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SUMMARY REPORT

Supportive Housing Services in Northern Ontario



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For:



**AT HOME IN
THE NORTH**

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Introduction: Housing in the North

Housing insecurity is a chronic issue plaguing communities in Northern Ontario. Understanding what supports exist for Northerners experiencing housing insecurity is essential to creating strategies better suited to the unique needs and realities of Northern communities. Access to safe and affordable housing is a strong predictor of health and wellbeing for people and families (Riva et al., 2020; Kohen et al., 2014), highlighting a need for more research in this area. There are currently very few, if any, comprehensive analyses of the supportive housing services that exist in Northern Ontario. This investigation aims to address this gap in existing literature and research, as part of a larger project to produce an inventory of existing supportive housing programs and services across Northern Canada through the At Home in the North project. A comprehensive inventory of housing services in Northern Ontario was produced, and this report will summarize the distribution and analyze the gaps in supportive housing services in the region.

While the term supportive housing is used to describe a broad range of concepts, it is described by Canada's National Housing Strategy as "housing that provides a physical environment that is specifically designed to be safe, secure, enabling and home-like, with support services such as social services, provision of meals, housekeeping and social and recreational activities, privacy and dignity" (NHS, 2018, p. 7). BC Housing describes it as "subsidized housing with on-site support for single adults, seniors and people with

disabilities at risk of or experiencing homelessness...[which] help people find and maintain stable housing" (BC Housing, 2022). Supportive housing therefore represents a spectrum of housing options and support services ranging from emergency housing to supportive care for adults with disabilities and seniors, to long term housing for psychiatric rehabilitation and community integration (CMHA - Canadian Mental Health Association, 2022).

Two groups most in need of supportive housing are people experiencing homelessness and seniors. The term homeless describes the situation of an individual or

family that "does not have stable, permanent, appropriate housing or the immediate prospect, means and ability of

acquiring it" (NHS, 2018, p. 4). Homelessness is often the result of a confluence of factors, including systemic barriers, such as lack of affordable and appropriate housing, systemic racism and discrimination, and individual barriers such as financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural, or physical challenges. Some groups are at higher risk of experiencing homelessness and require additional support, including people with mental illness, seniors, families and Indigenous Peoples (Forchuk et al., 2022; Jones, 2007; Kidd et al., 2019; Waegemakers Schiff & Turner, 2014).

The following report will thus describe and analyze the supportive housing services across Northern Ontario in order to better understand the current landscape of supports available to people experiencing homelessness and seniors. It will begin with an overview of the methodology, followed by an overview of the geographic context. Next, the general distribution of supportive housing services for people experiencing homelessness and for seniors will be summarized, based on the inventory compiled. Prior to the comprehensive analysis section, there will be a short discussion of First Nations housing resources and their importance. The gaps in supportive housing services in Northern Ontario will then be analyzed and discussed using supporting literature, before closing with concluding remarks.

Methodology

This report examines the distribution of supportive housing services for people experiencing homelessness and seniors across Northern Ontario, in order to identify the gaps in services. A comprehensive list of supportive housing services was compiled for 56 municipalities and 111 First Nations communities across Northern Ontario. To locate different services, Boolean Operators (e.g., AND, OR) were employed to conduct thorough searches using a list of key terms related to homeless committees, shelters and supportive housing organizations, and senior supportive housing. A separate search using these key terms was conducted for each municipality and First Nations community. For example: “Ross River” AND (homeless shelter OR domestic violence shelter OR emergency shelter OR women’s shelter).

The data was then categorized under the two groupings of homeless services and senior services, according to the types of services most observed. The subcategories established for homeless services include emergency housing, Friendship Centers, transitional housing and unfinished projects. The subcategories established for senior services include independent-living, assisted-living, supportive housing, long-term care and ongoing projects.

In order to best describe the general distribution of supportive housing services, the data was organized by census district. The choice to use census districts as a geographic organizer was undertaken for two main reasons. Firstly, they serve as a useful tool for understanding territorial and administrative boundaries within the province.

Secondly, each census district is home to a District Social Services Administration Board

(DSSAB), which administers a number of programs and services within their jurisdiction in an integrated manner. Every DSSAB has a Housing Department or board responsible for administering and funding housing and homelessness programs within their district. Each DSSAB manages funding through Community Homelessness Prevention Initiatives (CHPIs), programs which provide financial assistance with the following:

- Emergency shelters solutions
- Utility deposits and hook-up fees when establishing a residence
- Rental arrears and eviction

Thus, the availability of supportive housing services in any given geographic region of Northern Ontario is partly dependent on the diligence and activity of the local DSSABs.

Geographic Context: Northern Ontario

Northern Ontario is a geographic region reaching from the southern boundaries of Parry Sound and Nipissing, northward to the southern shores of Hudson Bay and James Bay (Ministry of Transportation, 2022). Northern Ontario contains nearly 90 percent of Ontario’s landmass, with a little over 5 percent of the province’s population. There are approximately 133 First Nations communities located in Ontario, with around 78 percent of these communities being in Northern Ontario (Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, 2020). Of the nearly 130,000 Indigenous people who live in Northern Ontario, approximately 70 percent live off-reserve in urban centers (Ministry of Transportation, 2020).

While the more common geographic delineation of Northern Ontario is between the northeast and northwest, this report will adopt terms put forth by Ontario’s Ministry of Transportation in a report on Connecting the North: the Near North and the Far North (Ministry of Transportation, 2020). Following the same definitions provided there, this report will use the term Near North to describe the southern part of the region which includes all major urban hubs such as Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins, Sudbury and North Bay, and as such, most of the region’s population. The term Far North will be used to describe the northern part of the region, which is home to approximately 24,000 people, 90 percent of whom are First Nations (Far North of Ontario, 2022).

These terms provide an effective approach to discussing issues of geographic distribution and their associated challenges, such as remoteness and transportation, which limit the ability of those living in the Far North to access goods and services.

Northern Ontario is divided between 11 census districts, the districts of Algoma, Cochrane, Kenora, Manitoulin, Nipissing, Parry Sound, Rainy River, Sudbury, the city of Greater Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Timiskaming. The majority of the districts cover the areas of the Near North, while the Far North comprises most of the Kenora District, and the northern parts of the Thunder Bay and Cochrane Districts. The climate of Northern Ontario is characterized by extreme temperatures in both winter and summer.



Figure 1. Map delineating the census districts of Northern Ontario. The box in the top right corner illustrates the southernmost border of what is considered Northern Ontario, edging the southern borders of the districts of Nipissing and Parry Sound (Stroink & Nelson, 2013)¹.

