

# **Good Practices in Rooming Houses**

**A research project carried out for the  
Homelessness Partnership Strategy  
Homelessness Knowledge Development  
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada**

**Prepared by**



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# Executive Summary

## Context and objectives

Rooming houses play a critical role in many communities across Canada, providing a low-cost housing option that keeps many people off the streets. Rooming houses are a necessary housing option for low-income, single people, in particular. For those living on social assistance, it is often the only option.

Rooming houses offer a path out of homelessness for those leaving an emergency shelter. And while many do offer safe and affordable housing, others are characterized by a variety of problems: shared bathrooms and kitchens that are often unsanitary; lack of repairs and maintenance resulting in properties that are poorly kept; lack of privacy and security; drinking and drug use; theft; and violence. The relatively low cost and week-to-week or month-to-month leases often result in high turnover.

Shared living space and the life skills, personalities and lived experiences of many rooming house tenants are factors in the presence of conflict and high eviction rates. The rooming house population includes many people who do not have choices, and as such are subject to economic abuse by owners or landlords who refuse to maintain the building, who do not handle tenant-landlord or tenant-tenant conflicts well, and who evict tenants without warning.

The overall intent of this project was to examine rooming houses as one critical housing option for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and to identify good practices in rooming houses as well as programs and services that might help rooming house tenants to sustain their tenancies.

The specific objectives of this research project were to advance the body of knowledge on homelessness by:

- 1) Conducting good practice research on rooming houses; and
- 2) Disseminating results directly to the target group.

## Methodology

This research project had three components:

- 1) An environmental scan of research carried out on rooming houses across Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia using the Internet;
- 2) Interviews with rooming house landlords who use or potentially use good practices in operating their rooming houses. Landlords were also invited to provide feedback on the “good practice” flyer developed as a result of this research; and
- 3) Interviews with coordinators of programs that have been put in place to help rooming house tenants sustain or potentially sustain their tenancies.

All research was qualitative. Once the research data was collected, we worked in collaboration with Homelessness Steering Committees in Greater Moncton, Fredericton and Saint John to share the information and seek feedback on the draft report. We also partnered with the committees in two locations (Moncton, Saint John) to share research findings with landlords and government officials, and to ask for feedback. A “good practice” flyer developed by the researchers was produced, and is included in Appendix 6.4. The dissemination list is included in Appendix 6.5.

## **Key findings**

The research demonstrates overwhelmingly that rooming houses are an important housing option for many individuals who might otherwise be homeless. There is a body of knowledge on good practices in rooming houses that has emerged over the years, although it is not large or extensive. This research adds to this body of knowledge.

Rooming houses and other forms of accommodation that involve shared facilities require much more cooperation and interaction than self-contained apartments, which means that collective rights are essential to their management. One disruptive tenant can make an entire house uninhabitable, and can put a landlord out of business.

There is recognition in the literature that rooming houses are “businesses,” and that landlords need to make a return on investment in order to stay in business.

Registration and regulation of rooming houses is a useful tool to ensure that rooming houses meet standards and codes, and are inspected on a timely basis. However, such regulations should not be too stringent so that landlords are driven out of business.

Encouraging landlords and tenants associations should be encouraged. Events that bring landlords, tenants and housing support workers together (for networking, education, communication) are a good practice.

This research has identified a number of “good practices” in the literature that were validated through interviews with rooming house landlords. Some of these include:

- Good practices that instill a sense of “ownership” in the tenant. These help landlords retain their tenancies over the longer term;
- Good practices that deal with payment of rent, the lack of which is identified as one of the top three problems in rooming houses. Where possible, setting up pay direct at the tenant’s bank is identified as a good practice;
- There are many examples of programs to support tenants to maintain their tenancy, including mediation services for landlords and tenants, programs that actively support tenants, and programs that help expand the rooming house sector. Some suggest that such programs are too costly to be sustainable in the long-term; however, research suggests that the cost to the health care system, when people are homeless, is much greater than when they are not.

## **Conclusions**

This research identified good practices in rooming houses, as well as program initiatives for rooming houses, that if shared could help to enhance the rooming house living experience as one of the critical housing options for those moving out of homelessness or to prevent homelessness. This information was validated through workshops held with rooming house landlords. Rooming houses are a very important option (sometimes the only option) for people who would be otherwise homeless, and this research suggests that there are many ways in which the rooming house sector could and should be improved, stabilized, expanded and, indeed, recognized as a viable housing option.

# 1. Introduction

Rooming houses play a critical role in many communities across Canada, providing a low-cost housing option that keeps many people off the streets. Rooming houses are a necessary housing option for low-income, single people, in particular. For those living on social assistance, it is often the only option.

Rooming houses offer a path out of homelessness for those leaving an emergency shelter. And while many do offer safe and affordable housing, others are characterized by a variety of problems: shared bathrooms and kitchens that are often unsanitary; lack of repairs and maintenance resulting in properties that are poorly kept; lack of privacy and security; drinking and drug use; theft; and violence. The relatively low cost and week-to-week or month-to-month leases often result in high turnover.

Shared living space and the life skills, personalities and lived experiences of many rooming house tenants are factors in the presence of conflict and high eviction rates. The rooming house population includes many people who do not have choices, and as such are subject to economic abuse by owners or landlords who refuse to maintain the building, who do not handle tenant-landlord or tenant-tenant conflicts well, and who evict tenants without warning.

At the time that the proposal for this project was submitted, New Brunswick was the only province in Canada to specifically exclude roomers and boarders from the *Residential Tenancies Act*, leaving the rooming house population without the protection granted to people living in apartments. That changed on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, and roomers and boarders are now included in the *Residential Tenancies Act* in New Brunswick.

A project to identify good practices in rooming houses as well as program initiatives that help “hard-to-house” individuals successfully remain in their rooming house is both timely and instructive. The results of this research project will be shared across the country, and will hopefully assist in maintaining or improving rooming houses as one housing option for individuals moving out of homelessness.

## **1.1. Description of the project and methodology used**

The overall intent of this project was to examine rooming houses as one critical housing option for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and to identify good practices in rooming houses as well as programs and services that might help rooming house tenants to sustain their tenancies.

The specific objectives of this research project were to advance the body of knowledge on homelessness by:

- 1) Conducting good practice research on rooming houses; and
- 2) Disseminating results directly to the target group.

By disseminating the results of the research directly to current landlords, rooming house owners and tenants, it is anticipated that there will be an improvement in relations between tenants and landlords, reduced tension and conflict in rooming houses, and ultimately, less tenant movement in and out of rooming houses (either voluntary or forced).

This project addresses the Homelessness Knowledge Development’s priority domains of trajectories out of homelessness, and practices and interventions. Specific objectives include the following:

- To generate information about good practices in rooming houses that could contribute to making rooming houses a more sustainable trajectory for people moving out homelessness;
- To generate information about initiatives that have been developed and implemented elsewhere in Canada and the US that help rooming house tenants to remain in their rooming house longer; and
- To share the information generated with landlords, tenants, government officials in order to improve services to rooming house tenants, and to make rooming houses a more sustainable trajectory for people moving out homelessness.

For the purposes of this project, “good practices” are defined as emerging guidelines, common themes and practices gleaned from the literature and supported by rooming house tenant and landlord perspectives gained through one-on-one interviews.

### **1.1.1. Research questions**

The research questions were as follows:

- What does the literature tell us about good practices that have helped both landlords and tenants develop and maintain relationships that foster sustainable tenancies;
- For selected landlords, what are the good practices that they have been able to implement that reduce turnover in their rooming houses, and that help to make their rooming house a more viable and sustainable operation? Are such practices potentially applicable to other rooming house operations?
- What programs and services have been put in place by community organizations/ agencies to work with tenants, in particular, to help tenants maintain their tenancies in rooming houses? How successful have such programs been (measured by formal or informal evaluations), and what “good practices” have evolved from such programs?

### **1.1.2. Brief description of methodology**

This research project had three components:

- 1) An environmental scan of the literature, using the Internet;
- 2) Interviews with rooming house landlords who use or potentially use good practices in operating their rooming houses; and
- 3) Interviews with coordinators of programs that have been put in place to help rooming house tenants sustain or potentially sustain their tenancies.

All research was qualitative.

Once the research data was collected, we worked in collaboration with Homelessness Steering Committees in Greater Moncton, Fredericton and Saint John to share the information and seek feedback on the draft report. We also partnered with the committees in two locations (Moncton, Saint John) to share research findings with landlords and government officials, and to ask for feedback. A “good practice” flyer developed by the researchers was produced, and is included in Appendix 6.4. The dissemination list is included in Appendix 6.5.

