

Environmental Scan Report

Prepared for: The Community Data Program

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Introduction

Project Background

The Community Data Program (CDP) is participating in a housing-focused Solutions Lab in association with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) to strengthen evidence-based planning and decision-making. In-House Group is supporting the CDP's work by performing a meta-analysis of the community data set on affordable housing to analyze how practitioners are data on housing and homelessness in Canada. We will be researching the key issues surrounding housing and homelessness and how the data is presented. Upon completion of this analysis, we will be recommending a local housing and homelessness reporting system.

In-House Group is covering the Eastern Canadian provinces, while the other team on this project, Haus of Planners, will be covering the Western Canadian provinces. Due to language capability constraints, the teams are splitting coverage of Québec. Our team is working closely with Haus of Planners to ensure that our analyses are complementary.

Report Structure

The second section of this report describes our research process and provides a brief discussion of our sources. The third section discusses the results of the environmental scan. The fourth section provides an assessment of the state of the field using data from the environmental scan to determine data gaps and collection shortcomings. The fifth section profiles examples of innovative programs, policies, and strategies. The final section contains the conclusions of this report.

Literature Review

Literature Search Process

The project's request for proposal provided a list of document categories to cover in this project. It also requested that the sources be varied by geographic region. Our team divided the document categories and used Google to search for our individual document types in a variety of regions. Following this search, a source list was compiled for client approval. After discussions with the client team, the source list was refined to include 35 documents across 6 document type categories with 15 more specific document type sub-categories.



Discussion of Document Types

The following section describes the document types that were analyzed for this project; refer to Figure 1 for document type counts.

Quality of life reports are present in the form of Vital Signs reports. The contents and specific indicators of these reports vary by region, though they all contain housing data of some kind. The quality of life reports analyzed covered Toronto, Fredericton, Greater Montréal, Simcoe Muskoka, Windsor-Essex, and Strait Region (Nova Scotia).

Municipal (and provincial) documents include housing and homelessness plans, reports, and strategies, community improvement plans, program evaluations, proposal calls, community services reports, demographic reports, and needs assessments. The government documents analyzed covered the Greater Toronto Area (Toronto, Peel Region, Mississauga), Nova Scotia,

Laval, Waterloo Region, Cambridge, Wellesley, Grey Highlands, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Ottawa.

Community organization documents often overlap with municipal and provincial document types. They also include housing and homelessness plans, reports, and strategies and the documents analyzed covered Montréal and Gatineau.

Best practice documents are produced by community organizations and provincial and municipal governments alike. They provide an overview of initiatives by various actors in the housing sector and provide evidence-based recommendations that can be implemented elsewhere. The best practice documents



analyzed covered Nunavik, a variety of other municipalities in Québec, and a variety of municipalities in Ontario.

Media articles from reliable news sources provide a detailed snapshot of a specific issue or program. They often combine quantitative and qualitative data by using hard numbers and interviews. The media articles analyzed covered Montréal, Gatineau, and New Brunswick.

Staff presentations vary, but generally provide information on the key housing and homelessness issues. They use statistics and indicators to quantify and explain these issues. The staff presentations analyzed covered Toronto and Hastings County.

