THE 519 HOUSING JUSTICE POSITION PAPER

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Where We Belong: Housing Rights and Recommendations for 2SLGBTQ+ People



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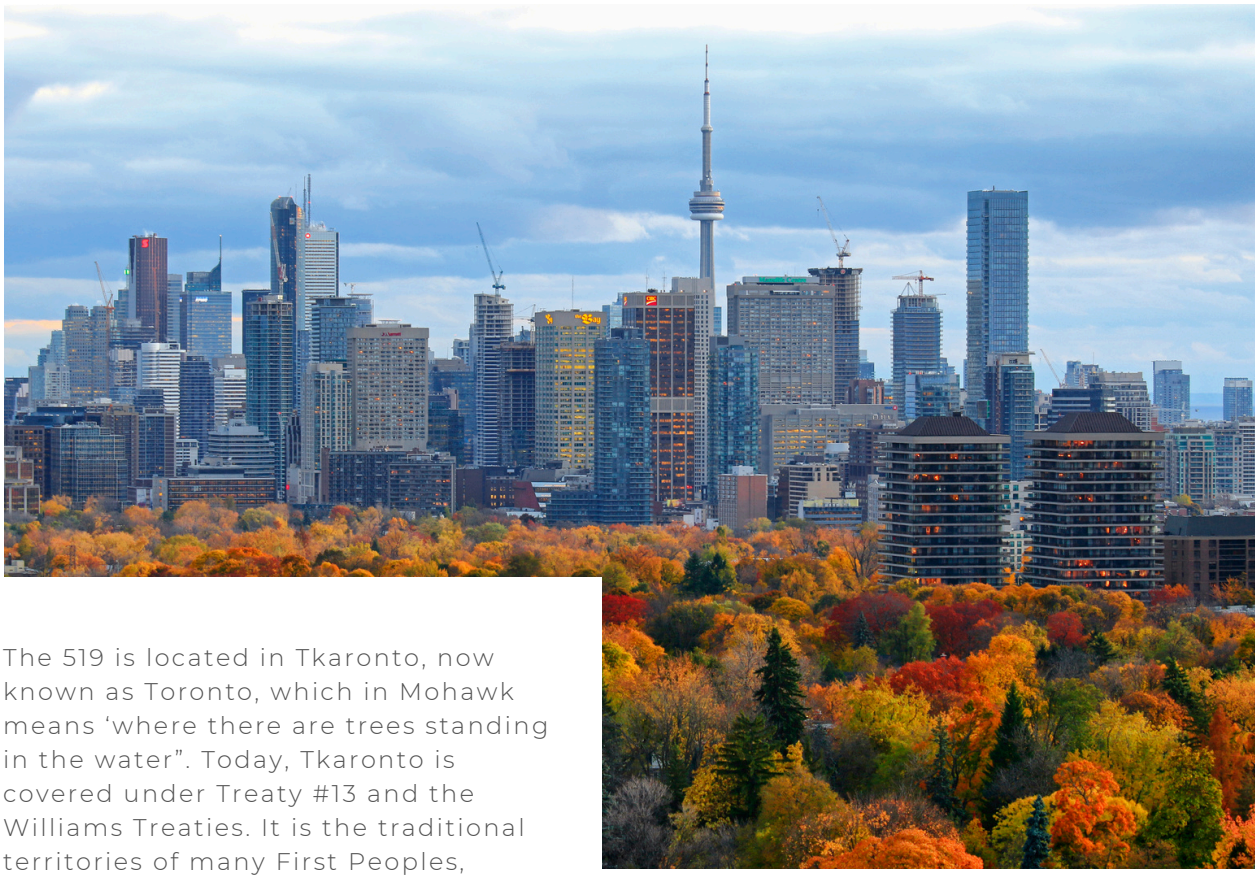
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Land Acknowledgement



The 519 is located in Tkaronto, now known as Toronto, which in Mohawk means ‘where there are trees standing in the water”. Today, Tkaronto is covered under Treaty #13 and the Williams Treaties. It is the traditional territories of many First Peoples, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnaabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples.

These nations continue to experience ongoing colonization and displacement – where land acknowledgements are offered in place of land itself. This territory is part of ‘the Dish with One Spoon’ wampum, a Treaty made between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas, and Haudenosaunee, where nations entered into an agreement to protect the land and responsibly care for its resources in harmony together.

As settlers, newcomers, refugees, and Indigenous peoples, we have all been invited into this treaty in the spirit of peace, friendship, and respect. We are also mindful of broken treaties that persist across Turtle Island today and recognize our responsibilities as Treaty people to engage in a meaningful, continuous process of truth and reconciliation with all our relations.

By being on this land, we are all responsible for upholding its treaties. Treaty agreements were made to last as long as “the sun shines, the grass grows, and rivers flow”.

