build a cadre of home health workers into the Social Prescribing model? if so, who could do that? 3. Have staff members do public education about matching criteria.

<https://www.seniorshousingnavigator.ca/project-archive/> is the link for the Case Study above

<https://www.seniorshousingnavigator.ca/>

### **#3 Housing supports that meet seniors' needs for aging in place or in short-term transitional rentals until more non-profit affordable housing is built.**

*Steps:* 1. The need for holistic understanding of well-being for seniors and what the needs are to successfully age in place: space, accessibility, mental health and community support using a social prescribing model. 2. Comprehensive, widely accessible information is needed to provide appropriate individual assistance. 3. Learn from nonprofit housing operators that are already very involved in making community connections.

*Considerations:* 1. There is a lot of information out there, but the target population is not aware of possibilities. Seniors Services Society of BC has a [Mental Health Directory](#) by city and type. 2. Collective action includes asset-mapping of supports among WSH Partners, and that can be disseminated by them and by projects like [Good Neighbour Kitsilano](#) neighbour-helping-neighbour model. Kits House recently hired a Community Connector whose social prescribing role is to connect seniors with community resources and supports. 3. Seniors-serving organizations can support seniors to navigate the complex housing system by having staff members and/or volunteers participate in the [SHINE Housing Navigator](#) trainings offered a couple of times a year and developing contractual relationships with SHINE to fund positions. 4. Liz Cochran (KCCA) has working relationships with N-P developers and can connect with them regarding renovations in homes or multiunit facilities. Age-friendly innovations are available by exploring a [list of eligible adaptations/innovations](#) offered by BC Housing's [Rebate for Accessible Home Renovation \(RAHA\) grants](#).

<https://www.seniorsservicessociety.ca/mental-help/>

<https://goodneighbourkitsilano.ca/>

<https://www.seniorsservicessociety.ca/shinebc/>

<https://www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/BC-RAHA/eligible-adaptations>

<https://www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/BC-RAHA>

### **#4 Empty homes awaiting demolition by developers pending issuance of City development permits.**

*No information available on "the empty houses" topic, so another topic was explored*

*Considerations:* 1. Explore quick and dirty innovative ideas for short term housing recognizing that building new seniors housing has a good five-to-six-year runway. 2. Often the first issue that causes seniors to need to move is that they can't get in and out of the bathtub. In a home, you have control over renovations but someone renting an apartment has no control over installing a bathtub with a door or a walk-in shower. 3. [Rebate for Accessible Home Renovation \(RAHA\)](#) is a provincial grant program up to \$20k for homeowner or tenant renovations (applied for by landlord) so seniors can live safely in their existing apartments. Consider eligibility requirements but can benefit homeowner, tenant and landlord.

<https://www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/BC-RAHA>

### **#5 Advocacy with City of Vancouver through Older Persons and Elders Advisory Committee (OPEAC) for policy changes, particularly regarding shelter and temporary housing needs awaiting new builds.**

*Steps:* 1. Working with different organizations that are doing similar advocacy work avoids a certain amount of duplication. 2. Recognize the benefits and limits of advocating to OPEAC given the complexity of the funding environment and the number of organizations. 3. WSH has already reached out to the Health Authority at a policy level and asked Marc White for a link into City Planning to have those kinds of discussions.



*Considerations:* 1. We might not want to limit advocacy to the City or focus support requests exclusively on non-profit organizations (COSCO, 411 Housing Forum participants). We could also focus attention on public institutions (VCH, BC Housing, Seniors Advocate, Ministries of Housing and Health). 2. The City's draft Seniors Housing Policy has a missing link: a policy revision or sub-policy for short-term temporary housing to accommodate displaced seniors awaiting affordable housing to be built. OPEAC is addressing concerns at CoV Council meetings and developing Motions for Councilors to consider raising for discussion and voting.

### **General Considerations**

- Tackle 'low-hanging fruit' first: Renovations/retrofits for aging-in-place are effective; get advice from Executive Directors about possibilities.
- WSH was able to identify a volunteer who wants to get involved in seniors housing navigation. He is in SHINE training (8 hours over 4 days) with a planned mentorship at the West End Seniors Network (WSEN) before volunteering at Kits Neighbourhood House, Lead WSH Partner, that will consider negotiating SHINE partnership for funding to create a paid position for Westside.
- Documenting client inquiries pertinent to each of the five housing Issues is important to move forward with a coordinated approach.
- Create a short survey to identify seniors' housing needs so organizations can set priorities.
- Create an information brochure about navigation resources and trained navigators that Partners can put into their newsletters.

### **Partners' Feedback from the Meeting *In their own words...***

1. *I really appreciate the action-oriented and group work at the onset of the meeting. It gave the opportunity to be participatory and we could hear from everyone.*
2. *Feedback*
  - *Valuable info sent out ahead of time.*
  - *5 group questions: excellent quick dip info.*
  - *A lot of info to follow up with details for each area.*
  - *Well run meeting as always**Housing – such a key big area*  
*I am inspired to go back to my partner organization to begin (at least) to track people who are insecure, and I am inspired to research a couple of areas myself.*
3. *A bit speedy? Perhaps not both topics in 1 day.*
4. *Love the group discussion format. Please continue advocating for housing.*
5. *Thank you, lots of food for thought. Great info, connections etc. Very, very well organized.*