

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

December, 2021

Policy Prototype

Throughout the lab, “policy change” continually emerged as a key component to any long-term housing solution. Defining this change, however, remained unanswered as Canada’s housing policy, specifically as it relates to autistic adults, is in its infancy.

The newly re-elected prime minister has appointed a federal minister responsible for housing, and we expect to hear soon about the appointment of a Federal Housing Advocate. This represents a cross-road in Canada and an opportunity for our solutions lab work to inform more inclusive and sustainable housing policy and infrastructure for people with disabilities, specifically autistic adults.

The purpose and core concept description

The purpose of the policy brief prototype is to synthesize policy learnings from the lab and develop a succinct, comprehensive policy brief. It strives to inform policy makers about the current experience of housing for autistics, based on what we uncovered in the lab, and propose policy recommendations for both housing and autism.

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

We have partnered with the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance (CASDA) and Sinneave, to develop the policy brief. CASDA already has social and political capital across Canada and Sinneave is a reputable organization that works to improve education, employment and housing outcomes for autistic youth and adults. CASDA coordinates national conversations about autism and brings community voices to the federal government to guide their development of a National Autism Strategy (NAS). Pari Johnston, the principal innovator and lead of this lab, will also work on developing and implementing this prototype.

Guiding questions and new ways of thinking

The national housing crisis in Canada requires a policy shift in how we *do* housing. The National Housing Strategy Act (2019) was a necessary first step in acknowledging the human right to housing and, by extension, the importance of applying human rights principles to all of our actions on housing. Now, we need to extend this conversation to develop a clear commitment to

principles, more inclusive institutions and systems, and resources, for Canada’s most housing insecure populations, including autistics. This needs to honour “*nothing about us without us*” and be centered in lived experiences of positive and negative housing situations, as explored within this Solutions Lab.

Next steps and implementation

We are working on developing the content for the policy prototype. This involves refining our findings and assembling the policy recommendations for a wide range of users – from advocates and families to policy officers and government officials. We plan to develop a 2-pager policy brief, targeting to different federal agencies including:

- CMHC (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation)
- PHAC (Public Health Agency of Canada)
- ESDC (Economic and Social Development Canada)
- National Housing Council

Then, we need will host the conversations with the appropriate policy makers, to leverage our connections and build momentum in this space.

Limiting beliefs, challenges, and how could this fail?

Canada needs inclusive, robust, and sustainable housing policy. The level of responsiveness to hearing and including the autistic experience is yet to be determined and, therefore, the uptake of this policy brief is limited by how progressive and rapid the broader housing system evolves.