## **1.2. Literature review**

The annotated bibliography, which is included in Appendix 6.1, includes 21 sources, of which 13 are Canadian. The remaining documents are from Australia, the US and the UK. Some common themes throughout the literature fall into two categories:

- Those aimed at policymakers or groups that advocate for positive housing solutions; and
- Those aimed at landlords and tenants.

The findings from the literature review can be summarized as follows:

### **1.2.1. Policy and Advocacy Themes**

- 1) The research demonstrates overwhelmingly that rooming houses are an important housing option for many individuals who might otherwise be homeless.
- 2) Rooming houses and other forms of accommodation that involve shared facilities require much more cooperation and interaction than self-contained apartments, which means that collective rights are essential to their management. One disruptive tenant can make an entire house uninhabitable, and can put a landlord out of business. This means that:
  - a. Tenant-to-tenant relationships are as important as tenant-to-landlord relationships. Expanding tenants' rights without balancing these rights with those of landlords may make landlords very selective in picking tenants. (Campsie, 1994)
  - b. The basis of all relationships (i.e. tenant-tenant, tenant-landlord) must be mutual respect, courtesy and professionalism, as well as abiding by the provisions in the Residential Tenancies Act. (Oriole Research, 2008)
- 3) There is recognition in the literature that rooming houses are "businesses," and that landlords need to make a return on investment in order to stay in business.
- 4) Registration and regulation of rooming houses is a useful tool to ensure that rooming houses meet standards and codes, and are inspected on a timely basis. However, such regulations should not be too stringent so that landlords are driven out of business. (CMHC, 2006)
  - a. Municipalities should find a balance between ensuring that safety standards are met and providing affordable housing. (CMHC 2001)
  - b. Being licensed should mean that landlords do not need to worry about the threat of NIMBY or municipal authorities shutting them down. (Oriole Research, 2008)
  - c. Make sure the rooming house is legal so if a neighbour is nasty, the city will not shut you down. (REIN Space Forum, 2010)
  - d. In the UK, licensing has brought about improvements. Some tenants experienced significant improvements to the physical condition of their properties including fire safety measures, kitchen and bathroom facilities. (Homelessness & Housing Support Directorate, 2010)
- 5) Associations for rooming house tenants and rooming house landlords should be encouraged. (Distasio et al, 2002)

- a. The promotion/development of a Landlord's Association, based upon an established code of ethics, might increase landlord bargaining power with governing agencies, and might enhance this sector's management practices. (Regional Housing Centre, Kamloops, 2000)
- 6) Events that bring landlords, tenants and housing support workers together (for networking, education, communication) are a good practice. (Rooming House Network Event, May 2010)
- a. Setting up an "introductory service" to help match prospective tenants with private landlords is also a good practice. (Homelessness & Housing Support Directorate 2006)

### **1.2.2. Tenant and Landlord Themes**

- 1) Good practices that instill a sense of "ownership" in the tenant helps landlords retain their tenancies over the longer term. Some good practices identified in the literature:
- a. Hire an on-site manager (or make one of the longer-term tenants the manager), give them duties, pay them well, and reward them often. (Distasio et al, 2002; REIN Space Forum, 2010)
  - b. On-site management appears to significantly lessen tenant tendencies and/or opportunities for drug trafficking, prostitution and property damage. (Regional Housing Centre, Kamloops, 2000)
  - c. Involve tenants in decisions regarding new tenants. Accepting a referral from an existing tenant is a good practice in filling vacancies. (Oriole Research, 2008)
  - d. Make expectations clear to everyone (i.e. expectation that each person clean up after themselves, who is responsible for daily and weekly cleaning/maintenance etc). (Oriole Research, 2008)
  - e. Education around rights and responsibilities for tenants, open and honest communication between landlords and tenants, and the ability to screen for good tenants are all good practices. (Rooming House Network Event, May 2010)
  - f. Even "little things," such as a Christmas cake at Christmas for each tenant will be much appreciated and creates good will. Put up a Christmas tree in the common area since many tenants won't have one in their room. (REIN Space Forum, 2010)
- 2) One of the top three problems in rooming houses is that the tenant is late with or doesn't pay rent. (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2010) Setting up pay direct (automatic account deductions) for tenants, where possible, is identified as a good practice. It ensures that rent will be paid on time. (Oriole Research, 2008)
- 3) There are many examples of programs to support tenants to maintain tenancy, including mediation services for landlords and tenants, programs that actively support tenants, and agencies that provide housing information and can make direct referrals.
- a. Social service and outreach supports for tenants with special needs are identified as a good practice. (Distasio et al, 2002)
  - b. Liaising with a housing worker who can be called in when a tenant is having problems is a good practice for landlords. (Oriole Research, 2008)

- c. Such support programs need to be individualized, not “one size fits all.” (Hwang et al, 2003)
- d. The Rupert Pilot Project (Ward and Associates 1993) demonstrated that providing dedicated social supports to rooming houses could improve social conditions inside the house and enhance the sense of community among the residents, many of whom had been socially isolated and/or homeless. (Tremblay et al, 2010)
- e. The CRC Self-Help model ([www.crcselfhelp.ca](http://www.crcselfhelp.ca)), which uses dedicated workers in a facilitative role to support their rooming houses, has been successful at keeping formerly homeless individuals stably housed over long periods of time. (Tremblay et al, 2010)

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Data collection**

The project began with an environmental scan of research carried out on rooming houses across Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. The original terms of reference of this project specified a timeframe of the past five years. However, we have gone farther back because of the lack of recent research on good practices in rooming houses, and also because earlier work is still relevant. We looked for documents, in particular, that identified best practices that could be put in place to ensure both protection for tenants and viability for landlords. We also attempted to identify programs that have been developed and implemented to help “hard-to-house” individuals successfully remain in their rooming house. We employed a “snowball” technique, using bibliographies of relevant studies to identify further research.

We note that there is not a large body of literature about rooming houses in Canada. However, concentrated efforts have been made in some locations where municipalities, agencies and/or non-profit organizations have realized the importance of rooming houses as an affordable housing option for some individuals who might otherwise be homeless.

We then carried out interviews with 11 rooming house landlords who use good practices and 10 coordinators of programs that help rooming house tenants and landlords find stability and sustainability. All interviews were carried out by telephone. Interviewees were identified either through the literature or through contacts that the researchers had. We also used a “snowball” technique, asking one interviewee to suggest another. All research was quantitative, and we did not ask interviewees to sign consent forms. Landlords were promised confidentiality.

We then drafted a report and “good practice” fact sheets, and working in collaboration with Homelessness Steering Committees in Greater Moncton, Fredericton and Saint John, organized workshops in two of the three cities to validate research findings with landlords and government officials. The “good practice” flyers were also sent to approximately 20 landlords in each of the three locations to ask for their feedback and comments.

Based on that, a final report was completed. The dissemination plan is included in Appendix 6.5. The interview guides are included in Appendix 6.2.

## **2.2. Data analysis**

### **2.2.1. Interviews with rooming house landlords**

In order to capture good practices in rooming houses, interviews were held with 11 landlords located in Toronto, Ottawa, Moncton, Saint John and Fredericton. Landlords were selected for interviews based on referrals from known service providers in the housing and homelessness sector, and also using a “snowball technique” – asking the landlord if s/he knew of any other landlords who might meet the criteria for this research. Criteria for selection was that they owned or operated a rooming house that would be described as a “good place to live” by the tenants.

The interviews were conducted by telephone between November 2010 and February 2011. Interviewees were promised confidentiality; therefore, their names are not included in this report. Three themes emerged from the responses: the business of managing tenancy; building relationships with tenants; and safety and comfort of tenants.

#### **1) Managing Tenancy**

**Selection of tenants** – who gets in and who stays - is paramount to a well-run rooming house. Landlords expressed the importance of asking for references, and checking them. It is common to hear that individuals have no local references, saying they had “*just arrived*” in the city and all their references were “*back home,*” when in fact they were a local resident with bad references. Being able to check out a potential tenant with other rooming house owners would be of value, and could be the function of an association of rooming house owners or landlords.

Some landlords said they will often include current tenants in the selection process. “*If someone isn’t going to fit in with the other tenants, either because they have a different schedule or a different lifestyle, then I won’t take them. It will not work – eventually their differences will result in complaints from my existing tenants.*”

Many landlords expressed that they rented only to men. If they had rooms with private baths and/or kitchens, they would consider renting to women. Their experiences were that mixing males and females resulted in conflicts over cleanliness and hygiene, and sometimes personal safety.