1. The original map was produced by the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC).

Summary of Findings: General Distribution of Housing Services

To assess the current landscape of supportive housing services across Northern Ontario, a comprehensive inventory was conducted of all services for people experiencing homelessness and senior supportive housing services in the region. The inventory included 56 municipalities and 111 First Nations communities, divided between the 11 census districts of Northern Ontario: Nipissing District, Parry Sound District, Manitoulin District, Sudbury District, Greater Sudbury Census Division, Timiskaming District, Cochrane District, Algoma District, Thunder Bay District, Rainy River District and Kenora District. While the city of Greater Sudbury is politically considered to be a distinct census district, for the purposes of this distribution analysis, we will be combining Sudbury District and Greater Sudbury as they are in the same geographic region. Though this report does mention the number of supportive housing services available on First Nations reserves as part of the discussion on distribution, the predominant focus is on supportive housing services available in the inventoried municipalities, since the management and administration of social services on-reserve are distinct from those in municipalities.

This section will describe the general distribution of supportive housing services in Northern Ontario, divided according to housing services for people experiencing homelessness and housing services for seniors. For each of these subsections, we will detail the types of services that were identified and discuss the overarching trends, followed by an overview of their geographic distribution across each of the census districts. Definitions of each type of supportive housing service can be found in the appendix of this report.

General Distribution of Services for People Experiencing Homelessness

Overall trends

The types of supportive housing services available in Northern Ontario can be divided into the following categories: women's shelters, men's shelters, general homeless shelters, Native Friendship Centers, and transitional housing, with an additional category for unfinished shelters currently undergoing construction. Out of the 56 municipalities, 25 (approximately 43 percent) had at least one homeless shelter or other supportive housing facility for those experiencing homelessness, while 32 had no services. Out of 111 First Nations communities, five had homeless shelters. A striking trend in supportive housing services in Northern Ontario is the prevalence of women's shelters compared to general homeless shelters, or those explicitly for men. Out of a total of 75

supportive housing services in Northern Ontario, 40 are women's shelters. By contrast, only five shelters are explicitly for men, while 11 are general homeless shelters. At the time of the inventory being conducted, there were two non-gender specific shelters undergoing construction, with unclear opening dates. In total, there are 15 Friendship Centers and two transitional housing organizations in Northern Ontario, two types of supportive housing services which can play similar roles, in some cases offering temporary shelter or housing while ultimately helping to connect individuals with long-term shelter or housing support.

Geographic Distribution

As might be expected, the highest numbers of supportive housing services for

people experiencing homelessness were located in the Near North in the largest cities of each district, likely due to the population density. There was also greater diversity in available services within urban centres, usually including at least one women's shelter, one general shelter, and a Friendship Centre.

Generally, in municipalities and townships situated in close proximity to a district's major cities or towns, there is transportation (either public or through community groups and services) available for those experiencing homelessness to access the services in larger municipalities. Additionally, oftentimes municipalities with supportive housing services also extend the use of their services to other remote municipalities in the vicinity. For example, in the Cochrane District, the bulk of supportive housing services are located in Timmins. In Kapuskasing, approximately an hour drive from Timmins, Habitat Interlude Family Resource Center offers its services to women fleeing situations of domestic violence from Hearst, Kapuskasing and Smooth Rock Falls, in the event that they are unable to access services in Timmins. This arrangement is used in many of the smaller or more remote municipalities across Northern Ontario, and organizations often make it clear on their websites that services are available to community members within a certain geographic scope. Another instance of this arrangement is the Nimkii-Naabkawagan Family Crisis Shelter, located on the Batchewana/Garden River First Nation reserve, which offers shelter and support to abused women and their children in crisis situations. This shelter serves Indigenous and non-Indigenous women located not only in Garden River, but also in Sault Ste. Marie and the rest of the Algoma District. Very few First Nations communities had services on-reserve available for people experiencing homelessness. As such, only communities with services will be mentioned in this geographic breakdown. The distribution of services by census district is as follows.

In Nipissing District, six out of nine of the homeless shelters are located in the city of

North Bay, the district's largest population center which contains over 63 percent of the district's total population (Plumstead, 2012). The city hosts at least one of each type of supportive housing service, notably it has one of the two transitional housing services in all of Northern Ontario. Outside of the largest urban centre, the municipalities of Mattawa and West Nipissing each have a women's shelter, and Temagami has no supportive housing services for people experiencing homelessness.

In the Districts of Parry Sound and Manitoulin, only the largest municipality was included in the inventory. In the city of Parry Sound, there were two supportive housing services, a Friendship Centre and a women's shelter, while on Manitoulin Island, the one supportive housing service was a women's shelter.

In the districts of Algoma, Timiskaming and Rainy River, services are distributed more evenly across several municipalities. In Algoma District, the supportive housing services are still predominantly located in the largest city, Sault Ste. Marie. The city has a Friendship Centre, two women's shelters, a men's shelter and a general homeless shelter.

Outside the largest urban centre, the municipalities of Elliot Lake, Blind River and Wawa all have women's shelters, as well as a men's shelter in Elliot Lake. Notably, there is a women's shelter located on the Batchewana First Nations Reserve. In Timiskaming District, Temiskaming Shores and Kirkland Lake each have one of the two total services available in the district, both women's shelters. In the Rainy River District, three out of six services are located in Fort Frances: a women's shelter, a Friendship Centre and a general shelter. In Atikokan, there is a women's shelter and a Friendship Centre.

In the District of Sudbury, there are seven supportive housing services located in Greater Sudbury that can be accessed by residents of other municipalities in the district. These include three women's shelters, two general shelters, a Friendship Centre, and the only other transitional housing service in

Northern Ontario. Outside of the largest urban centre, there are no services available for people experiencing homelessness.

Cochrane District is one of the districts which spans both the Near and Far North.

The services in the district are concentrated in its southern region, and the greatest diversity of services can be found in Timmins, the largest urban hub. They include three women's shelters, a Friendship Centre, a general shelter, and a men's shelter. Outside of Timmins, the municipalities of Cochrane and Kapuskasing have a men's shelter and a women's shelter respectively, and also each have a Friendship Centre. Notably, Moosonee's women's shelter is the only supportive housing service located in Cochrane's Far North.