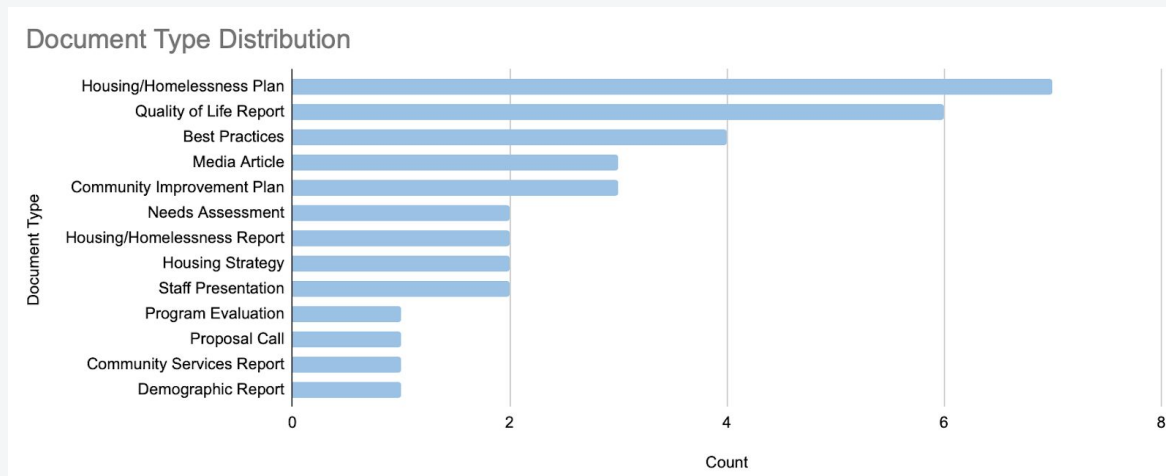


Figure 1

Environmental Scan

Key Housing and Homelessness Issues

Housing prices and rents are increasing in most regions, with housing prices in Toronto rising at an alarming rate (Toronto Foundation, 2020; Windsor Essex Community Foundation, 2019; Fredericton Community Foundation, 2014; New Brunswick, 2019). Most new rental housing is in the form of condos which are generally not affordable and do not accommodate larger households (Toronto



Foundation, 2020; Foundation of Greater Montréal, 2020) . Most eastern Canadian cities have very low vacancy rates and do not have enough rental units to keep up with the demand (Toronto Foundation, 2020; Foundation of Greater Montréal, 2020; Fredericton Community Foundation, 2014) . A large number of households in eastern Canadian municipalities spend

more than 30% of their income on housing (Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal, 2012; Ville de Laval, 2017; Huronia Community Foundation, 2016).

214,000

Low-income tenant households in Greater Montréal spend more than 30% of their income on housing

There has been a noticeable shift from occurrences of temporary homelessness to chronic homelessness. Municipalities are seeing increased numbers of homeless individuals, although Fredericton and Simcoe County are exceptions (Toronto Foundation, 2020; Fredericton Community Foundation, 2014; Huronia Community Foundation, 2016). Social housing waitlists are consistently growing, but the advances in the provision of new social housing units do not match these waitlist increases (Toronto Foundation, 2020; Fredericton Community Foundation, 2014 ; New Brunswick, 2019; Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2014; Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia, 2018). Overall, the housing and homelessness systems are overcapacity.

Common Indicators

Our analysis identified 6 main categories of common indicators.



- **Homelessness indicators** were very common and often included shelter counts, counts of individuals “turned away” from shelters, street counts, types of homelessness, and causes of homelessness.
- **Housing market indicators** included rental vacancy rates, housing prices and rents, counts of affordable housing units produced, and eviction counts.

- **Housing need indicators** included average numbers of people on housing waitlists, core housing need counts, repair need counts, and housing turnover rates.
- **Demographic indicators** included population, income, age, marginalized groups, and child poverty rates.
- **Service provision indicators** included the number of food banks and the number of soup kitchens.
- **Funding indicators** included grant amounts, forgivable loan amounts, funding amounts for housing repairs, shelter funding amounts.

Common Reporting Tools

Various reporting tools to present data relating to housing and homelessness were identified in our analysis. The main ways that municipalities and provincial governments collected data were by using shelter attendance lists, municipal incentive program participants, and surveys. The plans, reports, and studies that this data informs are key pieces of the housing and homelessness information that exists at the local level. These documents presented research through charts, graphs, and other graphic elements to supplement the information provided in the text.

Common Data Sources

Municipal documents and community organization reports generally rely on a combination of public and private sector data sources. The most common public sector data sources were Statistics Canada, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS), and provincial and municipal reports and

data. Québécois reports used Statistics Canada, CMHC, and municipal data, but also used data from the Institut du Québec and the Société d'habitation Québec.

The most common private sector data sources were real estate websites and local realtor associations. Some organizations conducted surveys to include primary data, but they largely relied on data from publicly accessible sources.



Outcomes

The following charts depict the presence (or lack thereof) of predetermined effectiveness and innovation indicators.