**Collecting damage deposits and rent** – Most landlords stated that the most difficult thing about being a landlord was collecting the rent, even though only about 15-25% of tenants were difficult to collect from. There is so little profit margin in rooming houses that unpaid rents impact the bottom line noticeably, so some landlords make it a rule to only rent to tenants who can provide the full damage deposit on move-in. This protects the landlord if the tenant leaves without paying rent, which seems to happen once or twice a year for most landlords interviewed.

**Tenant management** – “*Tenants need to know the rules, what is expected of them, right from the start*”. Having a rule book, or a list of rules posted in the room, and reviewing them with the tenant during the move-in process is seen as a good practice. That way, the tenant has a good understanding of the rules and can be reminded of them easily.

“*Tenants who cause conflict in the building need to be evicted quickly, before other tenants get discouraged and threaten to leave.*” Landlords felt that dealing with complaints early, and head on, was a good practice. Conflicts, irresponsible behaviour, vandalism and other crime, can be dealt with immediately and best by someone who lives in the building – there is a better chance that the person(s) responsible will be identified and dealt with immediately. An on-site manager

or superintendant is a good practice, and is seen as key to maintaining good tenant relationships and a clean, safe rooming house.

Most landlords expressed their management style as being “firm but fair.” They felt strongly that having house rules was important, but more importantly, enforcing them consistently and in a firm but fair manner was good practice.

**Tenant eviction** - Treating tenants with respect, even when eviction is necessary, was described as being a good practice. One landlord explained, *“Even when I end up having to evict someone, we shake hands. They know I’ve done all that I can, and they understand why they’ve been evicted.”*

## 2) Relationship building

Most of the landlords interviewed were very conscious of the value of taking the time to build a good relationship with each tenant. All cited *treating the tenant with respect* as being the basis of the relationship. Many shared a version of “going the extra mile” or examples of “doing something nice” that set the groundwork for reciprocity. One landlord interviewed drove a tenant to a doctor’s appointment when he heard that his drive fell through; another makes himself available to take tenants to the food bank once a week. One landlord shared that his wife frequently visits one of the tenants who is elderly and primarily alone.

Some landlords talked about the importance of creating a sense of community for the tenants in the rooming house, and how keeping elements of a home intact is a good practice. One landlord told about how he keeps a common room furnished and set up like a living room in a home. The tenants gather there after supper, *“they have become like a family to each other.”* Another landlord told of how he invited all six of his tenants to his home to share a potluck dinner with his family. They took pictures of the evening, had them framed and hung them in the rooming house. The tenants really enjoyed the evening, and were touched by the kind gesture of the framed photos.

A bulletin board posted in a common area can be used to post information for tenants that can improve their quality of life while living in a rooming house. Information about flu clinics, free leisure activities, services for low income people and community events can be very helpful for tenants on low income. *“Most of my tenants are very lonely, but they don’t have a lot of money to do things. Many stay in their room all day, every day, so I like to let them know about things they can do to get them out of the house for a little while.”*

Landlords who are knowledgeable about community support services can better support tenants who are dealing with mental health and addiction issues that may be affecting other tenants in the building (through noise, undesirable visitors, aggressive behaviour).

Knowing how to manage this, or where to refer the tenant for help if s/he wants it, can avoid an eviction of an otherwise good tenant. Getting acquainted with caseworkers can be helpful for the tenant in his/her recovery, if the tenant is agreeable.

Just being on-site regularly and being friendly is seen as a good practice. *“The tenants will get to know you, and will see that you care about them and the building, and usually they will stand up for you and report any tenants who are creating trouble for the building – they kind of protect the place for you.”*

Some landlords were comfortable dealing with conflict, and had developed good resolution skills as a result of their work experience. They felt that dealing with issues immediately and directly

was good practice. Those who were not experienced in conflict resolution cited that a landlord-tenant mediation service would be of value to them. Once or twice a year, an otherwise good tenant might experience some conflict in the building that could benefit from an outside intervention.

### **3) Safety and Comfort**

Some visitors can represent a safety issue for other tenants. *“As soon as I sense trouble starting with an unwelcome guest, I will knock on that tenant’s door, bring him outside and suggest that he ask his guest to leave right away.”* This is possible with an on-site superintendant or manager, and reduces the potential for other tenants to be harmed or to fear for their safety.

Many landlords expressed that cameras inside and outside the building are essential to a safe living environment. *“As soon as I put cameras in, crime dropped almost completely.”*

Good rooming houses are well maintained inside and out. They have rooms that are a legitimate size with good ventilation, and have working locks (preferably deadbolts). The appliances are in good working order, and repairs are done when reported. Fire and smoke detectors are inspected regularly.

An ideal bathroom and kitchen to room ratio is about 1:4 or 5. Some rooming houses have a few rooms that are self-contained. They have their own bathroom or a kitchenette. For shared bathrooms and kitchens, landlords suggest that having an on-site cleaner or contract cleaners to clean daily is a good practice. They say that it contributes to tenants being more respectful of the space. These landlords also make it a requirement that tenants clean up after they have used the space in order to maintain a standard of cleanliness, and they monitor for compliance.

### **4) Summary**

Landlords/superintendants generally express that the key to operating a good rooming house is in selecting good tenants, treating them fairly, keeping a clean house that is well maintained, and dealing with problems quickly, before they get out of hand. Having a respectful attitude towards tenants will yield positive results, and most landlords commented that *“if you’re only in it for the money, you’re in the wrong business.”*

Most of the landlords interviewed have a strong sense of social responsibility and understand that they are providing a service for a sector of the population that is hard-to-serve and requires a degree of compassion and understanding that might be above that required for other types of rental housing.

Most of the rooming house landlords and owners who participated in this research spoke with empathy for the lived experience and living situations of the people who were living in their facilities.

Most of the landlords owned or managed more than one building. Clearly, they had learned many lessons over years of owning or managing rooming houses, and the good practices that they follow allow them to experience a sense of pride and satisfaction that they are able to provide some of the hard-to-house with a place they can call home.

## 2.2.2. Interviews with Key Informants/stakeholders

There have been concentrated efforts in some locations in Canada and elsewhere to implement programs or projects that assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to find and maintain housing, mainly in rooming houses. Some of the most extensive research was carried out by Oriole Research & Design Inc. of Toronto, which was contracted by East York-East Toronto Family Resources to undertake a study of the rooming house sector in Toronto.<sup>1</sup> The objective of this research was to raise awareness of the positive contribution that rooming houses can make as part of the city's housing continuum and to work towards increasing the supply of legal, safe and affordable housing for single people with low incomes.

A scan of the literature, followed by interviews with Key Informants involved in programs or projects to help rooming house tenants and/or landlords, identified a number of different kinds of initiatives that have been effective and have developed good practices. A theme that emerged was that community agencies and municipal governments both have an important and valuable role to play in providing services and programs that support the rooming house sector.

In this section, we look at good practices that have evolved from various kinds of initiatives, including programs that:

1. Support tenants to develop and maintain stable housing;
2. Assist low income individuals to find suitable accommodations;
3. Prevent homelessness through mediation;
4. Develop and expand the rooming house sector; and
5. Support rooming house operators.

To some extent, these categories are arbitrary and overlapping. Programs that support tenants to develop and maintain stable housing also prevent homelessness, for example.

### 1) Supporting tenants to develop and maintain stable housing

The **Rooming House Tenant Support Pilot Project** in Ottawa began as a pilot in the spring of 2008, with funding from the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy. It was part of the Community Action Plan on Homelessness in the city of Ottawa.<sup>2</sup> It was initiated because those who work with the disadvantaged found that while rooming houses are the most affordable housing option for many people, they had become "revolving doors," with people moving back and forth between the rooming houses and the street.<sup>3</sup>

This program matches outreach workers with individuals using two drop-in centres. It involves very structured case management, with the worker meeting initially with the client to help her or him define goals. Each worker has a caseload of 30 people. When their caseload is not full, the worker "hits the street" to put up posters, and make contact with people living in rooming houses.

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<sup>1</sup> Oriole Research & Design Inc. *Shared Accommodation in Toronto: Successful Practices and Opportunities for Change in the Rooming House Sector*, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> [www.ottawa.ca/residents/housing/homelessness/ending\\_homelessness/index\\_en.html](http://www.ottawa.ca/residents/housing/homelessness/ending_homelessness/index_en.html)).

<sup>3</sup> perscomm, Centre 507 Manager

Workers also develop relationships with landlords, who are able to refer their tenants to the program. Workers connect clients to other resources in the community, and also support clients in their desire to move to another housing option.