While Kenora is geographically the largest district and spans both the Near and Far North, all four of the major municipalities, and

thus the majority of the population, are situated in its southern region. The municipalities of Dryden, Kenora, Red Lake and Sioux Lookout each have a Friendship Centre, a women's shelter and a general shelter, though the Dryden general shelter is as yet unfinished. The First Nations communities of Whitefish Bay, Mishkeegogamang, and Fort Albany each have a women's shelter, and Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug has two women's shelters. The community of Eabametoong has an emergency shelter for elderly people. With a total 17 supportive housing services, Kenora District has the highest number of supportive housing services of all the districts. It also includes the most First Nations housing services and the most Friendship Centres of any district. This makes sense, seeing as this district covers most of the Far North and therefore most of the remote First Nations communities who have less access to urban services.

General distribution of senior supportive housing services

Overall trends

The types of senior supportive housing services in Northern Ontario can be divided into the following categories: supportive housing, assisted-living, long-term care, independent-living, and aging at home programs. An additional category was added for senior housing currently being built in the inventoried municipalities. This was the prevalence of each type of senior supportive service identified: 10 independent-living facilities, 37 supportive housing facilities, 12 assisted-living facilities, 35 long-term care or nursing home facilities, 31 aging at home programs, and four supportive housing facilities currently under construction.

Northern Ontario's population is fluid and continuously changing, but amidst the fluctuations, there is an unmistakable trend of an increasing proportion of senior citizens. Coupled with the relatively low birth rate and the strong out-migration of youth from Northern Ontario, the rising life expectancy is contributing to a growing population of

seniors (Moazzami, 2015), and therefore, the growing need for services that support seniors as they age.

Out of the 56 municipalities inventoried, 36 had at least one senior supportive housing service, either a facility or an aging at home program, while three First Nation communities had a senior supportive housing service on-reserve. Across Northern Ontario, there are a total of 129 supportive housing services available to seniors. While 98 of these services are live-in facilities with varying levels of support, as will be discussed in the following section, 31 of these services are aging at home programs.

Geographic Distribution

Similarly to homeless supportive housing services, the majority of senior supportive housing services were found to be located in the largest municipalities in each census district. By default, this means that most senior supportive housing services are located in the Near North, rather than the Far

North. There was a greater diversity in available services within the bigger cities, usually including a mix of types of supportive housing services, long-term care facilities and aging at home programs.

As with the supportive housing services for people experiencing homelessness, there is often transportation available to seniors in municipalities and townships situated within a certain geographic range to municipalities with housing services, to increase the accessibility of those existing services. For example, Kotitalo is an assisted-living facility operated by the Ontario Finnish Resthome Association that is located in Sault Ste. Marie but offers its services to all seniors in the Algoma District (OFRA, 2022). Due to their mobile and adaptable nature, most aging at home programs serve seniors in municipalities located in proximity to their base. The Métis Nation of Ontario's Aging At Home Program is one example of this, as this program provides supports for Indigenous seniors in Atikokan, Dryden, Blind River, Timmins, Chapleau, Cochrane, Mattawa and Kenora to remain in their homes as long as possible (Métis Nation of Ontario, 2021). Therefore, while the following discussion on geographic distribution will reference only the municipalities in which each service is based, there is an implicit understanding that many of these housing services extend their reach into smaller or remote municipalities without their own services. The distribution of services by census district is as follows.

In Nipissing District, North Bay hosts six out of the district's 11 senior supportive housing services. It has four supportive housing facilities, one long-term care facility and one aging at home program. Outside of the largest urban centre, the municipalities of Mattawa and West Nipissing each have a long-term care facility, and Temagami has an independent living facility and two aging at home programs.

Within the District of Parry Sound, there are three long-term care facilities, two supportive housing facilities and two aging at home programs, all located in the city of Parry

Sound. In Manitoulin District, there are three long-term care facilities, one supportive housing facility and two aging at home programs, located on Manitoulin Island. In addition, there is an assisted living facility on M'Chigeeng First Nation reserve, and a long-term care facility on Wikwemikong First Nation reserve.

In the district of Algoma, the senior supportive housing services are predominantly located in the largest city, Sault Ste. Marie. The city has three supportive housing facilities, three long-term care facilities, an assisted living facility, two independent living facilities and three aging at home programs. The municipality of Elliot Lake has an assisted living facility, two independent living facilities, a long-term care facility and an aging at home program. Blind River has an aging at home program, Thessalon has one long-term care facility, and Wawa has one supportive housing facility.

In Timiskaming District, there are two long-term care facilities, a supportive housing facility, and two aging at home programs in Temiskaming Shores. Kirkland Lake has one long-term care facility and a supportive housing facility.

In the Rainy River District, five out of eleven services are located in Fort Frances; two supportive housing facilities, one assisted living facility, one long-term care facility, and one aging at home program. In Atikokan, there is an assisted living facility, a supportive housing facility undergoing construction and two aging at home programs. In Rainy River, there is an assisted living facility and a long-term care facility.

In the District of Sudbury, 19 out of the total 25 senior supportive housing services located in the district are in Greater Sudbury. These include three long-term care facilities, three independent living facilities, seven supportive housing facilities, an assisted living facility, and five aging at home programs. Outside of the largest urban centre, the municipality of Chapleau has the most senior supportive housing services, including an independent living facility, an aging at home program, and

one supportive housing facility undergoing construction. The municipalities of Espanola and St. Charles each have an aging at home program, and Sables-Spanish River has one supportive housing facility. Overall, the District of Sudbury has the most supportive housing services for seniors out of all the districts.

Cochrane District spans both the Near and Far North, though the services in the district are concentrated in its southern region, and the greatest diversity of services can be found in Timmins, the largest urban hub. They include two independent living facilities, two long-term care facilities, one supportive housing facility and two aging at home programs. Unlike many of the other districts, where housing services are concentrated in relatively few municipalities, Cochrane District has some supportive housing services in seven municipalities outside of Timmins. Many of these smaller municipalities have more than one supportive housing service: Kapuskasing has two long-term care facilities and one assisted living facility, Smooth Rock Falls has a long-term care facility and an aging at home program, and Iroquois Falls has one long-term care facility and one supportive housing facility undergoing

construction. Other municipalities have a single service, including

Cochrane which has an aging at home program, Hearst's assisted living facility, and Moonbeam's long-term care facility. Cochrane District's only municipality located in the Far North, Moosonee, has no supportive housing services for seniors.

In Kenora District's southern region, the municipalities of Dryden, Kenora, and Sioux Lookout each have a variety of supportive housing services for seniors. In Dryden, there are two assisted living facilities and a long-term care facility. In Kenora, there are two long-term care facilities, one supportive housing facility and an aging at home program. In Sioux Lookout, there is one supportive housing facility, one long-term care facility, and one unfinished supportive housing facility. The municipality of Red Lake has one long-term care facility. As mentioned in the section on distribution of supportive housing services for people experiencing homelessness, the community of Eabametoong has an emergency shelter for elderly people, which can also be included in this section.