Executive Summary

The 519 has been a longstanding advocate for equity in homelessness services and is involved in many efforts to advance housing justice. For decades we have endeavored to: provide and support opportunities for 2SLGBTQ+ individuals to share their experiences and needs with government; develop collaborative responses to ongoing discrimination, violence and exclusion in homelessness services and throughout the housing continuum; and engage directly with governments to demand that the deep and broad housing support needs of our communities are acknowledged and addressed.

It is evident, both in available research and through our work and engagement with community, that many marginalized 2SLGBTQ+ people: disproportionately experience being unhoused; face discrimination in all parts of their housing journey from shelters, to social and market housing, to long-term care; live with fear of harassment and violence; and often hide who they are to access and maintain accommodation. Further, these experiences of housing instability, violence and discrimination in residential contexts often start in youth and continue through to old age. Given the clear connection between housing and health, these experiences result in wide ranging and long-term health impacts, and serve to compound marginalization, especially for those who belong to multiple equity-denied communities.

It is also clear that an urgent and large-scale response is required to address these issues and ensure the long-term stability of 2SLGBTQ+ people of all ages and demographics, to support our health, happiness and full participation.

- We need shelter, housing and housing supports developed *by* 2SLGBTQ+ people *for* 2SLGBTQ+ people, at a scale that proportionally reflects the size of our community and its overrepresentation in experiences of being unhoused and precariously housed.
- We need 2SLGBTQ+ people at housing decision-making tables.
- We need a housing system that elevates the right to housing over the financialization of housing, through protecting renter rights and investing in deeply affordable and accessible housing.

2SLGBTQ+ people simply want what all people desire – safe, adequate and affordable housing: a comfortable place to call home.

As a City of Toronto agency, which primarily serves 2SLGBTQ+ Torontonians, our observations and recommendations largely relate to this context, however it is clear from the research that the barriers we see are evident across the country, and implementing these recommendations would support housing equity broadly.

Current Government Considerations

- Stable housing enables 2SLGBTQ+ individuals to participate fully in the workforce and community, leading to greater economic contributions and reduced reliance on social assistance.
- By investing in safe, affirming housing and supports, governments can reduce costly emergency health care, justice system interactions, and crisis interventions.

Calls to Action

All levels of government

RECOMMENDATION 1

Acknowledge 2SLGBTQ+ communities as a priority population in housing and homelessness by setting minimum targets to deliver a proportional number of 2SLGBTQ+-centred affordable units, with a focus on intersectional vulnerabilities, including seniors, refugees, trans, gender diverse, Black and Indigenous housing needs.

RECOMMENDATION 2

With leadership from the federal Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, collaboratively develop a targeted action plan to address housing unaffordability for lowest income earners by creating 50,000 net new rent-geared-to-income (RGI) units annually, consistently defining affordability at 30% of income, and preserving affordable housing stock, to ensure that all available housing funding meets the needs of those most vulnerable to homelessness.

Federal

RECOMMENDATION 3

Make housing funding for provinces and territories contingent on legislative reform that complies with the federal Blueprint for Renters Rights[1] and a Right to Housing mandate, with specific emphasis on enacting rent control, vacancy control and addressing the financialization of housing.



Provincial

RECOMMENDATION 4

Create an Ontario Housing Advocate within the Ontario Ombudsman office to critically assess all provincial housing programs and legislation, and ensure compliance with the federal Blueprint for Renters Rights[1] and a Right to Housing mandate - with specific emphasis on enacting rent control, vacancy control, landlords' responsibility during extreme weather events, and addressing the financialization of housing.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Develop an Action Plan to meet the needs of 2SLGBTQ+ seniors and ensure their right to safe housing, including: strengthening language in the Fixing the Long-term Care Act to include freedom from transphobia and respect for 2SLGBTQ+ culture; mandatory training for all Long-term Care staff and management on gender affirming care and inclusive policies and practice; and allocating funding for the development of 100 new dedicated 2SLGBTQ+ Long-term Care sites through a Request For Proposals.

Municipal

RECOMMENDATION 6

Build a minimum of 440 2SLGBTQ+ shelter beds through the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy, to proportionally align with the 22% of 2SLGBTQ+ people currently experiencing homelessness in Toronto (with 50% of beds dedicated to trans and gender-diverse people).

RECOMMENDATION 7

Dedicate $10M for 2SLGBTQ+-led community organizations over five years to provide inclusive, intersectional and affirming housing navigation and peer supports; and strengthen their organizational capacity to act as 2SLGBTQ+ champions at housing decision-making tables and support the building of new purpose-built shelter and housing.

Broader 2SLGBTQ+ Community

RECOMMENDATION 8

Collaborate with organizations like The 519 to meet the 2SLGBTQ+ housing needs of today through a community-led "for us by us" model of 2SLGBTQ+-centred shelter, supportive and affordable housing development.