A 360° evaluation found that *“this program has been a valuable service for service providers and service users. Some service providers expressed an interest in having the RHTS program routinely visit their programs; however, due to small staff and large caseloads this has not yet been possible to accommodate. Most agencies responded that they would like to see our team expand with more staff.”*<sup>4</sup>

#### Best practices/Lessons learned

- The “human factor” is key. The worker needs to be able to connect with the clients, to be non-judgmental and able to establish trust.
- Having the program under the auspices of a larger agency with a history in the city and established credibility is an advantage. It helps to establish trust sooner because the agency is already a “known quantity.”
- Having the right funding formula is key. The program needs to pay workers’ wages, but monies are also needed to help the client get established so that the person is able to make the room their own.
- The case management approach allows for tracking goals and encourages accountability on the part of the client.

**Best Practice Housing Inc.** in Vancouver is another example of a program that supports tenants to develop and maintain stable housing, although without using a case management approach.<sup>5</sup>

The Community Builders Benevolence Group is an incorporated non-profit organization that, because of strategic investments from social entrepreneurs (“benevolent investors”), owns and operates four rooming houses in the Downtown Eastside area of Vancouver. The buildings have a total of 251 rooms, with shared kitchen and bathroom facilities on each floor.

The buildings operate on a “harm reduction” approach in that tenants are welcomed as they are, and are allowed to “use” in their rooms. Dealing and violent and criminal activities, however, are strictly prohibited.

A key element is “ownership” where the organization attempts to foster community spirit in each building so that tenants take ownership of the building. For example, a tenant support program provides a daily breakfast program and periodic “community kitchen” endeavours (e.g., dinners on holidays).<sup>6</sup>

#### Best practices/Lessons learned

- The “bottom-up” style of management creates an atmosphere where tenants feel community spirit. It is their building. They have ownership of it. They take care of it.
- The breakfast program encourages people who might otherwise not do so to leave their rooms, to socialize with other tenants in the building, helping to reinforce “community spirit.”
- Best practices focus on making sure that the building is safe and clean. There are security systems on each floor, steel doors, and a daily cleaning program based on high standards of cleanliness.
- The operation of the four rooming houses is financially sustainable through the rent paid by tenants, although the breakfast and other programs require fundraising.

A 2005 research initiative sponsored by Human Resources and Social Development, Anhart Holdings and the Community Builders Benevolence Group revealed that risk factors to homelessness were reduced by 40-60% after a six-week stay in a rooming house committed to best practices. Of the 100 tenants who were studied over a one-year period, none returned to

<sup>4</sup> Rooming House Tenant Support Pilot Project evaluation, undated

<sup>5</sup> [www.communitybuilders.ca/bestpracticehousing.html](http://www.communitybuilders.ca/bestpracticehousing.html)

<sup>6</sup> [www.communitybuilders.ca/bestpracticehousing.html](http://www.communitybuilders.ca/bestpracticehousing.html)

homelessness after a minimum six-week stay in the facilities. The current “global” rate of recidivism is 5%.<sup>7</sup>

A third example of supporting tenants to develop and maintain stable housing is the **Rupert Pilot Project**, now called the **Rupert Community Residential Services of Toronto Inc.** The Pilot Project began when 10 people died in a rooming house fire at the Rupert Hotel on Parliament Street in 1989. The provincially funded project lasted for three years, and created secure, affordable housing for more than 300 tenants in both private and non-profit houses.

The focus of the project was on the people living in rooming houses, and on using a community development approach to ensure that tenants achieve substantive gains (such as clean and safe housing) and also increase their control over their physical and social environment. It demonstrated that many of the so-called “hard to house” could stay housed if they had access to supportive services, and that rooming houses could provide good-quality accommodation if funds for upgrading were available.

Although the project ended in 1993 when the funding was not renewed, a volunteer group called Rupert Community Residential Services Inc. continues to advocate around rooming house issues in the GTA and to offer emergency help when roomers are evicted.

#### Best practices/Lessons learned

- Advocacy initiatives can thrive based on nothing more than good will and shared commitment, but the implementation of a pilot project involving housing, support services and other considerations require the creation of effective legal and financial controls, and a community-based corporation that builds on a collaborative structure to ensure effective administration (as the Rupert did in the final months of the pilot project).
- Large-scale projects such as the Rupert may be possible, but in an era of restraint it is unlikely that the same level of funding could be secured. Smaller initiatives over a longer-term, which cost less per year to operate but which accomplish its work incrementally, may be possible depending on the right circumstances.
- Advocacy groups need to develop the capacity to better understand the political and social environment in which they operate, in order to anticipate the opportunities for future initiatives to improve the social and physical conditions in rooming houses.

An evaluation concluded: *“Overall, the Rupert pilot project has been a considerable success. It grew from the ashes of the December 23rd, 1989, Rupert Hotel fire, a tragedy that claimed the lives of 10 rooming house tenants in downtown Toronto. That even brought together a large group of concerned citizens, social activists, and social service agency personnel who wanted to ensure that there would not be a repeat. Possibly the Rupert’s most outstanding achievement was that it developed a method for working with this disparate group of people and, by and large, it achieved its objectives.”*<sup>8</sup>

## 2) Assisting low income individuals to find suitable accommodations

The rapid growth of the Internet, with on-line database management capabilities, has encouraged the development of services that help low-income people find housing. In this section, we provide several examples of programs that are less “hands-on” than those described above but which are nonetheless of help to those seeking housing. Although many people who are homeless or at risk do not have access to a personal computer, there are usually locations in any given town or city (e.g., a public library) where such access is possible.

<sup>7</sup> [www.communitybuilders.ca/bestpracticehousing.html](http://www.communitybuilders.ca/bestpracticehousing.html)

<sup>8</sup> Jim Ward Associates. *Making Rooms into Homes: An Evaluation of Toronto’s Rupert Pilot Project.* Toronto, 1993.

The “**Find My Way program**”<sup>9</sup> in Moncton, New Brunswick is an Internet tool that allows individuals to quickly and easily locate the assistance that is available to them, by topic or situation of need. It was created in 2003 to support the successful re-integration of individuals who are faced with various personal and social difficulties, including homelessness, addictions, family breakdown, trouble with the law, poor health, unemployment etc. Its objectives included:

- Enhance the communication, co-operation and overall efficiency of the existing human services sector by enabling greater resource and information sharing among agencies, community organizations, groups and concerned citizens working to support those who seek to help themselves;
- Identify new or underserved areas of need that require further development or additional resources; and
- Contribute to public safety, awareness and equality by supporting the successful rehabilitation and re-integration of community members at risk.

The Find My Way website provides information on rooming houses<sup>10</sup> but it is in no way exhaustive. With additional resources, one would think, it could be greatly expanded to become a very useful tool for both landlords and tenants of rooming houses. No evaluation has been done to date of this tool.

The **Housing Help Association of Ontario** (HHAO) is a provincial association of community based, not-for-profit organizations delivering the spectrum of free *Housing Help* services that prevent and reduce homelessness. The mandate of the Association is to raise awareness and access to these services in the community; to create opportunities for professional development and the sharing of best practices; and to build the capacity of service providers to respond to the housing support needs of their communities through networking and training.<sup>11</sup>

The HHAO provides a range of services, including helping people find a place to live (Housing Access); helping people settle into a new place (Housing Stabilization); helping people avoid having to leave their place (Eviction Prevention) and providing tenants with information about their legal rights and income resources. An interactive map on the HHAO website allows an individual to find an agency to help in any part of the province. No evaluation of this service was identified, although stories posted to the website speak to its success:

- *“I had a client that [sic] wanted to move out of Toronto. With the help of the Housing Help Association of Ontario, I was able to network with Hastings Housing Help to help my client find housing in the area of Bancroft. Such a great network to help housing workers in other areas of the province to see what is available in certain communities.”*<sup>12</sup>
- *“The gentleman had nowhere to go and only had a small amount of money on him and nothing more until the end of the month. The Housing program helped this gentleman to secure temporary housing while helping him fill out applications for a subsidized housing unit. The Housing worker also provided other resources such as information about the food bank as well as information about the few lunch programs in Owen Sound. This gentleman has since moved into his subsidized apartment and all is well.”*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [www.findmyway.ca](http://www.findmyway.ca)

<sup>10</sup> [www.findmyway.ca/index.php?option=com\\_fm&view=search&controller=search&lang=en](http://www.findmyway.ca/index.php?option=com_fm&view=search&controller=search&lang=en)

<sup>11</sup> [www.findhousinghelp.ca/about/](http://www.findhousinghelp.ca/about/)

<sup>12</sup> [www.findhousinghelp.ca/stories/](http://www.findhousinghelp.ca/stories/)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Another example that combines an on-line tool with face-to-face encounters is **Resources Exist for Networking and Training (RENT)**, a comprehensive program offered at the East York East Toronto Family Resources Centre<sup>14</sup> that was developed to help housing workers reduce homelessness and maintain housing for their clients. It offers a range of services for housing workers, landlords and tenants. For housing workers, joining the on-line community offers opportunity for workers to:<sup>15</sup>

- Talk to other housing workers on line about issues affecting clients;
- Attend training sessions about topics housing workers need to know;
- Take TESH (Training of Essential Skills for Housing Workers) for those new to the field;
- Receive information bulletins about the housing help sector and issues that are important to housing workers;
- Access a large library of information and resources workers can use in their work; and
- Participate in the Job Shadow/Mentorship program that matches new housing workers with more experience workers in the sector;<sup>16</sup>

Landlords can sign up and receive:<sup>17</sup>

- Free on-line listings of their affordable rental units;
- Connections to housing workers who will work with them to keep their units filled and provide their new tenants with vital support if needed;
- Access resources and information that landlords need; and
- Opportunities to network with other landlords and with housing workers at the semi-annual Landlord Connect networking luncheons.<sup>18</sup>

Each unit that a landlord fills through [landlordconnect.ca](http://landlordconnect.ca) is affiliated to a housing worker who works for a non-profit agency in the city. The housing worker acts as a third party to assist in keeping tenants housed. Housing workers have access to supports and specialty funds, and will assist both the tenant and landlord if problems arise.