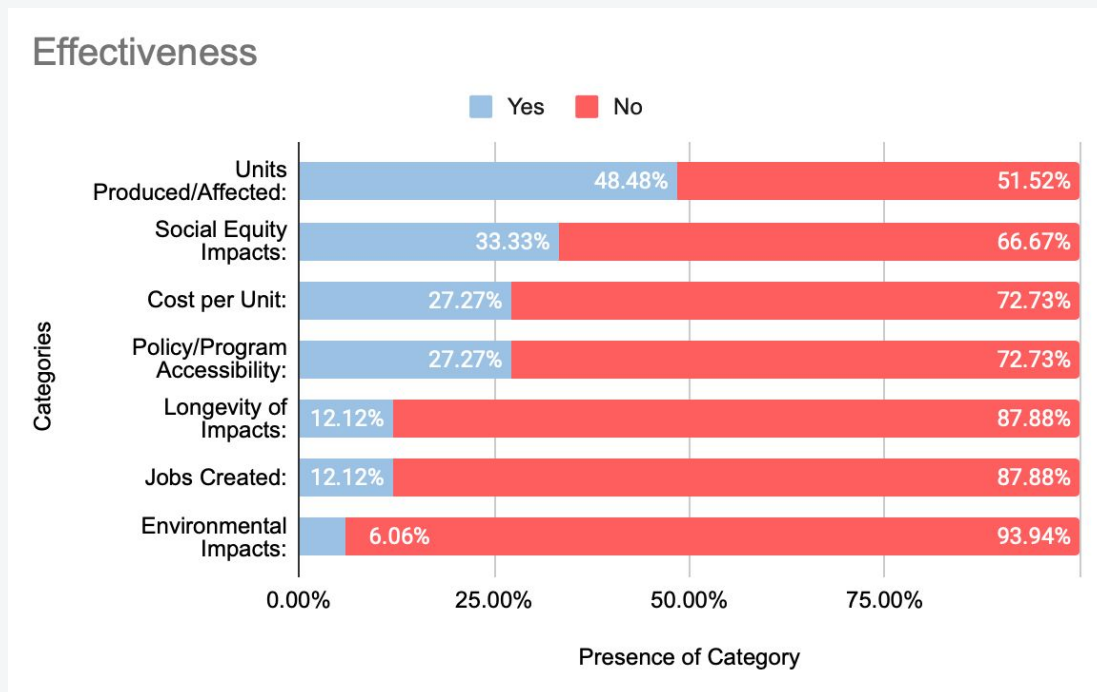


Figure 2

There was not much consistency in which effectiveness indicators were present in each document, but the most common category present was the number of units produced or affected. The lack of unit production discussion is likely due to document types that were examined. Social equity impacts were also mentioned relatively frequently, as many documents discussed the demographics of people struggling with housing and homelessness and some had specific programs to address these demographic factors.