Foundations of Our Work

The 519 is a City of Toronto agency and registered charity built by Toronto's 2SLGBTQ+ residents; a space where people come together to celebrate, organize, and create community. As an organization, we are committed to the health, happiness and full participation of 2SLGBTQIA+ people, and we strive to make a real difference in their lives, while working to advance equity, justice and collective strength. In addition to a diverse suite of programs for all ages, we offer legal clinics, health services, and refugee and newcomer supports for 2SLGBTQ+ communities across the city and beyond.

At The 519's second Annual Meeting in 1977, the board passed a resolution recognizing the rights of people experiencing homelessness in the neighbourhood to use the Centre, and our regular services for people experiencing homelessness have only grown since that time. From the early days of Sunday Drop-In, a many-decades-old program that still runs every Sunday, to Meal Trans, the first trans-specific program in Canada that began at The 519 in 1999, to newer programs like TPOC and the frozen meals program, this work has been complex and ongoing. Our daily local outreach and drop-in teams feed neighbours, reverse overdoses, and provide clean materials, basic needs supplies and referrals.

The 519 has advocated for equitable access to homelessness services and supports for decades: supporting a community consultation in 2002, which detailed the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ people using shelters; staffing the Trans Access Project (the resulting training initiative for shelter staff led by trans facilitators); and providing housing supports to community in various forms over the last 20+ years.

At the request of the City of Toronto in 2022, The 519 led another community consultation on the experiences and needs of 2SLGBTQ+ people using shelter services, which found little had changed in the 20 years since the previous consultation. Following the publication of this report, the City of Toronto funded the development of a new curriculum for Toronto shelters, designed to support learning and implementation of service providers' obligations to provide equitable and inclusive services to 2SLGBTQ+ clients, with over 1,500 shelter workers trained to date. City funds have also enabled a collaboration with Homes First Society in the operation of Pacewood - Toronto's first 2SLGBTQ+ adult shelter, with an exclusive focus on queer and trans refugees.

In relation to this work, The 519's Housing Advocacy and Support Services staff have led and engaged in a number of homelessness and housing planning projects and forums.
In 2023, we worked with an external consultant to evaluate the Pacewood project and produce a toolkit to support others seeking to explore similar collaborative approaches to demographic-specific service provision, sharing the project's research at several national conferences.

In 2025, the team conducted community consultations and prepared a written submission for *Neha*, The National Housing Council's Review Panel on *The Right to Housing for Women, Two Spirit, Trans, and Gender-Diverse people*. Following this submission, we were asked to host an in-person dialogue with *Neha* representatives and The 519 community members. At this time, we also became co-chair of the Toronto Shelter Network's 2SLGBTQ+ Sector Table and with the engagement of 2SLGBTQ+ shelter leaders, have relaunched this forum as a Community of Practice intended to support the shelter sector in implementing the 2025 updates to the Toronto Shelter Standards, to better support 2SLGBTQ+ clients.

Along with these important community-informed actions, The 519's Housing Advocacy and Support Services team have participated in: the Toronto Non-Indigenous Community Advisory Board[2]; the Refugee Service System Roundtable[3]; the Housing Pathways for Women and Gender Diverse People Working Group[4]; the Case Management Working Group[5]; a Review Committee as part of the process to update Toronto Shelter Standards to better support 2SLGBTQ+ clients; and a collaborative workshop to support the development of the City's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan to address homelessness.



Through our 50 years of serving 2SLGBTQ+ community and advocating for change toward inclusion, we know that safely utilizing shelters and accessing and maintaining adequate housing has been and remains a huge barrier to the health, happiness and full participation of 2SLGBTQ+ communities. 2SLGBTQ+ people are disproportionately overrepresented in experiences of homelessness, and more likely to be renters and to live in poverty, and therefore to be exposed to poor housing conditions and insecure tenancy. As low-income tenants, 2SLGBTQ+ people are more likely to face housing-related health risks - such as extreme heat or mold-induced asthma - which may in turn exacerbate existing health challenges. We also see, as the overlapping affordability, housing and drug poisoning crises continue to intensify, and large numbers of 2SLGBTQ+ people begin to age into care services, the depth and breadth of need for safe, affordable and adequate housing options for queer and trans people far outstrips existing resources. We are therefore calling on all orders of government to act and meet these growing needs with adequate attention and a systemic response.

2SLGBTQ+ Vulnerabilities in Housing

Shelters

Between 25-40% of all youth experiencing homelessness across Canada identify as 2SLGBTQ+, despite representing less than 10% of Canada's youth population[6]. When young people make the vulnerable choice to disclose their gender or sexual identities to their parents and caregivers, many face a lack of acceptance or abuse, and are forced to leave home[7]. This early attachment rupture from their primary caregivers sets many 2SLGBTQ+ youth on a lifelong journey of housing precarity, with cascading physical and mental health impacts. 2SLGBTQ+ people in Toronto are more likely to enter homelessness at younger ages; more likely to experience chronic homelessness; have reported higher rates of conflict and/or abuse by a parent/guardian; and are twice as likely to report mental health issues as a reason for housing loss[8].