A tenant looking for housing is referred to the Housing Help Association of Ontario (mentioned above), which has a website that assists residents in Ontario to find housing, and also provides staff who can assist with eviction prevention, social housing waiting lists and access to income support.

#### Best practices/Lessons learned<sup>19</sup>

- Building a website is one thing but managing it on an on-going basis is another. Staff is needed to keep the site updated, and also to answer the phones. Housing workers will not necessarily feel comfortable navigating the site.
- Support for tenants means different things to different people. Some housing workers simply hand a list to someone, and tell them to go find housing. That does not work. Someone whose income is \$300 per month needs support (i.e., an advocate). A low-income person seeking housing on their own will inevitably run into discrimination.
- Landlords are not social workers. They are business people. You need someone who is savvy with the business culture, who can engage landlords, and help them to understand “what’s in it for them.”

Mediation is a real challenge. It can be an enormous job, especially if there are several hundred units to fill. RENT initially did very “hands-on” mediation between tenants and landlords, but

<sup>14</sup> [www.eyetfrp.ca/services/housing\\_workers\\_landlords.cfm](http://www.eyetfrp.ca/services/housing_workers_landlords.cfm)

<sup>15</sup> [www.housingworkers.ca](http://www.housingworkers.ca)

<sup>16</sup> [www.eyetfrp.ca/services/housing\\_workers\\_landlords.cfm](http://www.eyetfrp.ca/services/housing_workers_landlords.cfm)

<sup>17</sup> [www.landlordconnect.ca](http://www.landlordconnect.ca)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> perscomm, RENT coordinator

found it didn't have the resources to do so. The group now does a "lighter level," and refers people to other mediation services.<sup>20</sup>

An evaluation of [Landlordconnect.ca](http://Landlordconnect.ca) in 2007 found that the website was assisting housing workers to access the most affordable units (40% of vacancies listed in the past year rented for \$600 a month or less), that housing workers reported improved effectiveness and efficiency in finding housing, and that the website was a vital tool for staff new to the housing help sector. It concluded: "Landlordconnect is an innovative and valuable resource that has been demonstrated to promote linkages between housing workers and landlords. It is these linkages that help vulnerable individuals and families find and maintain their housing. Landlordconnect has already drawn interest from housing workers and landlords outside of Toronto and from other sectors wanting to find ways to use technology to build community capacity. This evaluation report supports the ongoing development and operation of Landlordconnect as a resource for housing search practices in Toronto."<sup>21</sup>

### 3) Preventing homelessness through mediation

The **Rooming House Residents Mediation Service (RHRMS) of the Community Housing Federation** of Victoria, Australia is a free service that helps residents of rooming houses settle their disputes in a fair, confidential and cooperative manner. It is a tenant-tenant mediation service, not tenant-landlord. The RHRMS helps in disputes involving:

- Interference with the use of shared facilities;
- Complaints made about a particular resident to the rooming house owner that the resident considered unfair;
- Annoying and irritating behaviour; and
- Bullying and harassment from another resident/s.

Mediation is designed to promote cooperation and to allow people a chance to resolve the dispute themselves. People who are involved in a dispute meet together to talk to each other about their concerns.

A team of two neutral mediators runs the meeting, and listens to each person to ensure that everyone has a chance to speak and to be heard.

The mediators help everyone to identify the key issues, look at options, and then reach their own agreement. Any agreement reached is strictly confidential.

#### Best practices/Lessons learned

The service is effective because it is easy to use, requires no forms to be filled out or fees paid.

STEP 1 – Telephone us. We will talk to you about ways to resolve the problem yourself, other options available to you and give referrals to other services that might help.

STEP 2 – If mediation is suitable, (and with your permission), we will contact the person/s and invite them to participate in a mediation session.

STEP 3 – If the other person is prepared to come to a mediation session, we will organize a suitable time, and location and book the mediators (and interpreters if required).

STEP 4 – At the mediation session, two trained mediators listen and help you all to discuss the issues and settle the matter.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> perscomm, RENT coordinator

<sup>21</sup> Oriole Research & Design Inc. *Landlordconnect.ca: Pilot Phase Evaluation. Report and Recommendations*. Prepared for Rosalee Bender, RENT Coordinator, East York/East Toronto Family Resources, August 2007.

<sup>22</sup> <http://esvc000034.wic056u.server-web.com/MediationInfoforRoomingHouseTenants.htm>

#### 4) Developing, expanding the rooming house sector

The following are two examples of interesting projects that have helped to expand the inventory of rooming houses, although the Portland Hotel Society uses the term “single-occupancy units.”

The **Portland Hotel Society in Vancouver** is a non-profit organization created in 1993 to advocate, develop and implement creative and responsive services for persons living with concurrent disorders (i.e., mental health issues, addictions). Each resident’s rent is charged at an amount corresponding to the shelter allowance portion of pension or welfare payments. The British Columbia Housing and Mortgage Corporation (a provincial Crown corporation) and the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority fund the program.

##### Best practices/Lessons learned

- Beyond the obvious requirement of substantial and stable funding from funders who appreciate the economic and social value of this type of program, a critical success factor is staffing. Who is hired is critical. Staff must be genuinely flexible, non-judgmental and compassionate in dealing with residents.
- Another success factor is the development of partnerships with related service agencies and community groups, in order to mobilize resources and increase awareness and support for the work.

The hotel has 86 single-occupancy units, each with its own toilet and shower. Most units have minimal facilities for food. Each floor has a common kitchen, laundry facility and lounge. Eight mental health workers provide round-the-clock service to residents, and a variety of services are able on-site. Aside from the guiding criteria outlining who the program serves, the Portland Hotel has no formal intake or admissions process, and few rules and regulations. Emphasis is placed on accepting residents where they are at, and being flexible, responsive and creative in working with them to remain housed and as healthy as possible.

An evaluation on the Shared Learnings on Homelessness website notes: *“The Portland Hotel has succeeded in providing long term housing for people with mental illness, addictions and other problems, and in reducing their susceptibility to harm. Approximately 40 percent of residents stay at the Portland Hotel for about 10 years, while the balance of residents stay four to six years. This contrasts dramatically with the prior history of residents, who typically registered six to eight addresses – or none at all – in the year before moving to the Portland Hotel. Some residents eventually move out to live on their own or with family.”*<sup>23</sup>

Another example that has helped to expand the rooming house sector is the **Toronto Christian Resource Centre (CRC) Self-Help Inc. Housing Office**, founded in 1984 to provide social housing to low-income single people. At present, its portfolio is made up of 33 houses located in different parts of Toronto, with each house having between four and nine rooms. Similar to the Best Housing project in Vancouver, the CRC Self-help uses a “facilitative management model” where residents collaborate closely with each other on the maintenance and management of their house. They share in the upkeep of their house, and contribute towards a joint fund to buy commonly used items (e.g., toilet paper, light bulbs). They are also involved in selecting new tenants. What is interesting about this project is that residents can choose the type of rooming house they wish. Categories include:<sup>24</sup>

- “Dry by program,” for people who go to AA, NA, have a sponsor etc;
- “Dry by choice,” where people do not have alcohol addictions;

<sup>23</sup> [www.sharedlearnings.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Prof.dspProfileFull&profilesId=18131194-83ff-4f31-aea0-37e8756b3d0e](http://www.sharedlearnings.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Prof.dspProfileFull&profilesId=18131194-83ff-4f31-aea0-37e8756b3d0e). Note: The researchers tried without success to contact the general manager.