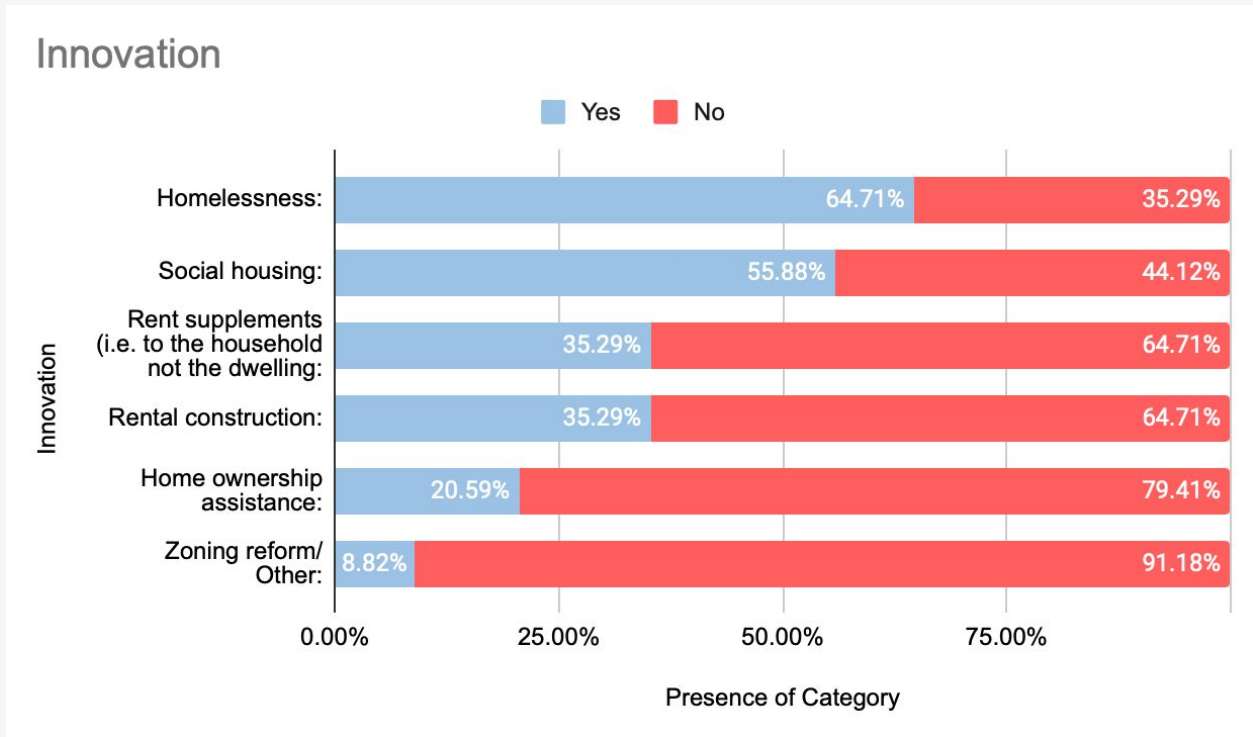


Figure 3

The majority of documents examined addressed homelessness and social housing as those are two of the most pressing issues and shortcomings of the current housing systems. Zoning reform was the least common strategy mentioned, demonstrating a lack of cohesion and support between planning departments and affordable housing providers.

Assessment of the State of the Field

Data Gaps

Many homelessness reports and plans rely on shelter counts to determine the homeless population and to identify needs (Toronto Foundation, 2020; Fredericton Community Foundation, 2014; Huronia Community Foundation, 2016; Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia, 2018; City of Toronto, 2018). Shelter counts are not entirely accurate and do not address the range of the homelessness experience. Expanding on other homelessness indicators is necessary to fill this gap. There is also a lack of data regarding the male/female discrepancies in shelter use due to non-economic factors like domestic violence and custody disputes. Very few sources that addressed homelessness addressed domestic violence and the other common non-economic factors that contribute to homelessness.



There needs to be greater differentiation of indicators that correlate with homelessness and housing affordability issues from data that contributes conclusively to the cause. This would allow for a much more effective method of targeting useful indicators and solutions.

While differentiation would be useful, there are also significant inconsistencies in how factors relating to housing need are reported on and it is generally high level information. For example, many quality of life reports examine housing and poverty separately; however, there are overlapping and related issues and indicators between them. Collecting and presenting data in a more cohesive way will give a better idea of effective solutions. Furthermore, integrating demographic data into housing data demonstrates a community's needs more accurately.

Shortcomings of Data Collection Methods

The homelessness data gaps identified in the previous section are partially due to shortcomings in data collection methods. First, there is a discrepancy in the understanding of the factor that constitutes “homelessness”; not all groups that collect primary demographic data on homeless use the same definition. Many groups only focus on the “on-street” population (which includes the shelter population). Other groups consider people who have homes but not adequate utilities as “homeless”, they also include those with housing insecurity (the “at risk” population) in this count. These two differing definitions can not only end up with very different statistics, they can also lead to different prevention/intervention methods. Programs that focus on the on-street population can help temporarily get individuals off of the streets, but they do not give the individuals the tools to actually escape homelessness (such as employment assistance or rent subsidies). Further discrepancies can occur in homelessness demographics when it comes to non-profit shelters and government shelters. Many non-profit shelters aim to get more funding and donations, as such they are biased towards data sampling methods that inflate homelessness counts. For example, some shelters consider the number of beds used in one night as individual homeless counts, so one person using a shelter for 30 days will be counted as 30 individual homeless people. Before even considering the best prevention/intervention methods, every group that deals with homelessness issues needs to share a single definition of “homelessness”.

Although many government homeless programs in Canada include the at-risk population in their definition of “homelessness”, the data collecting methods in the documents we found do not reflect this as the main focus was on the on-street population. Toronto conducts the Street-Needs Assessment (City of Toronto, 2018) every year in the hopes to collect both

qualitative and quantitative homeless demographics, but they use an inaccurate point-in-time method to collect the data.

The first part is a “Windshield Street Survey” where city employees and volunteers literally approach people on the street who appear to be homeless. These individuals are asked to do a quick questionnaire, each questionnaire counts as one homeless individual, and those who can not answer or choose not to answer are also counted as homeless individuals. The first problem is that it is impossible to survey each and every street in a city which results in a incomplete street survey; moreover, 44% of the city volunteers did not show up on the day of the street count for the 2018 assessment. Next, it is impossible to identify who is homeless based on appearance alone, this fact means that much of the street population on the day of the count was excluded. Third, the street population varies depending on the season, it is impossible to survey the entire population in one night.