Housing vulnerabilities are especially pronounced for 2SLGBTQ+ people with intersectional identities. 64% of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents in the 2021 Street Needs Assessment* (SNA) identified as racialized, with Black and Indigenous people representing the highest demographic[9]. In the 2024 SNA, one-third of all refugee claimant respondents identified as LGBTQ+[10], many arriving in Canada to escape persecution or violence due to their sexual or gender identity.

Discrimination from both shelter staff and residents is widely reported by 2SLGBTQ+ shelter users[11], and especially acute for gender diverse people**. In shelters, they must: navigate spaces that are structurally gendered[12] (e.g. dorms divided by gender and shared shower facilities) and cultures of normalized transphobia and oppression[13]; face exclusion due to discriminatory shelter policies and practices; and experience judgement or indifference from shelter staff[14]. In instances of transphobic violence (such as physical or verbal assaults from fellow residents), trans shelter residents report neglectful staff responses that included being blamed for their assault, or being removed from the facilities[15]. Many respondents report not feeling safe to fall asleep in shelter settings due to the need to stay vigilant against inevitable violence[16].

This lack of safety compels many 2SLGBTQ+ people to hide their gender

* The City of Toronto's Street Needs Assessment is a city-wide point-in-time count and survey of people experiencing homelessness that is used to inform evidence-based service planning and programming across the homelessness sector. Learn more at: https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/housing-shelter/homeless-help/about-torontos-shelter-system/street-needs-assessment/

** *Gender diverse* is a term used to describe a broad range of gender identities, including (but not limited to): trans women, trans men, nonbinary, genderfluid and gender non-conforming people.

identity or sexual orientation, sometimes choosing to avoid shelters altogether. This in turn results in further risks to their safety, as they navigate returning to abusive settings, couch surfing, or sleeping outdoors[17].

> Almost all LGBTQ+ people going into the shelters have a fear of them because it isn't a matter of *if* it's dangerous, but just *how* dangerous it will be. It is horrible to live in that fear. [18]

Housing

Lack of housing safety and access continue to impact 2SLGBTQ+ people throughout their housing journeys. In addition to shelters, 2SLGBTQ+ people also face discrimination in supportive housing, social housing, and amongst landlords, neighbours and the larger community. In one cross-Canada survey, 43% of gender diverse participants reported experiencing discrimination from their landlords due to their gender identity[19], and almost 25% experienced mistreatment, threats and assault from other tenants and community members. Participants named discrimination and exclusion as key contributing factors to homelessness and housing precarity in their lives[20]. This constant state of fear also results in inadequate living conditions. Many trans respondents reported that they had not addressed key maintenance issues (e.g. mold, broken structures) with their landlords due to fear that doing so might reveal their trans identity and lead to eviction[21].



> My friend and I were looking for a house and this place was available. When we were in the house and we were talking about our sexual orientation the place became unavailable. The landlord's behaviour wasn't about getting the house anymore, the questions he was asking were outrageous. I still don't understand how the place became unavailable so fast.[22]

Long-term Care

In provincially-funded long-term care, there is a similar absence of 2SLGBTQ+-centred settings, with most homes operating in cultures that lack recognition or affirmation of 2SLGBTQ+ elders. Many 2SLGBTQ+ older adults face intense fear of entering long-term care due to mistrust of institutions and anticipated discrimination[23]. According to the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario which represents over 50,000 nurses and coordinates the Long Term Care Best Practices program, "2SLGBTQI+ residents experience anxiety and concern about LTC staff due to past stigma, [and] staff, with few exceptions, are untrained or ill-trained in 2SLGBTQI+ residents' specific care issues and needs"[24].

As the Canadian population ages, we are also seeing the average age of those living with HIV in Canada climb – currently over 50 and projected to rise above 65 in the next 10 years. Despite a lack of research and understanding of the compounding impacts of aging with HIV/AIDS, it is clear that this group "presents with age-related diseases sooner and more frequently than the general population", and that the "care and support received at home among older adults with HIV can also impact their overall health outcomes"[25].

2SLGBTQ+ seniors have resiliently navigated decades of legislated discrimination against their gender or sexuality, and have faced numerous barriers over their lifetime, including stigma, violence, family rejection, imprisonment, housing loss, employment loss and denial of affirming health care.

Given their lived experience, 2SLGBTQ+ seniors fearfully anticipate mistreatment from both staff and residents in long-term care settings, compelling many of them to 'return to the closet' and hide their gender and sexual identities[26], further contributing to a climate of anxiety and isolation for 2SLGBTQ+ elders. The perpetual fear of disclosure and inability to be their authentic selves in turn takes a toll on their physical and mental health[27].