<sup>24</sup> [www.crcselfhelp.ca/pdf/HousingApplicationForm.pdf](http://www.crcselfhelp.ca/pdf/HousingApplicationForm.pdf)

- “Responsibly wet house,” where one can drink as long as they do not cause problems for others, neighbours or the house; and
- “Women’s house” for women only.

## 5) Supporting rooming house operators

Some municipalities in Canada have set up working groups around rooming houses, recognizing that a rooming house is often the only option for low-income people.

One example is the **Toronto Rooming House Working Group**<sup>25</sup> whose goal is to undertake activities aimed at supporting the maintenance, improvement and expansion of the existing rooming house inventory; the creation of new rooming houses; the tenants who live in rooming houses, and the landlords and others that provide such housing.

The Terms of Reference state that the objective is to provide a forum for interaction and information sharing among rooming house tenants and providers, representatives from community agencies that work with such tenants and landlords, and government representatives, primarily city but potentially provincial and federal.

The Working Group holds monthly meetings. It also convenes consultations, workshops and seminars. The purposes of its undertakings are to achieve the following:

- Influence public policy as it pertains to rooming houses;
- Inform decision makers and the general public on issues that impact on rooming houses, their tenants, landlords and communities;
- Develop effective working relationships among tenants, landlords, homeowners, service providers and government representatives;
- Create a more positive public image of rooming houses; and
- In general, advocate on matters that have to do with the stated goal of the Rooming House Working Group.<sup>26</sup>

This group has existed for 40 years. It worked closely with the Rupert Pilot Project during the time that the project existed. Membership is open to anyone with an interest in rooming house issues, including rooming house tenants and landlords, social agencies and legal clinics.

The Working Group is now exploring a project to support the rooming house sector through concrete interventions that will maintain and improve the rooming house stock. The four components of the project are sales of units (monitoring sales, following up with vendor, offering support to purchaser); supports to landlords (to navigate services and programs such as RRAP [see below] funding); networking with services (formal partnerships between agencies and landlords) and evaluation and outcomes (developing outcome measurement based on project activities that allow continuous evaluation of the project against its goal.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> [www.toronto.ca/housing/rhwg.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/housing/rhwg.htm)

<sup>26</sup> Terms of Reference: Rooming House Working Group, 2004-05.

<sup>27</sup> Perscomm, chair of Working Group

Another example is the **Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) – Rooming Houses** of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation,<sup>28</sup> a federal government program that has provided help to rooming house landlords for many years.

This program offers repair assistance to owners of rooming houses who offer affordable rents to low-income individuals. Owners (landlords) of rooming houses intended as permanent accommodation for the occupants may apply if:

- Rental rates for the bed units are at or below established levels for the market area;
- The property must lack basic facilities, or require major repair in one or more of five categories: structural, electrical, plumbing, heating and fire safety; and
- Tenants are not family members of the owner.

Up to \$16,000 per bed/unit is available. This program is only available on-reserve for rooming houses not owned by the Band.

In this section, we have provided examples of types of programs that have assisted people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to find and maintain housing, mainly in rooming houses as well as programs that have helped to expand the rooming house sector. This list is not intended to be exhaustive. An underlying theme is recognition of the value of rooming houses, as a housing option for people who might otherwise be homeless. Another is the recognition that rooming houses can be financially viable for the landlord while at the same time providing a “good place to live” for a vulnerable population. That is to say, “good practices” can also be good for the bottomline.

While there have been concentrated efforts in some locations to implement such programs, these attempts have not been widespread in Canada nor in other countries. Nonetheless, where evaluations have been done, the results have shown that these programs can be effective in helping to keep “hard-to house” individuals housed, particularly in the rooming house sector.

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<sup>28</sup> [http://cmhc.ca/en/ab/onre/onre\\_012.cfm](http://cmhc.ca/en/ab/onre/onre_012.cfm)

## 3. Discussion

### 3.1. Relevance of research

The relevance of this research hinges on the fact that rooming houses are often the only affordable housing option for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Using the province of New Brunswick as an example, a single individual on provincial social assistance receives a basic rate of \$537 per month.<sup>29</sup> The average monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment in October 2010 was \$577.<sup>30</sup> The average monthly rent in a rooming house was \$350-400, making a rooming house the only affordable option (other than living in a shelter). The situation is similar in other Canadian provinces.

The research questions focused on good practices:

- What the literature tells us about good practices in rooming houses, that have helped both tenants and landlords;
- What rooming house landlords have to say about good practices that they use; and
- What programs and services have been put in place to work with tenants, to help them maintain tenancies in rooming houses, and what evaluations have said about such programs and services.

The research demonstrates that there is a body of literature on good practices in rooming houses and that, according to landlords interviewed, implementing such good practices helps to make a rooming house a more viable and sustainable operation. The literature recognizes that a rooming house is a business and as such, needs to be financially viable in order to be sustainability. High turnover directly impacts the “bottom line.”

A “lesson learned” from this research is that there are, indeed, rooming house landlords who have a “social conscience,” and are trying to do their best with a sometimes difficult “hard-to-house” population. Such landlords should be encouraged, and assisted through programs identified in this research.

One of the challenges in rooming houses, as noted earlier, is that shared living space and the life skills, personalities and lived experiences of many rooming house tenants are factors in the presence of conflict and high eviction rates. “Good practices” recognize that mutual respect must underline the relationships not only between landlord and tenant but also between tenants.

This research has identified several models of programs that address these relationships. Some use case management approaches (e.g., Rooming House Tenant Support Project, Rupert Pilot Project), requiring a commitment or personal investment to change from the tenant. Others use a less structured approach (e.g., Best Practice Housing Inc., Portland Hotel Society), emphasizing “ownership” of the building by tenants, developing pride and community spirit.

Some programs are extremely “hands-on,” working directly one-on-one with the tenant, an approach that some evaluations have suggested may not be sustainable in the long-term. On

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<sup>29</sup> [www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/social\\_development/social\\_assistance/social\\_assistancerate/schedules.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/social_development/social_assistance/social_assistancerate/schedules.html)

<sup>30</sup> [www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/hoficlincl/homain/stda/index.cfm](http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/hoficlincl/homain/stda/index.cfm)

the other hand, a recent study<sup>31</sup> found that homeless individuals are frequently hospitalized, and that homeless patients on medical and surgical services remain hospitalized longer than housed patients, resulting in substantial excess costs to the health care system.

Programs that work directly with rooming house tenants to help them maintain their tenancy in a rooming house might be considered more cost-effective in the long-term.

Probably the most successful programs have been comprehensive ones (such as RENT) where housing workers work “hands-on” with tenants and also connect with landlords, who are able to refer people to the program, and even attend networking events to meet potential tenants. It is a “win-win” situation for all parties, where a tenant is helped to maintain a tenancy and a landlord is able to reduce turnover and keep units filled. In all these programs, a “good practice” is careful consideration of staff. It is critical that people hired are flexible, non-judgmental and compassionate in dealing with residents.

### **3.2. Potential significance of research results**

The potential significance of the research results is that it has identified a body of knowledge about good practices in rooming houses. That knowledge has been validated through a series of interviews with rooming house landlords. This research could help to inform existing rooming house operations or start-ups, as a way of stabilizing this very important housing option for the homeless or those at risk of homelessness.

### **3.3. Linkages or partnerships with or within the homeless community resulting from this project**

Research gathered was shared with homelessness steering committees in Greater Moncton, Saint John and Fredericton, NB. Linkages were also made with a number of organizations across the country that currently deal with the homeless community. Their names are listed in Appendix 6.3.

The researchers also connected with rooming house landlords in Toronto, Ottawa, Moncton, Saint John and Fredericton.

Once approved, this research will be widely distributed to other agencies and organizations. The dissemination list is provided in Appendix 6.5.

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<sup>31</sup> Stephen Hwang, James Weaver, Tim Aubry and Jeffrey S. Hoch. *Hospital Costs and Length of Stay Among Homeless Patients Admitted to Medical, Surgical and Psychiatric Services*. Medical Care, Volume 00, Number 00, 2011.

## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

This research identified good practices in rooming houses, as well as program initiatives for rooming houses, that if shared could help to enhance the rooming house living experience as one of the critical housing options for those moving out of homelessness or to prevent homelessness.

A literature review was completed, and interviews with landlords and with program coordinators were conducted. The “good practices” identified were shared with landlords in workshop settings, and also e-mailed to a number of landlords. This provided landlords the opportunity to provide feedback on the practicality of the good practices presented.

The findings from this research will be disseminated to landlords and tenants, in the form of a two-page hand-out (Appendix 6.4). It is hoped that this research will also be used by community and government agencies and organizations to implement programs and services that can enhance the rooming house experience and increase length of stay by tenants. At the same time, the research can be used by tenants to increase awareness and become a better tenant, and perhaps a more discerning tenant when searching for a place to live. The findings also point to the need for more research in the area of rooming house management, and impacts of rooming house legislation in New Brunswick.