The next part of Toronto’s Street-Needs Assessment involves a Service-Based counting technique, this “indoor count” section involves identifying services that the homeless use (such as emergency shelters, transitional shelters and individuals identifying as homeless in correctional institutes) and conducting surveys in those locations. Similar to the street count, those who



volunteered to do a questionnaire were included in the count, and those who were unable to or chose not to complete the questionnaire were also included in the count. The first problem with this technique is that not every service that the homeless population uses was surveyed. Next, many non-homeless individuals (such as those living in poverty or temporarily escaping from an

abusive home) often use these services as well. Resulting in inaccuracies by including the individuals who did not fill out the survey in the homeless count. The Halifax 2018 Everyone Counts document (Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia, 2018) used a similar point-in-time methodology to collect homeless data, meaning that everyone was not actually counted.

These point-in-time counts are inaccurate as they are not truly representative of the on-street homeless population, and they also do not take the at-risk population into account. Better sampling methods and a longitudinal model can better capture the homeless demographic.

Case Studies

New Brunswick

The 2019-2022 New Brunswick Action Plan is an action plan under the CMHC - New Brunswick Bilateral Agreement Under the 2017 National Housing Strategy



Action Plan. Not only does New Brunswick fund public housing units, they also have an Urban Native Housing program that provides housing for Indigenous households. The province also provides rent supplements subsidies for families, seniors, and non-elderly single adults and funding assistance for non-profit and co-operative housing to support affordable units. They are also implementing 4 different repair programs to fund repairs for homeowners and renters, public housing, the urban native housing, and non-profit and co-operative repairs.

This wide range of programs is supplemented by accessibility, environmental sustainability, energy efficiency, local employment, and business impact requirements. The 2019-2022 Action Plan also supports a shelter enhancement program and a homeownership assistance program. The final piece of the Action Plan that makes it innovative is its “Wrap-around Services” model which works in collaboration with cross-departmental and cross-sectoral partners to address the complicated, overlapping, individual needs of a household. This model will encourage greater support for vulnerable sub-populations. However, regardless of the Action Plan’s impressive range, it does not address how it will be implemented at the local level.

Simcoe County

Simcoe County uses a variety of interventions to address housing issues. They provide municipally-funded rent subsidies, an urban native housing program, a secondary suites program, and an affordable homeownership program. The Secondary Suites Program provides funding for the construction of secondary or garden suites (up to \$30,000 per unit) to increase the supply of affordable housing. The Affordable Homeownership Program assists low-to-moderate income renter households to purchase a home through the provision of a forgivable loan (10% down payment assistance).

Simcoe County is also the direct owner and manager of the Simcoe County Housing Corporation which provides affordable housing using a rent-geared-to-income approach. The County also has specific units for people with disabilities. The Housing Retention Program is a program specifically designed to improve access to adequate, suitable, and affordable housing and homelessness services for people at-risk of homelessness and those experiencing homelessness.

Gatineau

The Ville de Gatineau created a land reserve through their Social Housing Fund in 2008. The sites are located according to a geographical distribution that favours social diversity, consolidation or rehabilitation of the urban fabric, proximity to public transportation, and proximity to commercial and socio-community services. Land is acquired by the Ville when it is put up for sale for the non-payment of taxes or through the purchases made on the open market. As of 2012, all land in the reserve was donated and the reserve contained no land. This demonstrates that the land is actually being used and the program is being implemented, rather than collecting land and then stalling.

In Québec, housing programs are largely provided at the provincial level. For example, the AccèsLogis Québec helps organizations and cooperatives build affordable homes and the City of Gatineau has been participating in this program since 2002. The Ville has since taken over running the AccèsLogis program in Gatineau and provides up to 15% of eligible costs for the construction of social and community housing.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Conclusions

Practitioners are mostly relying on publicly-funded and accessible data like Statistics Canada and CMHC data. While these sources provide extensive data, they generally focus on larger

geographic areas and when they do provide localized data, it is by census tract. Census Tracts do not necessarily address the nuances of neighbourhood boundaries.

While this project is focusing on local housing data, some provinces (notably Québec and New Brunswick) are expanding programs and provide extensive data. This is promising and could indicate a shift towards greater provincial housing support for municipalities which could lead to increased effectiveness of programs at the local level.

Overall, the trends identified in this report are alarming. While new affordable housing is being built, the increasing length of housing waitlists and growing homeless populations are widening the housing gap. While many organizations are reporting on housing and homelessness issues and are making an effort to solve these problems, the lack of consistent data makes it challenging to enact suitable programs.

Next Steps

- 1 Complete a more in-depth analysis of indicators and data visualization models at the municipal level
- 2 Recommend an indicator framework, data visualization models, and strategies to address data gaps
- 3 Present our key findings
- 4 Prepare the final report

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