First Nations Housing Resources and Their Importance

Both on and off-reserve, Indigenous led programs supporting Indigenous seniors and people experiencing homelessness are important.

Studies indicate that in Canada, Indigenous people are 8 times more likely to be homeless than non-Indigenous people and represent 10-80 percent of the total homeless population in large urban centers (Thistle & Smylie, 2020). Indigenous homelessness is a term describing First Nations, Métis and Inuit individuals, families or communities lacking stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect or means of acquiring such housing. Indigenous homelessness differs from the common colonial definition of homelessness since the roots of Indigenous homelessness involve colonial disruptions of relationships with self, family, community, land, water, place, animals, culture and language (Thistle, 2017; Thistle & Smylie, 2020; Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness, 2017; The Homeless Hub, 2020). For this reason, responses to Indigenous homelessness need to be led by Indigenous Peoples and grounded in Indigenous worldviews and practices. They must also address ongoing colonization, issues of Indigenous sovereignty and provide culturally safe housing to Indigenous people.

Indigenous protocols regarding relationships provide a strong and practical framework for health and social service providers working with Indigenous people who are experiencing homelessness (Thistle & Smylie, 2020).

In urban hubs, Native² Friendship Centers can help to bridge the gap between social services and Indigenous people experiencing homelessness, as they not only help to connect individuals with appropriate emergency and long-term housing resources, but also often offer programs, services, and

supports to Indigenous people living in urban, rural, and remote settings (NAFC, 2022). To highlight an example, the Dryden Native Friendship Centre (DNFC) has served as a gathering place to meet the needs of Indigenous people in Dryden and the surrounding area since 1984 (DNFC, 2020). This Friendship Centre offers a wide variety of programs and services, including employment training, healing and wellness programs, a Community Connections program which organizes transportation and friendly visits to check in on senior Indigenous individuals, health outreach worker programs, Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin (a program providing Indigenous culturally based programming focussing on empowerment and wellbeing), amongst many others (DNFC, 2020). Out of the 56 municipalities inventoried, 15 have a Friendship Centre. They are generally located in larger municipalities that serve as urban hubs, including Thunder Bay, Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury. There are other Indigenous-led supportive housing services in urban spaces geared towards urban Indigenous populations, like the Ojibway Women's Lodge in North Bay, a shelter for Indigenous women fleeing situations of domestic abuse. This shelter recognizes that for "aboriginal people, violence against women is understood as a community issue that requires healing of the woman, the family and the community", and so the shelter makes it a priority to provide "a community based, cultural and holistic healing approach to ending violence against all women" (Ojibway Women's Lodge, 2022).

Another noteworthy facility located in an urban space is Zack's Crib, a safe bed facility

² The terms Native and Indian are considered outdated and can often have negative connotations, and they have largely been replaced by the preferred term Indigenous. However, the terms Native and Indian will be applied throughout this report when discussing Friendship Centres only when they are used in the official name of that particular Friendship Centre (e.g., the Kapuskasing Indian Friendship Centre or the Timmins Native Friendship Centre).

being constructed in Temiskaming Shores. The facility hopes to become a shelter for homeless individuals and offer programs and services that will support its clients in “creating a life in which they feel secure, healthy, happy and develop a sense of belonging” (Safe Bed Facility, 2020). Though it is not an Indigenous-led facility, the founders of Zack’s Crib work closely in partnership with the Temiskaming First Nation and other local Indigenous communities to ensure that their project remains rooted in an effective understanding of Indigenous homelessness and is equipped to provide culturally appropriate support to Indigenous people experiencing homelessness.

Supportive housing services on-reserve are also crucial. Housing shortages and

substandard housing conditions commonly seen on reserves contribute to high rates of homelessness, and lead to heightened mobility of Indigenous Peoples between reserves and urban centres where they travel to access supports and services (Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness, 2017). As mentioned previously, in the inventory conducted for this report, only five First Nations communities were identified as having an emergency shelter, and four First Nations communities were identified as having a senior supportive service. Like Indigenous-led services off-reserve, these on-reserve services are both effective and meaningful due to their being rooted in historical and cultural understanding of Indigenous issues and Indigenous worldviews.

Gaps in Supportive Housing in Northern Ontario

Following the discussion on general trends in supportive housing services across Northern Ontario, it is important to recognize and understand the gaps in supportive housing and why they exist.

Overall Gaps

For both people experiencing homelessness and seniors in Northern Ontario, the highest diversity of supportive housing services was found in the larger towns and cities. In each

census district, the urban hubs generally have a good range of services. For people experiencing homelessness, this usually includes a women's shelter, a general shelter and a Friendship Centre. For seniors, this usually includes at least one supportive housing facility with a range of support options for seniors, a long-term care facility offering round-the-clock care and higher levels of medical assistance, and an aging at home program.

There is an evident lack of transitional and supportive housing facilities for people experiencing homelessness across Northern Ontario, with only two transitional housing facilities currently operating, located in North Bay and Sudbury. While emergency housing is crucial for short term immediate shelter from the elements, transitional housing serves as an intermediate step between emergency crisis shelter and permanent housing. Though transitional housing does not provide a permanent housing solution for those experiencing long-term homelessness, it is still necessary in contexts where there is an inadequate supply of affordable housing (The Homeless Hub, 2020). The lack of transitional and affordable supportive housing facilities across Northern Ontario is therefore a major barrier to addressing and

eliminating homelessness, since permanent and stable housing with supports are key to reducing homelessness and achieving housing stability (Aubry et al., 2020; Rog et al., 2014; Carnemolla & Skinner, 2021).

Overall, the prevalence of aging at home programs in Northern Ontario is growing, as a direct result of Ontario's reform efforts through their Aging at Home Strategy (Peckham et al., 2018). This initiative promoted the development of broader community-based care options, which aim to support the independence of seniors and their caregivers, for as long as possible, in their own homes and communities. These initiatives respond to the desire of seniors to age in "familiar settings" rather than accessing the "more costly, and often inappropriate, care" (Peckham et al., 2018, p. 31) received in hospitals and long-term care facilities. While these aging at home programs, in conjunction with the current available supportive housing facilities for seniors, provide critical support to this aging demographic across Northern Ontario, there are several weaknesses in the distribution of services across this region that this section will address.