> "We are going back into the closet. Many of us are in isolation. Many of us are invisible. Many of us are afraid, because we have been so stigmatized for so many years, and those of us who are 55 years old or 60-plus are still afraid to speak out...
>
> We are worried about the care we are gonna get. We are worried about being treated badly. We worry about actual physical harm happening to us. Not only from [long-term care] staff, but from other residents, because remember, those straight people who were harassing us and beating us back then are now our ages too, right? Now we are the same age in long-term facilities together. That kind of hatred doesn't just disappear.[28]"

Inadequate System Response

While The 519 works with the wider shelter sector to advocate for consistent, queer and trans-competent service delivery and a systems approach to affirming and inclusive shelters broadly, the urgent need for safe 2SLGBTQ+ shelters remains for queer and trans people having to navigate shelters in the current moment.

There is clear evidence to support a need for housing and social supports explicitly for 2SLGBTQ+ communities, however current resources are overwhelmingly inadequate. In Toronto, for example, whilst 30% of the youth shelter population identify as 2SLGBTQ+, only 1% of shelter beds are designated for 2SLGBTQ+ youth[29]. For single adults over the age of 29 identifying as 2SLGBTQ+, who represent 24% of the unhoused population in Toronto[30], there are 20 beds at Pacewood shelter (for adult refugees) - representing 0.17% of total shelter beds available.

If measured proportionally to the demographic data, Toronto should have roughly 2,800 2SLGBTQ+-allocated shelter beds. Looking ahead to the 20 new Toronto shelters that will be developed under the municipal Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS) by 2033[31], at least 440 beds must be dedicated to 2SLGBTQ+ people, to align with the rising needs of this population - which doubled from 2021 to 2024[32].

In Ontario, the provincial Housing Action Plan makes no mention of 2SLGBTQ+ people as a vulnerable sub-population that will benefit from upcoming affordable housing initiatives[33] - a striking absence given the overrepresentation of 2SLGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness. Similarly, the provincial expansion in long-term care promises over 58,000 beds across the province and investments in staffing[34], but does not acknowledge the gap in 2SLGBTQ+-inclusive long-term care spaces. And while Ontario's Long-term Care Act has recently been updated to include language about respect and dignity aligned with the Human Rights Code, the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario has urgently highlighted the noticeable lack of language around providing gender-affirming care, and recognition of the cultural needs of 2SLGBTQ+ residents[35]. In these overtly heterosexist and cisnormative* environments[36], more must be done to hold long-term care homes accountable to providing affirming housing and healthcare, cultivating spaces that are safe for elders to be their true selves, and meeting the cultural needs of 2SLGBTQ+ seniors.

* *Heterosexism* is defined as the assumption that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior and preferable. The result is discrimination against bisexual, lesbian and gay people that is less overt, and which may be unintentional and unrecognized by the person or organization responsible.

Cisnormativity refers to the commonplace assumption that all people are cisgender and that everyone accepts this as "the norm." The term cisnormativity is used to describe systemic prejudice against trans people. This form of systemic prejudice may go unrecognized by the people or organizations responsible.

Federally, while Housing and Homelessness is named as a key pillar in the 2022 Federal 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan[37], little action has been initiated to date. Similarly, while the 2017 National Housing Strategy (NHS) identifies 2SLGBTQIA+ people as a priority population, **only 159 units** had been committed for 2SLGBTQ+ people after eight years of the NHS' 10-year plan – the lowest of any priority group[38].

The disconnect between these two national strategies and the lack of action taken to date paints a stark picture of neglect on 2SLGBTQ+ housing priorities. With the announcement of the new federal *Build Canada Homes* program, we see renewed opportunity to address this gap and prioritize culturally safe, supportive and affordable housing for 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

