

HOUSING THROUGH AN AUTISM LENS: A PATHWAY FROM CRISIS TO SOLUTION

December, 2021

Housing Blueprint Prototype

No experience of housing for autistic adults is the same and our lab illuminated that housing solutions must consider more than bricks and mortar. Housing solutions must be individualized and flexible enough to change as the autistic adult's needs and life changes too, they must also be centred around autistic adults and grounded in self-determination. To create housing situations where autistic adults can thrive, our prototype needed to be integrated and create ways to facilitate the multitude of players of the housing system.

The purpose and core concept description

This Blueprint is a guide to attaining positive outcomes in housing for an autistic person no matter where they are in their adult life course. It is designed for all players of the housing system including but not exclusive to:

- Autistic individuals and their families
- Organisations
- Policy makers
- Housing designers
- Housing providers

This Blueprint is informed by eight **elements** needed to secure suitable housing for autistic adults. Each element contains a list of **requirements** and subsequent questions for consideration. The requirements describe the key aspects, factors, or conditions of the element to be successful. They were derived from the entire Housing through an Autism Lens Solutions lab and represent what the system, around housing, has told us makes a safe, secure, and empowering housing experience for autistic adults.

The eight elements include:

- Self-determination
- Medical and mental health
- Community care, positive relationships, and social connection
- Financial and economic stability
- Housing infrastructure and suitability
- Physical, emotional, and social safety
- Support systems, including natural and paid support
- Technological support and other tools

Who can help bring the Blueprint to reality and key partners?

As an outcome of the Solutions Lab, we envision the creation of a national network that will continue to champion the Housing through an Autism Lens lab Blueprint, build new partnerships, and strengthen existing relationships to promote the Blueprint and determine paths for implementation in Ottawa and across Canada. Key partners may include various levels of government, housing experts, advocacy groups, autistic service organisations, families, and autistic adults.

Guiding questions and new ways of thinking

The Blueprint shifts decision-making power around housing solutions and acts to catalyse:

- **An adult lifespan approach** that considers how needs might change over the adult's life course of an autistic adult.
- **An individualized approach** to housing and support that is portable and flexible as needs change.
- **Self-Determination** as the right of autistic adults to make their own choices is critical, including autistic adults whose needs are more complex.

This means that there is, from autistic adults, continual input, discussion, and feedback to ensure *"nothing about us without us"* in both individual housing solutions and public policy and planning.

Next steps and implementation

An organisation (or organizations) needs to hold the Blueprint and to begin to test it with diverse players of the housing system. We have started conversations with our lab stakeholders to envision who has capacity to hold the Blueprint and begin to incorporate it into their work. This entails:

- Socialising the Blueprint within their organisation
- Refining the content to their group context, where necessary
- Building capacity of staff to use the Blueprint
- Using and testing the Blueprint (will vary depending on context)
- Evaluating the Blueprint, guided by the following themes:
- Utility - Was this tool helpful as a guide for making housing decisions?
- Outcomes - Did this lead to securing housing for autistic adults?
- Gaps and improvements for next time - Were any elements missing?

Limiting beliefs, challenges, and how could this fail?

We see two challenges of implementing the Blueprint. First, the implementation of this prototype depends on the engagement and capacity of the organization that will hold it and how they make partnerships to use it. Second, to be sustainable over time, the housing solutions resulting from utilization of the Blueprint also require: Initial Capital, Sustainable Support, and long-term Funding. Without them, solutions will not be sustainable and therefore, the application of the Blueprint depends on them too.

A lot of energy and work has been put into ideating, iterating, and developing the Blueprint. We have had input from autistics, organisations and service providers, policy makers, and designers into the elements, requirements, and enabling factors of success. This solution has emerged from the system, and we believe it will be able to facilitate within it.