The following sections are structured to highlight and reflect on different gaps in supportive housing services for people experiencing homelessness and seniors across Northern Ontario, including geographic, race-based, gender-based gaps and affordability barriers

Geographic Gaps

Northern Ontario spans a vast territory that contains 90 percent of the landmass of the province but less than 10 percent of the

population. Of that population, the majority are concentrated in the southeastern districts of the region, namely in the city of Greater

Sudbury, Nipissing District, Algoma District, Cochrane District and Parry Sound District. The largest city, by population, is Greater Sudbury, followed by Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and North Bay. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the concentration of urban centers and population in the southeast correlates to a higher occurrence of supportive housing services. The following subsections will explore the geographic gap in terms of housing services for people experiencing homelessness and seniors.

Supportive Housing Services for People Experiencing Homelessness

Census districts located in Ontario's Near North have a higher volume of supportive housing services for people experiencing homelessness. For example, Nipissing District, located in the southeast, has at least one homeless shelter in each of its three principal municipalities. Meanwhile, a district located further north, like Kenora District, has homeless shelters in approximately half of its main municipalities. The further north in the province one travels, the greater the gap in supportive housing services, with services becoming fewer and further between. The reasons for this are many - further north, the districts are usually larger in landmass, with greater distances between municipalities and a more dispersed population. It is in these more northern districts that the challenges of remoteness and rurality are most apparent. Generally, rural is defined as a population of less than 1000 and locations with less than 400 persons per square kilometer (Statistics Canada, 2001), while remote is defined as not accessible year-round by road (Youngson, 2021). Even in northern municipalities that do have social services, issues such as long wait times and wait lists, slow follow-up times, lack of community outreach and a narrow eligibility criterion make the services difficult and frustrating to navigate, especially for rural residents traveling across distances to access them (Schmidt, 2015).

Canadian literature has a tendency of conflating northern and rural issues that can

be problematic, since northern regions are not exclusively rural (Timony & Pong, 2011).

However, there are commonalities and intersections between both that produce similar challenges in accessing services for both northern and rural communities (Kauppi et al., 2017; OACAS Library Guides, 2021). For one, most rural and northern communities are dependent on either public or private transportation to access certain services and are faced with barriers including longer-than-normal travel times often required for residents of these communities to reach urban centres, complicated service patterns in regional transportation systems, and unaffordable fare rates produced by low population density and large distances (Kauppi et al., 2017). First Nations members wanting to access supportive housing services face significant geographic barriers, as one in four First Nation communities in Ontario is a remote community, accessible only by air year-round or by ice road in the winter (Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, 2020).

Figure 2, below, shows Northern Ontario's transportation infrastructure, while Figures 3 and 4 depict the dispersal of on-reserve housing services for people experiencing homelessness and seniors, respectively. In each of the latter figures, the yellow or orange map points mark First Nations reserves with a supportive housing service, while the purple map points mark those without. Together, these figures emphasize the geographic barriers faced by remote northern communities in accessing services located in the Near North.

These considerable transportation barriers are exacerbated by additional challenges related to extreme weather conditions, including forest fires, flooding, and heavy precipitation year-round, which can lead to road closures and limitations on load capacities in areas that already have limited road access (Ministry of Transportation, 2020).

These barriers threaten people in remote communities' access to healthcare and social services like homeless shelters, as well as their ability to access and move critical goods such

as fuel, housing materials, food and potable water cost-effectively. These circumstances will become increasingly precarious in a changing climate (Sanderson & Galway, 2021).

Supportive Housing Services for Seniors

Like housing services for people experiencing homelessness, the highest concentrations of seniors supportive housing services are situated in the census districts of the Near North with higher population density. In the census districts located in the Near North, there is an availability of diverse seniors supportive housing services spread-out between the different municipalities. For example, in Nipissing District, three of the four municipalities have long-term care facilities, two of the four have aging at home programs, and the largest urban centre, North Bay, has an additional four senior supportive housing facilities offering a range of supports to seniors. Even in a district like Timiskaming District, where only two of the four municipalities inventoried have supportive housing services for seniors, the geographic scale of the district is small enough that seniors living in municipalities without services are not required to travel great distances to access supportive services. Throughout the Near North, districts are generally small enough that aging at home programs have the capacity to serve seniors in municipalities outside of the urban centres.

By contrast, in the census districts comprising the Far North, namely Kenora District and Cochrane District, there are few seniors supportive housing located in municipalities outside of the major urban

hubs, and the geographic scale of these districts limits the ability of seniors in more rural and northern spaces to access services, often requiring them to leave their families, communities, and familiar landscapes in order to receive the supports they depend on. Given the geographic scale of this region, moving to a community with more services can mean traveling hundreds, possibly thousands of kilometers (Skinner & McCrillis, 2019). Similar geographic barriers affect the ability of seniors to access services as those discussed in the section on homelessness, including limited transportation between services in the Near North and communities in rural and remote regions of the Far North, exacerbated by climatic factors such as flooding.

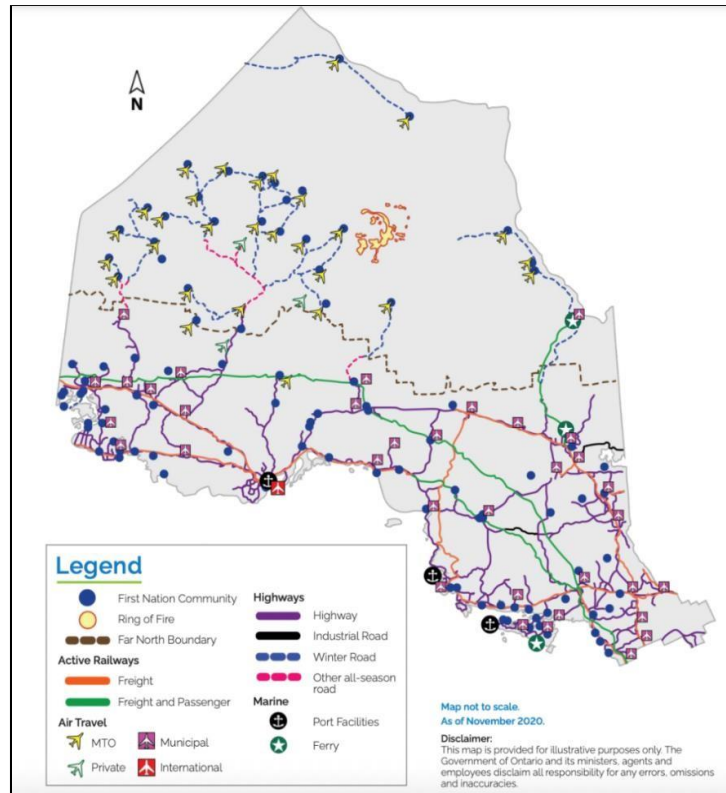


Figure 2. Northern Ontario's transportation infrastructure (Ministry of Transportation, 2020).