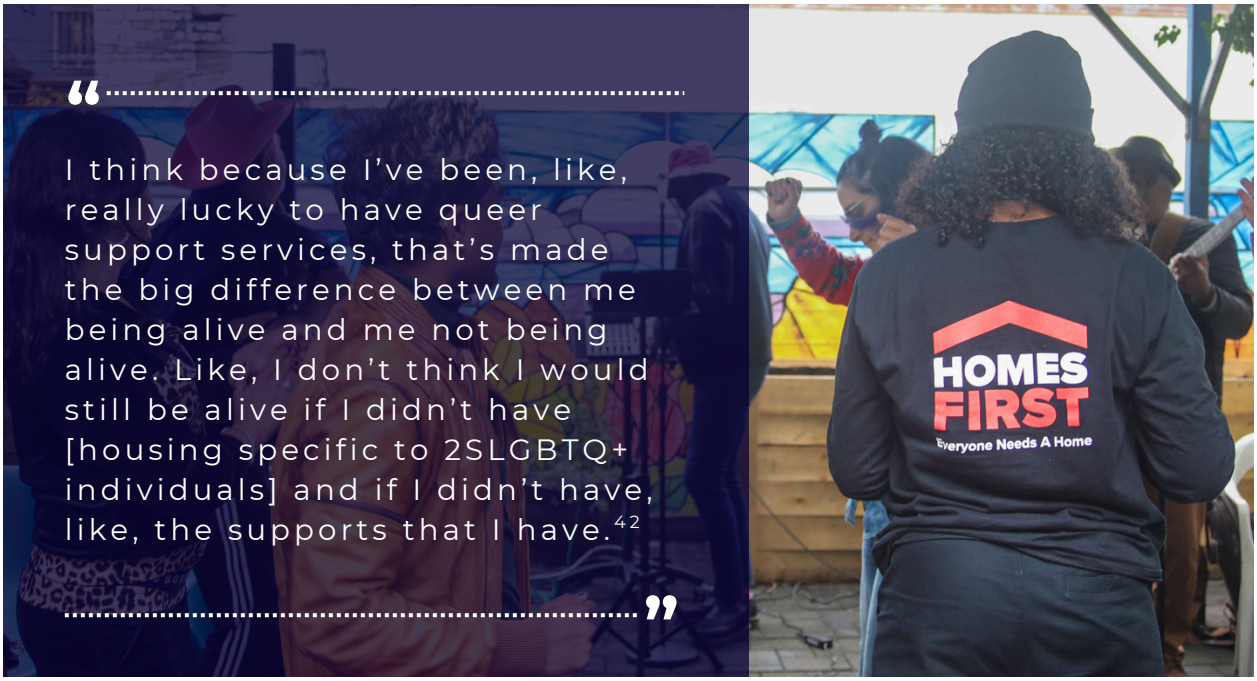


More than just a Roof

Common and frequent instances of housing violence and discrimination have hardened many queer and trans people to expect discrimination wherever they live. In one study of 2,800 trans and nonbinary adults by TransPulse Canada, 50% anticipated discrimination in obtaining housing because of who they are[39].

In the context of this deeply eroded sense of safety, 2SLGBTQ housing access is not merely about a roof over one's head. Equally important is being amidst a culture of active 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion, representation and affirmation.

The impact of access to 2SLGBTQ+-affirming culture is immense. In contrast to the constant threat of violence in the broader shelter system, residents of 2SLGBTQ+-centred shelters have noted feelings of safety and improved mental wellbeing when being supported by both visibly 2SLGBTQ+ staff and adequately trained cisgender staff, as well as sharing space with other 2SLGBTQ+ residents[40]. The 519's evaluation of our Pacewood shelter collaboration with Homes First (Toronto's only adult 2SLGBTQ+ shelter) echoed these sentiments, with participants highlighting the importance of accessing affirming health services, and queer and trans specific peer supports and community building opportunities[41]. When participants expressed a desire to make the shelter feel like home, The 519 and Homes First responded by creating a process to involve residents in decisions about the space, providing a greater sense of safety and autonomy, and positioning staff and residents as collaborative partners with a common goal.



The City of Toronto provides over $52.9 million annually to fund housing-focused and homelessness support services[43]. Nonetheless, there is still a lack of funding explicitly allocated to meet the needs of 2SLGBTQ+ people, who are overrepresented and underserved in the sector.

As homelessness prevention supports require adequate resourcing from all levels of government, we continue to call for collaborative approaches to resource this urgent need.

We are calling on the City of Toronto, which is responsible for the dispersal of federal and provincial homelessness funds, to dedicate $10M over five years to develop and sustain "for us by us" 2SLGBTQ+ housing and homelessness supports and initiatives.

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total (000s)
15%	20%	21%	22%	22%	100%
$1.5M	$2M	$2.1M	$2.2M	$2.2M	$10M

This proposed investment in the housing stability of 2SLGBTQ+ people echoes City commitments that include the *Access Plan for Two-Spirit, Trans and Nonbinary Youth*[44], and the *Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism*[45]. Coupled with the engagement of organizations with demonstrated expertise in supporting queer and trans people, the funding would support the transformation of the current system into one that is better equipped to meet the needs of 2SLGBTQ+ people who might otherwise experience long-term housing instability. This, in turn, alleviates significant pressures on public finances - healthcare costs are six times higher for those who are unhoused[46]; and publicly funded institutions which commonly serve as accommodations for otherwise unhoused persons (e.g. shelters/correctional facilities/ hospitals) are 3 to 22 times[47] more expensive than social housing.

In addition to funding, the failure to address 2SLGBTQ+ housing needs is also a result of a lack of representation at the decision-making level. A recent report from the Wellesley Institute notes the significant gap in knowledge within governments and the housing sector on 2SLGBTQ+ needs, and the inadvertent harm that comes with systems and policies that fail to create accessible, gender-affirming and trauma-informed pathways to services[48]. The report cited funding as a major barrier to progress, and emphasized the need to "let 2SLGBTQ+ communities lead," with governmental bodies playing a supportive role in resourcing community-led organizations and ensuring housing policy and programs are accountable to queer and trans housing needs[49].

Realizing the right to housing for queer and trans people means housing and supports specifically designed with 2SLGBTQ+ people's needs and safety in mind all along the housing spectrum - in shelters, supportive housing and long-term care - helmed by queer and trans leadership and protected by 2SLGBTQ+-affirming policies.