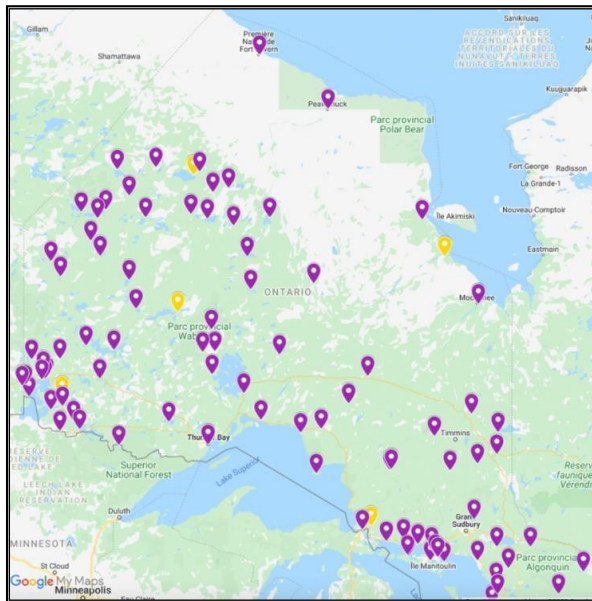


Figure 3. Homeless supportive housing services on First Nations reserves in Northern Ontario. Created using Google Maps.

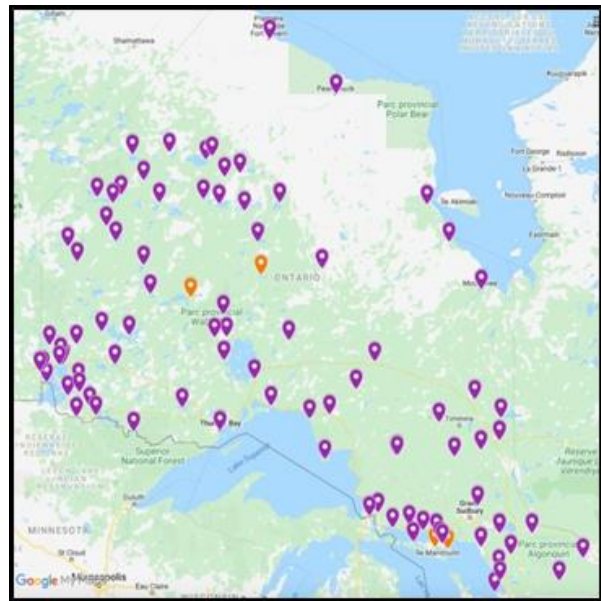


Figure 4. Senior supportive housing services on First Nations reserves in Northern Ontario. Created using Google Maps.

Race-based Gaps

There is a critical lack of literature examining the intersection of supportive housing, race and discrimination in Northern Ontario. This section will therefore draw on research based in Southern Ontario and other Canadian provinces, assuming certain parallels between race-based issues and remote, rural and northern communities. The following subsections will explore the gaps created by racism and discrimination in housing services for people experiencing homelessness and seniors.

Supportive Housing Services for People Experiencing Homelessness

In Canada, individuals from racialized and newcomer communities are disproportionately more likely to experience homelessness or housing security (The Homeless Hub, 2021).

Factors such as discrimination, language barriers, historical trauma and colonization all play a role increasing the risk of marginalized groups for experiencing homelessness.

Indigenous Peoples

Approximately 70 percent of Indigenous Peoples in Northern Ontario live off-reserve in urban centers (Ministry of Transportation, 2020), and while they make up only a small portion of the overall population living in urban areas, they account for a large part of the homeless population (The Homeless Hub, 2021; Kauppi et al., 2017; Kidd et al., 2019). In Northern Ontario, Indigenous Peoples living on-reserve often face housing issues of “overcrowding, need for major repairs, concerns with water supply and chronic housing shortages” (Kauppi et al., 2017, p. 15), leading to high rates of homelessness (Anaya, 2014). The difficulty of obtaining housing within First Nations communities often leads to “hypermobility” of First Nations people between their home communities and urban centres (Kauppi et al., 2017, p. 12; Bruce, 2006).

Urban spaces often operate as service hubs for Indigenous People living across Northern Ontario. People regularly visit and relocate to large cities like Thunder Bay and

Sudbury in order to obtain social or health care services, or to pursue employment or educational opportunities that are not available elsewhere in the region (Burnett et al., 2020). While these larger population centres are often seen as desirable spaces given the greater number and range social and healthcare services they offer, the impacts of settler colonialism and pervasive anti-Indigenous racism have been identified as significant problems limiting the ability of Indigenous People to access services (Burnett et al., 2020; McNeilly, 2018). Without the ability to safely or reliably access social and healthcare services, including mental health or addictions support, the risk of homelessness increases.

In urban centers, finding housing or shelter can also be difficult due to housing shortages and pervasive racism in the rental housing market (Kauppi et al., 2017). In a qualitative study on Homelessness and Hidden Homelessness in Rural and Northern Ontario, several Indigenous participants explained “their inability to secure housing because landlords consistently told them that the advertised units were already rented”, or situations where a participant who “obtained housing in a complex designated for Indigenous people stated that he was not being given rent-geared-to-income (RGI) even though he qualified for it and there were available units in the building” (Kauppi et al., 2017, p. 87). Thus, for both emergency housing and permanent housing, racism and discrimination create gaps that increase housing precarity for Indigenous people.

Other Racialized and Minority Groups

According to The Homeless Hub (2021), 28.2 percent of people experiencing homelessness in Canada are members of racialized groups, compared to the average of 19.1 percent of the total population. Fowle (2022) uses the term “pathways” to describe the different trajectories along which individuals travel to fall into homelessness, and how these individual pathways often expose broader structural forces that influence racialized homelessness. Common

pathways to homelessness for White people include substance abuse and psychiatric illness, while non-White people are more likely to report explicit structural causes of homelessness, such as racial income disparities, inadequate welfare and housing discrimination (Fowle, 2022).

Though no comprehensive studies on racial discrimination in the housing market have yet been undertaken in Northern Ontario, many studies on this topic conducted in major Canadian cities found that Indigenous, Black, Hispanic and other visible minority renters face significant levels of discrimination that act as a serious barrier to accessing housing and housing services (Ahajumobi & Anderson, 2020; Teixeira, 2008; Mensah & Williams, 2013; CERA, 2022). These structural barriers prevent racialized groups from gaining economic and social autonomy and stability, two factors that contribute to eliminating homelessness (Ahajumobi & Anderson, 2020).

Intersections of race and gender, as well as race and immigration status, create conditions of compounded discrimination that further affect peoples’ ability to access housing. Indigenous and racialized women face even deeper systemic inequities than their male counterparts, and are more likely to be employed on a temporary basis, receive significantly lower wages, and pay a higher average rate for rental housing (Schwan et al., 2021), placing them at even higher risk of homelessness. Newcomers, a term encompassing both recent immigrants and refugees, are at higher risk of homelessness due to income inequality, discrimination, and systemic barriers to employment (Preston et al., 2017).

Seniors Supportive Housing Services

Immigrant and otherwise racialized seniors are identified as another group particularly vulnerable to homelessness, due to lack of income, ineligibility for pensions or social assistance, and reliance on family care (Preston et al., 2017). Additionally, senior supportive housing services often lack of culturally sensitive care for vulnerable

Indigenous and racialized seniors. Throughout the inventory conducted, very few senior housing services stated that they provided culturally sensitive care, bringing us back to the importance of Indigenous-led housing services and other housing services that consider their clients' diverse values and needs.

Mishkeegogamang First Nation, located in the Kenora District, administers an aging at home program through their Home and Community Care Program funded by Health Canada, with the aim that seniors can “stay in the home and community longer than to get sent to an elder’s home” (Mishkeegogamang Ojibway Nation, 2010). Due to the remote nature of many northern First Nations communities and the scarcity of seniors supportive housing facilities providing medical care on reserves, First Nations seniors requiring any level of care that their family or community are unable to provide generally must seek care in urban centres. For Indigenous seniors pursuing supportive housing services in urban spaces away from their communities, barriers stemming from colonialism, racism and social exclusion

contribute to an “intertwined and vicious cycle of difficulties in healthcare access” (Nguyen et al., 2020, p. 9).

To compound this, studies have shown that First Nations seniors are among the most vulnerable in Canada “due to their health, age and economic situation” (Mihychuk, 2018, p. 10), often requiring First Nations people to access continuing care earlier in their lives compared to the non-Indigenous population. According to the First Nations Health Authority, there has been an observed increase in the incidence of Alzheimer’s and dementia among First Nations members, as well as a susceptibility to early onset chronic health conditions compared to the general Canadian population (Mihychuk, 2018). Combined, these factors tend to accelerate the transition from home and community care to facility-based long-term care, indicating a critical need for more senior supportive housing options geared towards First Nations seniors in Northern Ontario, with an emphasis on aging at home programs, as they allow for continued social and environmental connection (Pace and Grenier 2016).

Gender-based Gaps

In Northern Ontario, women experience a significantly higher rate of domestic or family-based violence than men (Conroy, 2021). Domestic violence is defined as physical, sexual or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse, or by family members, and is a major cause of women’s homelessness. According to the Homeless Hub (2021), survivors of domestic violence face significant discrimination from landlords when applying for housing and often end up homeless, highlighting a need for widespread shelter and housing services for women.

Emergency shelters, and especially women’s shelters, often serve as the first line response for women escaping situations of domestic violence. As identified in the inventory, out of the total 56 emergency shelter facilities, 40 (around 71 percent) were

women’s shelters. The distribution of women’s shelters across Northern Ontario is relatively widespread. Overall, 25 out of 56 municipalities have women’s shelters. In every census district, each of the largest cities has at least one women’s shelter, and in most of the census districts, several municipalities outside of the largest urban centre also have women’s shelters. Sudbury District is the exception, where the three total women’s shelters are all located in Greater Sudbury. The bulk of women’s shelters are in the Near North, where the concentration of urban hubs is higher. As has been discussed, all five of the supportive housing services located on First Nations reserves are women’s shelters, where three are spread out across the Far North and two are in the Near North.

Compared to general shelters and men's shelters in Northern Ontario, the availability of women's shelters appears extensive, and yet the current distribution is likely not extensive enough to meet the demand for these services. While no comprehensive studies on domestic violence and women's homelessness have been conducted in Northern Ontario, a Canada-wide report on gender-based homelessness found that women's shelters are chronically underfunded and often running at maximum capacity (Yakubovich & Maki, 2021).

Certain groups are at higher risk of experiencing domestic violence, including immigrants and refugees; Indigenous Peoples; and rural, remote and northern populations (Youngson et al., 2021; Wuerch et al., 2016). There are many factors that increase the risk of women experiencing domestic violence, including location and cultural factors.

The location risk factors, which include geographic isolation and lack of transportation, affect women in both remote and rural communities, which also experience a scarcity of services. These risks are even more elevated in Ontario's Far North, implying a greater challenge to access services for Indigenous women in remote

communities. As many of these communities are only accessible by airplane or by seasonal highways, women in communities that do not have their own women's shelters face great barriers to accessing services. Compounding this is the evidence that Indigenous women in Canada are at a higher risk for experiencing domestic violence, especially by an intimate partner, compared to non-Indigenous women (Amnesty International, 2004; Brownridge, 2008, McGillivray & Comaskey, 1999).

Other cultural, social and practical barriers can also impact women's access to services in small rural communities, including concerns regarding anonymity and confidentiality (Edwards, 2014) and the stigmatization of women who report domestic abuse (Doherty & Hornosty, 2004; Petersen et al., 2005). Indigenous women face additional challenges in finding services relevant to Indigenous culture (Klingspohn, 2018). As such, despite the predominance of women's shelters in Northern Ontario compared to general homeless shelters or men's shelters, the current distribution is insufficient to support women, and particularly Indigenous women, adequately and appropriately.

The results of this inventory, which identified a total of 16 co-ed or men-specific shelters compared to 40 women's shelters, contradict the average Canadian distribution of emergency shelters by gender. Research conducted through the Pan-Canadian Women's Housing & Homelessness Survey found that across the country, an average of 68 percent of all shelter beds are designated as co-ed, or for male-identifying people, compared to only 13 percent dedicated specifically to women (Schwan et al., 2021). Based on the data ascertained through the inventory, while more shelters and housing services for women are certainly needed, there is a pertinent gap in services available to men in the region.

Further, out of the 16 emergency shelters available to men, only five are geared towards men experiencing domestic violence. Rizkalla et al. (2020) discuss how Indigenous men experience disproportionately high rates of domestic violence compared to non-Indigenous men in Northern Ontario, and the insufficient preparedness within the primary care system to respond to the needs of these men, including the need for culturally safe services.