As we continue to advocate for government action, we recognize such long-term shifts can take years to produce on-the-ground impacts for our communities. In the interim, there is an opportunity to fill the gap of decision-making on 2SLGBTQ+ housing - by building the housing ourselves.

In recent years, housing cooperatives, nonprofits and Community Land Trusts across Canada have turned to models of culturally competent affordable housing development to address displacement amidst gentrification. Similar to initiatives like the Upper Hammonds Plains Community Land Trust, UNITI, and Toronto Chinatown Land Trust[50], there is an opportunity for creative minds of the 2SLGBTQ+ community to develop affordable housing that is culturally ours - for us and by us.

Queer and trans housing developers and community advocates, 2SLGBTQ+ architects, designers and consultants all have an opportunity to collaborate with organizations like The 519 to innovate on the status quo and galvanize a community-led response to meet the 2SLGBTQ+ housing needs of today. Together we can develop 2SLGBTQ+-centred shelters, supportive and affordable housing, informed by an affirming model of inclusion and dignity for all.

Call to Action: Broader 2SLGBTQ+ Community

Collaborate with organizations like The 519 to meet 2SLGBTQ+ housing needs through a community-led model of 2SLGBTQ+-centred shelter, supportive and affordable housing development.

2SLGBTQ+ Housing

While all forms of housing should be free from discrimination, the reality is far from the case. 2SLGBTQ+ people currently navigate rampant discrimination in shelters, supportive housing, long-term care homes, and amongst landlords, neighbours and other tenants. These experiences are especially heightened for racialized, trans, gender diverse, disabled and/or refugee members of the community, who face multiple and overlapping oppressions.

All levels of government

RECOMMENDATION 1

Acknowledge 2SLGBTQ+ communities as a priority population in housing and homelessness by setting minimum targets to deliver a proportional number of 2SLGBTQ+-centred units, with a focus on intersectional vulnerabilities, including seniors, refugees, trans, gender diverse, Black and Indigenous housing needs.

Municipal

RECOMMENDATION 6

Build a minimum of 440 2SLGBTQ+ shelter beds through the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy, to proportionally align with the 22% of 2SLGBTQ+ people currently experiencing homelessness in Toronto (with 50% of beds dedicated to trans and gender-diverse people).

Provincial

RECOMMENDATION 5

Develop an Action Plan to meet the needs of 2SLGBTQ+ seniors and ensure their right to safe housing, including: strengthening language in the Fixing the Long-term Care Act to include freedom from transphobia and respect for 2SLGBTQ+ culture; mandatory training for all Long-term Care staff and management on gender affirming care and inclusive policies and practice; and allocating funding for the development of 100 new dedicated 2SLGBTQ+ Long-term Care sites through a Request For Proposals.



More 2SLGBTQ+-Led Housing Supports

Actual instances of discrimination mean many queer and trans people expect and perceive discrimination when accessing services. In the context of this deeply eroded sense of safety, 2SLGBTQ+ housing access requires a relational, community-based approach that emphasizes care, validation and an offering of trust. And no one can understand how to cultivate trust and safety for 2SLGBTQ+ people better than those who are 2SLGBTQ+ themselves.

Municipal

RECOMMENDATION 7

Dedicate $10M for 2SLGBTQ+-led community organizations over five years to provide inclusive, intersectional and affirming housing navigation and peer supports; and strengthen their organizational capacity to act as 2SLGBTQ+ champions at housing decision-making tables and support the building of new purpose-built shelter and housing.

> "Safety is a big thing. If we are not safe, we cannot dream."[51]



Impact of Housing Affordability Crisis on Marginalized Communities

Housing as Determinant of Health

2SLGBTQ+ communities are not the only ones disproportionately impacted by the affordable housing crisis. Black, Indigenous, disabled and refugee/newcomer communities (all of whom may also face overlapping oppression as 2SLGBTQ+ people) continue to face housing discrimination and struggle against rising costs, bad faith evictions and displacement - with dire consequences. Housing is a crucial social determinant of health. Lack of access to safe, adequate and affordable housing contributes to a myriad of negative physical and mental health outcomes, including: chronic illness, infectious disease, respiratory infections, anxiety, depression, substance use and early mortality[52]. Additionally, not having a safe place to call home creates a ripple effect on other determinants of health, leaving individuals less likely to find employment, less socially connected, and less able to access healthcare. Over the long-term, housing instability entrenches individuals in experiences of systemic marginalization and exclusion; poverty and isolation. Conversely, housing stability allows for full participation in social and economic life; improves physical and mental health, well-being and cost-effectiveness; and reduces mortality rates, criminal justice interactions and service use[53].



Systemic Barriers to Affordable Housing

The housing vulnerability that 2SLGBTQ+ people and others face is deeply affected by stagnant social assistance rates, the loosening or removal of key tenant protections, and a clear lack of housing programs that focus on affordability for low-income earners. Additionally, conflict resolution mechanisms like the Landlord and Tenant Board are tilted against tenants, with 90% of cases presented initiated by landlords, most commonly to either evict tenants or to request Above-Guideline Rent Increases[54]. In contrast, tenants wait up to three times longer for cases against their landlords to be heard[55].

Government response to the housing affordability crisis has been to incentivize market developers to build more housing supply, a strategy that leaves low-income renters and tenants to fend for themselves. **More housing does not equal housing affordability.** Currently, Canada is losing 11 affordable housing units for every new one built[56]. To truly address the housing crisis, we must use policy to protect our current affordable housing stock from being re-developed and prioritize building new housing that is deeply affordable and accessible to the lowest income earners among us. That means more social housing, more Rent-Geared-to-Income units, and more affordable housing set consistently at 30% of income for low income earners - well below the vague and varying definitions for affordability that 'affordable' housing programs currently fund[57].

In recent years there have been some governmental efforts to move towards an internationally-recognized Right to Housing approach, for example the development of a Federal Housing Advocate and Toronto's Housing Ombudsman. However, targeted action to protect low-income renters are still vague and lacking. Recommendations from the National Housing Council's recent review panel to address the Financialization of Rental Housing[58] have yet to be implemented with no communicated plan to do so, and the recently released Blueprint for Renters' Rights[59] contains no accountability measures for provincial and territorial compliance.

In Ontario, the creation of a rights-based provincial housing body would ensure accountability in demonstrating meaningful action towards addressing the needs of low-income renters. To align with a Right to Housing mandate, Ontario legislation must be critically examined and revised to provide fair and equitable access to the Landlord and Tenant Board, greater tenant protections such as rent and vacancy control, and stronger tenant legal rights education and representation to combat bad faith evictions.

A Proactive Right to Housing Approach

The affordable housing crisis disproportionately impacts 2SLGBTQ+ communities and others marginalized by systemic discrimination. All levels of government must work together towards progressive realization of our right to housing by protecting renters from rent hikes, renovictions, bad faith landlords, and extreme climate impacts, while also investing in accessible 2SLGBTQ+-competent social housing, supportive housing and long-term care.

All levels of government

RECOMMENDATION 2

Develop a targeted action plan to address housing unaffordability for lowest income earners by creating 50,000 net new RGI units annually, consistently defining affordability at 30% of income, and preserving affordable housing stock, to ensure that all available housing funding meets the needs of those most vulnerable to homelessness.

Federal

RECOMMENDATION 3

Make housing funding for provinces and territories contingent on legislative reform that complies with the federal Blueprint for Renters Rights and a Right to Housing mandate with specific emphasis on enacting rent control, vacancy control and addressing the financialization of housing.

Provincial

RECOMMENDATION 4

Create an Ontario Housing Advocate within the Ontario Ombudsman office to critically assess all provincial housing programs and legislation, and ensure compliance with the federal Blueprint for Renters Rights and a Right to Housing mandate - with specific emphasis on enacting rent control, vacancy control, landlords' responsibility during extreme weather events, and addressing the financialization of housing.



Conclusion

Building safe housing for 2SLGBTQ+ people requires material and emotional supports to meet their needs. Materially, it means designing housing that does not assume or segregate by gender, respects privacy, and fosters 2SLGBTQ+ visibility, representation and community connection. But beyond the bare essentials of four walls, secure housing also means cultivating a sense of home that enables 2SLGBTQ+ people to safely and openly be their authentic selves. To gain the trust of those who experience normalized discrimination for their gender and sexual identities requires a relational, community-based approach - and a knowing that only those who are 2SLGBTQ+ themselves can truly understand.

Queer and trans people want what all people desire - a comfortable place to call home where neighbours, long-term care workers, shelter staff and landlords are fair and respectful, and where the price of housing is reasonable, and relative to income. In this climate of deep housing unaffordability, equity-denied groups that have historically faced (and continue to face) housing discrimination have been hit the hardest. To make a home for these communities, an equitable approach is needed to ensure that all people can have an equal opportunity to realize their right to safe, adequate and affordable housing.



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- Past and current residents of Toronto's Pacewood shelter
- LGBTQ+ Refugee Newcomer participants of our *NEHA: Right to Housing for Women, Two-Spirit, Trans and Gender Diverse people* in-person dialogue
- Community members who participated in The 519's 2022 community consultation *Developing Sustainable and Safe 2SLGBTQ+ Housing Models*

Our paper also draws from the existing research on 2SLGBTQ+ housing needs - in particular, we want to acknowledge the work of Dr. Alex Abramovich, TransPulse Canada, Egale Canada and the Toronto Shelter Network.

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3. The Refugee Service System Roundtable was established by the City of Toronto, Shelter & Support Services division to provide advice, input and feedback to support the development and implementation of the refugee service system

4. The Housing Pathways for Women and Gender Diverse People Working Group was established by Toronto's Housing Secretariat to advance the HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan's ("HousingTO Plan") Key Strategic Action #4 "Provide Pathways to Support Women."

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