Affordability Barriers

Affordability is a significant barrier for seniors in accessing supportive housing services. In Northern Ontario, the percentage of seniors considered to be low-income is between 9.8% to 19.9%, varying across census districts (Income Security Advocacy Centre, 2018). While there are a variety of housing options for low-income seniors, there are limits to these funding programs and a clear scarcity of affordable supportive housing options across Northern Ontario (Jones, 2007). For instance, long-term care is part of the province's health care system and is publicly funded on a cost-share basis with residents. Ontario's Long-Term Care Home Rate Reduction Program offers subsidies to help low-income residents pay for basic accommodation in long-term care facilities, however these subsidies only cover basic accommodation, not private or semi-private. For a person to be eligible to receive a subsidy, they must already be receiving all of the federal and provincial benefits that they are eligible for (Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, 2022), making them more difficult to access.

The lack of transparency surrounding the term "affordable" makes it difficult to determine which facilities are truly financially accessible. For example, most of the supportive housing options for seniors, such

as Jasper Place, a 100-unit seniors supportive housing building located in Thunder Bay and owned by the Thunder Bay District Social Services Administration Board, require program support fees on top of rent, the cost of which is not disclosed. Many of the facilities which offer varying levels of support to seniors in Northern Ontario are retirement homes with distinct care packages or connections to aging at home programs that provide service to individuals in these retirement facilities. Retirement homes are not covered by government funding, and individuals living in these facilities must be able to pay for their own care and living costs (Ministry of Health, 2021). According to the Ministry of Health, depending on the retirement facility and the level of care provided to the residents, the cost of a private room can vary from \$1,500 to \$6,000 per month, while the cost of assisted-living facilities in Ontario is between \$2,000 to \$5,000 per month, depending on location and level of care.

While it is clear from the initial research conducted throughout this study that there are few affordable housing options that offer supports to the aging demographic of Northern Ontario, a more comprehensive analysis of the affordability barriers in Northern Ontario is needed to better understand the complexities of this issue.

Conclusion

As long wait lists for affordable housing continue to grow, and investments into social housing by the Government of Canada continue to decrease across many regions of Canada (Gaetz et al., 2014), the need for supportive housing is becoming increasingly urgent (Kerman et al., 2017). Through the inventory conducted in this project, we found that there are important gaps to address in the distribution and type of supportive housing services for individuals experiencing homelessness and seniors in Northern Ontario. While there exists a relatively diverse range of supportive housing services in the municipalities of Ontario's Near North and its major urban hubs, there are substantial geographic gaps affecting First Nations communities and other rural and remote municipalities in Ontario's Far North. There is a need for more general emergency housing, particularly in the Far North. This project also revealed that there is a lack of intermediary services to bridge the gap between emergency shelters and permanent stable housing, with only two transitional housing facilities in the entire region. This is revealing of the systemic fragmentation and lack of coordination within Ontario's health, support services and affordable housing sectors, which forces both people experiencing homelessness and seniors to navigate discrete service systems in order to have their needs met (Kerman et al., 2017).

An integrated services model coordinating a diverse array of housing related services is essential for both seniors and people experiencing homelessness to achieve housing stability and would work towards addressing the gaps explored throughout this report. Implementing more holistic, integrated policies and programs along a continuum of housing and care will be essential to both individuals experiencing homelessness and seniors' ability to access supportive services and maintain stable

housing (Jones, 2007; Aubry et al., 2020). This is especially key in geographically remote regions of the province, where an integrated services model would increase the accessibility of health and housing services in a coordinated but flexible way. Such an approach could also be used to work with First Nations communities to develop healthcare and housing solutions that fit the unique realities, needs and challenges of people living in remote and northern communities.

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Appendix

Types of Supportive Housing Services

This appendix section will list and define the key terms and categories used to conduct the inventory and referred to throughout the report.

Supportive Housing: Housing that provides a physical environment specifically designed to be safe, secure, enabling and home-like, with support services such as social services, provision of meals, housekeeping and social and recreational activities, privacy and dignity (NHS, 2018). In the context of the inventory conducted, facilities were categorized as supportive housing when they self-described as such, and when they offered a range of supportive services, but did not self-describe as any of the other categories.

Types of supportive housing services for people experiencing homelessness:

Emergency Housing: A facility, most often referred to as a shelter, which provides temporary residence to homeless individuals and families. Shelters exist to provide residents with safety and protection from exposure to the weather. There are several distinct types of emergency shelters, including women's shelters, men's shelters, and general homeless shelters, which will be discussed further in this report.

Friendship Centers: Organizations that provide culturally appropriate services for Indigenous people living in urban centers, in areas such as culture, shelter and housing, health, support and development. Friendship Centers understand the unique challenges faced by urban Indigenous communities and act as a crucial lifeline in tackling these issues (National Association of Friendship Centres, 2022).

Transitional Housing: A supportive but temporary type of accommodation designed to bridge the gap between emergency crisis shelter and permanent housing. Transitional housing facilities generally offer structure, supervision and support to individuals struggling with addictions, mental health, and trauma, and help individuals to establish a support network. Unlike permanent housing, they are usually time-limited to stays of three months to three years (The Homeless Hub, 2021). It is important to note the difference between transitional housing and a Transition House, a term which is most often used to describe a short- or long-term housing facility for women and children fleeing violence.

Types of senior supportive housing:

Independent Living: A facility which offers residents a safe living environment, but with minimal assistance (Jones, 2007). Many independent-living facilities offer some hospitality and recreational services but require that residents be able to fully function independently. Retirement homes are one such service that offer an independent-living community lifestyle for seniors. For the purposes of this report, and to adhere to the characterization of supportive housing, only independent-living facilities which self-describe using key terms such as "affordable", "subsidized", or "rent geared-to-income" were included in the inventory.

Assisted-Living: Facilities which provide housing, hospitality services and personal care services for seniors who can live independently and make decisions on their own behalf but require extra support due to physical and functional health challenges. Generally, assisted-living

communities provide an intermediate level of care between independent living and nursing homes or long-term care facilities (Ministry of Health, 2021).

Long-Term Care: A facility which provides a variety of services that aim to meet a person's health and personal care needs during a short or long period of time. This type of housing service is usually sought out by individuals who have serious, ongoing health conditions and require 24/7 nursing care. The terms long-term care facility and nursing home will be used interchangeably throughout this report (National Institute on Aging, 2017).

Aging at Home: Aging at home programs, a term interchangeable with home care and aging in place services, allow seniors to remain in their own homes as they grow older by providing a variety of at-home services (Peckham et al., 2018). Depending on the needs of clients, many Aging at Home programs have a range of personal care and medical services that can be provided by volunteers, trained staff, or licensed nurse practitioners.

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