### 4.1. *Specific recommendations for services, policy, programs*

Recommendations emerging from this research are presented below by area of responsibility or ownership. ***It is recommended that:***

1. **Landlords** strongly consider forming an association to provide support and exchange information about legislation, management practices, tenant referrals and programs and services. Landlords who attended the workshops stated that meeting and talking with other landlords in that setting was very helpful to them. Having a landlord association might also help to reduce abuse of the rooming house sector (i.e., by not paying their rent) by the small percentage of tenants who do so. A tenant association would also be a good idea, although given the transitory nature of most people who live in rooming houses, this idea may not be realistic.
2. **Rentalsman’s Offices** in all provinces distribute the flyer developed during this research for landlords, and for tenants, to educate both groups on good practices. The information could help reduce some conflict within rooming houses, thereby decreasing the number of disputes and evictions;
3. **Municipalities** consider the implementation of a licensing or registration system for rooming houses. (We note that some municipalities across Canada require rooming houses to be registered, although this is not consistent across the country.) Development of such a system should include collaboration with existing rooming house owners and tenant representatives to ensure that the impact of registration requirements on all stakeholders is considered. Research demonstrates that in areas where rooming house registration systems have been implemented, one impact has been that conditions (i.e., fire, safety, cleanliness) have improved. Registration of rooming houses would also provide a mechanism for getting information out to landlords about changes in legislation, government grants and loans for repairs and upgrades, as well as information that could assist the landlord in maintaining a more viable business.

4. **Municipalities** also consider the implementation of a formal tenant-landlord mediation process for rooming house tenants and landlords, and provide resources for the service to be offered by a neutral party.
5. **Community agencies and/or government departments** consider developing an “information bulletin” to advertise free services, events, leisure activities and programs, and that such a bulletin be sent to rooming house tenants on a regular basis (e.g., monthly). The information bulletin could also be sent to landlords (most of whom have e-mail addresses) who could, in turn, post the bulletin in their rooming houses. Landlords stated that having a bulletin board with information for tenants would be very helpful since many rooming house tenants experience boredom and loneliness because they do not have resources to access paid leisure activities. This kind of gesture would benefit both tenants and landlords, and help to develop a sense of “community” within the rooming house.
6. **Community agencies and/or government departments** consider collaborating with rooming house owners to provide on-site services because many tenants are limited by resources to access these services off-site.

#### ***4.2. Areas for further research***

The findings point to the need for more research in the area of rooming house management and the impacts on the sector of using “good practices.”

Given the situation in New Brunswick, that roomers and boarders are now included under the Residential Tenancies Act (as of April 1, 2010), there is a need to monitor the implementation of this legislation in order to assess the impacts on both landlords and tenants.

This research has identified examples of programs and services that have been effective in helping tenants maintain their tenancy in a rooming house as well as programs that also work effectively with landlords. Based on the literature review and interviews, some of these programs are very “labour intensive,” and, some suggest, not sustainable for that reason. On the other hand, studies such as the recent one by Steven Hwang et al (mentioned in section 3) suggest that the cost to the health care system, when people are homeless, is much greater than when they are not. There is a need for further research in this area, looking specifically at the rooming house sector.

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## WEBSITES

Best Practice Housing [www.communitybuilders.ca/bestpracticehousing.html](http://www.communitybuilders.ca/bestpracticehousing.html)

Best Practice Housing exists to provide safe and supportive housing for persons that are at risk to homelessness through self-sustaining social housing networks. In Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, three privately owned rooming houses (Jubilee, Dodson and Powell Rooms) provide safe and supportive housing for 175 persons that are at-risk to homelessness or substandard housing. I have sent a note for more information. Maybe someone here we could interview.

Homeless Hub [www.homelesshub.ca/](http://www.homelesshub.ca/)

A website dedicated to research on homeless issues across Canada

Housing Help [www.housinghelp.on.ca/home](http://www.housinghelp.on.ca/home)

Based in Ottawa, Housing Help believes that every person has the right to secure, adequate and affordable housing. Housing Help's mission is to advocate those rights and to support disadvantaged people in meeting their housing needs. Housing Help is a one-stop housing information and assistance agency. From simple tenancy questions to the crisis of homelessness, we work to solve a wide range of tenant and landlord issues.

Raising the Roof [www.raisingtheroof.org/ss-reso-index.cfm](http://www.raisingtheroof.org/ss-reso-index.cfm)

Created as a result of a national consultation on homelessness conducted in 1996. Experts from across the country expressed a need for an organization that would play a key role in facilitating shared strategies to end homelessness - strategies that would show people in tangible, practical terms what they can do in their own communities to prevent and address current problems of homelessness.

Real Estate Investment Network (on Facebook)

[www.facebook.com/RealEstateInvestmentNetwork](http://www.facebook.com/RealEstateInvestmentNetwork)

The Real Estate Investment Network™ ("REIN™") is a Canadian based business that has been supporting Canadian real estate investors, from beginner to veteran since 1992. Its members have purchased over \$2.6 billion of Canadian real estate, each member purchases their own properties, and this is not a purchase pool, so the information provided is completely unbiased. We keep on top of everything to

## 6. Appendices

### 6.1. Annotated Bibliography

In this annotated bibliography, we present only documents that include best practices (although they are not necessarily labelled as such). The selected bibliography that follows includes other documentation and reports on rooming houses in general.

#### 6.1.1. Canada

1. Campsie, Philippa. (1994) *A Brief History of Rooming Houses in Toronto, 1972-94*. Prepared for the Rupert Community Residential Services.

This research presents an interesting overview of the history of rooming houses in Toronto. After a fire in 1972 where a rooming house tenant died, the Toronto City Council passed two by-laws in 1974, one that required owners of non-owner-occupied rooming houses with five or more tenants to obtain a license and submit to yearly inspections, and a second, which set standards for fire protection and maintenance. The result was that nearly half of the rooming houses in the city went out of business, in order to avoid the expense of structural alternations to provide secondary exits and fire doors. By the mid-1970s, rooming houses had become part of the “urban redevelopment process,” the “filtering down” of housing stock from one socioeconomic group to another as landlords purchased large residences, and converted them to rooming houses. The report also notes that deinstitutionalization added to the numbers of the chronically “hard to house.” It also documents the controversy surrounding the rise of “bachelorettes” in Parkdale, which in the end some concluded was simply a response to the desperate need for affordable housing in the city.

This report (written in 1994) notes that the Toronto Rooming House Association (created for landlords in the 1970s, revived in the 1990s) has about 450 names on its mailing list at present, but suffers from a lack of resources. Its president at the time argued that private landlords are able to provide housing at less cost to the public than the non-profit sector. In 1987, after lobbying and demonstrations by tenants’ rights groups, the Landlord and Tenant Act was amended to include boarders and roomers in its provisions. Some conclusions:

- Security of tenure is an essential aspect of permanent housing. However, the dilemma of tenants’ rights is the need to balance the rights of the individual with the rights of the collective. Tenants sometimes need protection from each other, not just from landlords.
- Rooming houses and other forms of accommodation that involve shared facilities require much more cooperation and interaction than self-contained apartments, which means that collective rights are essential to their management. One disruptive tenant can make an entire house uninhabitable, and can put a landlord out of business.
- Expanding tenants’ rights without balancing these rights with those of landlords may make landlords very selective in picking tenants.

2. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). (2006) *Profile of Rooming House Residents*. Socio-economic Series 06-019.

Rooming houses, one of the most inexpensive types of housing in most cities, play an important role in addressing the housing needs of very low-income single people. This study had three main objectives:

1. Create a profile of rooming house residents in three cities;
2. Assess residents' views about the affordability and quality of rooming houses; and
3. Determine whether residents consider rooming houses as temporary or permanent housing.

Researchers interviewed 240 rooming house residents – 80 in Vancouver, 80 in Ottawa and 80 in Montréal – and a small number of landlords in each city. Findings included:

- There appears to be a widening gap between what tenants can afford to pay for a room and the cost of operating a rooming house;
- Economic pressures, such as the aging of the building stock and the rising cost of utilities, operations and general maintenance, could threaten the sustainability of the rooming house sector because other investment options are becoming more attractive to landlords;
- As the population ages, so will rooming house residents age – making the need for “supportive housing” more pressing;
- Good quality rooming houses can play a role in the array of housing options for low-income people and those who choose this form of housing for lifestyle reasons;
- There is growing pressure on cities to further regulate rooming houses and enforce violations to ensure properties are properly maintained. At the same time, there is danger that regulatory requirements will drive both good and bad landlords out of the business as a result of the increasing cost of meeting such requirements; and
- There is a need for different government sectors to work together to maintain or increase the affordability of rooming houses.

3. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). (2002) *Initiatives to Maintain Rooming House/Single Room Occupancy Stock and Stabilize Tenancies*. Socio-economic Series 102.

Outside of social housing, rooming houses and single room occupancy (SRO) units are the least expensive form of permanent housing, and essential for very low-income single people. This study looked at approaches to conserving rooming house and SRO stock, and stabilizing tenancies. A range of initiatives was addressed in seven case studies, and findings are presented here:

- Conflict resolution – A mediation service provided by qualified mediators who operate on the basis of community vision, neutrality, impartiality and education can be effective in resolving conflicts between landlords and tenants, and avoiding evictions;
- Public education – Public education and information are essential to the successful retention and development of rooming house stock;

- Community development – The Portland Hotel Society in Vancouver provides 24-hour “asylum” for socially alienated people, using a “no eviction” approach with the goal to find alternate housing before tenants are evicted. Success is due to the cooperation of many levels of government including housing, health, social development and the attorney general;
- Building construction – There are usually government monies available for the renovation of existing single-family homes into rooming houses and/or bachelorette units;
- Supportive housing – Founded in 1982, the non-profit Supportive Housing Coalition in Toronto is an agency providing permanent, safe, affordable accommodation including 16 rooming houses, for mental health consumer-survivors at 40 locations across the city. Difficulty in adding new rooming house stock because of the need for 24-hour staffing led the Coalition to transform some rooming houses into “congregate living” with a staff member on site or to contract these properties to outside agencies.

The study concluded that strong landlord-tenant and tenant-tenant relationships have many benefits, which include enhanced retention as well as expansion of rooming house stock, awareness of legal rights and responsibilities, and good building maintenance. Involvement of both landlords and tenants in the planning and development process avoids future conflicts.

4. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). (2001) *Regulatory Factors in the Retention and Expansion of Rooming House Stock*. Socio-economic Series 48.

Rooming houses are one of the least-costly forms of transitional and permanent accommodation available to low-income Canadians. There is a growing demand for this type of accommodation due to such factors as growth in single-person households, increasing homelessness and growing student housing demands. This study looked at how rooming houses are regulated in Canada, and provided information on a number of strategies to stabilize the rooming house stock, which is under constant threat from a variety of forces. Findings include:

- Municipalities should find a balance between ensuring that safety standards are met and providing affordable housing options;
- Municipalities should take steps to slow the conversion of rooming house stock to other forms of accommodation;
- There is a need for licensing and/or registration of rooming houses. Tracking the number of rooming houses is important, as it enables municipalities to evaluate the impact of particular forms of legislation and regulations, and determine whether more or fewer rooming houses are needed. Licensing is recommended as the best means of ensuring units are inspected on a regular basis; and
- The cost of meeting regulations and standards must be considered when setting regulations.

This study profiled rooming house regulatory practices and conditions in 11 cities selected from five regions in Canada. (No cities in New Brunswick were included.)

5. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). (1999) *Documentation of Best Practices Addressing Homelessness*. Distinct Housing Needs Series, Research Division, CMHC.

The selection criteria for choosing effective practices for this report included:

- Involvement of homeless persons and front-line service providers in developing solutions;
- Empowerment of homeless persons to access services, develop skills and actively pursue the goal of independence;
- A safe and secure environment, especially for vulnerable groups such as women, children and youth; and
- Provision of a variety of services to respond to the varying needs of the homeless populations.

This report is not geared specifically to best practices in rooming houses. However, several case studies of agencies presented point to the need for an intensive off-site, short-term case management and planning services for shelter users who require additional intervention and support to transition and maintain themselves successfully within the community. This includes special support to help people access and maintain a tenancy in a rooming house.

6. Distasio, Jino, Michael Dudley and Mike Maunder. (2002) *Out of the Long Dark Hallway: Voices from Winnipeg's Rooming Houses*. Winnipeg: Winnipeg Inner-city Research Alliance.

The focus of this research was to learn about rooming houses in several areas of Winnipeg, the people who live in them and those who share the neighbourhood. The data and insights gathered through surveys, in-depth interviews and a workshop were intended to assist with the development of programs, policies or other initiatives geared towards improving rooming house accommodations. The research focused, in particular, on the creation of strategic partnerships and enhanced information sharing between landlords, tenants, area residents and local businesses.

Best practices were identified according to four key themes, and recommendations/best practices were proposed within each theme (10 recommendations total).

1) Affordability and support provision:

- Increase shelter allowance for tenants (was currently \$236 per month; what landlords were able to offer at that rate was bare minimum accommodation). Level should allow owners to provide reasonably spacious and clean rooms, safe, functional shared space, regular maintenance (including caretaker) and reasonable profit for owner.
- A government subsidy program for employed tenants (an increase in shelter allowance will drive up rents, reducing the affordability for the working poor).
- Social service and outreach supports for tenants with special needs.

2) Tenant relationships:

- Ensure rooming houses have adequate "in-house" support in the form of live-in caretakers.

- Supports, financing, information and guidance should be provided to encourage the formation and running of associations for rooming house tenants and rooming house owners.
- Encourage communication between owners and the community (research showed that in neighbourhoods where owners have made an effort to cooperate with the neighbourhood to make their properties part of the community, rooming houses were perceived in relatively positive light).

3) Physical improvements (especially safety, bathroom ratios):

- Government should review occupancy standards to ensure a reasonable minimum space allowance is enforced.
- Owners ensure a reasonable tenant-to-bathroom ratio be set at 4:1.
- Improve safety-crime prevention measures.

4) Financial affordability for owners (no detail)

7. Hwang, Stephen, Russell Wilkins, Michael Tjepkema, Patricia J. O'Campo and James R. Dunn. (2009) *Mortality among residents of shelters, rooming houses and hotels in Canada: 11-year follow-up study*. Centre for Research on Inner City Health, Keenan Research Centre, Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute, St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto ON.

The objective of this research was to examine mortality in a representative nationwide sample of homeless and marginally housed people living in shelters, rooming houses and hotels in Canada between 1991-2001. Of 15,100 homeless and marginally housed people enumerated in the 1991 census, 3,280 died. The report concludes that living in shelters, rooming houses and hotels is associated with much higher mortality than expected on the basis of low income alone. Reducing the excessively high rates of premature mortality in this population would require interventions to address deaths related to smoking, alcohol and drugs, and mental disorders and suicide, among other causes. These findings emphasize the importance of considering housing situation as a marker of socioeconomic disadvantage. It recommends further work to evaluate interventions to improve the health of homeless and marginally housed individuals, including interventions that improve housing affordability and quality.

8. Hwang, S., R. Martin, D. Hulchanski and G. Tolomiczenko. (2003) *Rooming House Residents: Challenging the Stereotypes*. Research Bulletin no.16, Institute of Urban Studies, Toronto.

This study provides a demographic profile of Toronto's rooming house residents. Some findings include:

- About a third of those interviewed were employed, nearly 15% had university degrees, and about 80% felt they had adequate social supports;
- Roomers include the working poor (not just those on social assistance), some well-educated individuals, and people who are by no means socially isolated; and
- Other than the fact that most roomers live alone (since few rooming houses can accommodate couples or families), have low incomes, and are therefore often food insecure, it is not possible to make many valid generalizations about roomers' lives.

The findings challenge the stereotype of roomers as socially isolated individuals and of rooming houses as being places in which people generally avoid interaction, although the researchers concede that it was probably the people who are more sociable who were willing to be interviewed. The implications for rooming house support programs is that there cannot be a “one size fits all” kind of program to help individuals access and maintain tenancy in a rooming house.

9. Oriole Research & Design Inc. *Shared Accommodation in Toronto: Successful Practices and Opportunities for Change in the Rooming House Sector:*

- *Component 1: Good Practices in Toronto’s Rooming House Sector, May 2008*
- *Component 2: Profile of Rooming House Tenants, May 2008*
- *Component 3: Three Business Cases: The Economics of Rooming Houses in Toronto, May 2008*
- *Executive Summary and Recommendations.* Prepared for East York East Toronto Family Resources and the Rooming House Working Group, June 3, 2008. Accessed September 11, 2010 at [www.toronto.ca/housing/pdf/eyet\\_component1\\_report.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/housing/pdf/eyet_component1_report.pdf)
- *Final Report: Rooming House Networking Group Event – Comments, feedback and impressions.* A rooming house networking and research event held May 18, 2010 based on above report.

Oriole Research and Design Inc. was contracted in February 2008 by East York East Toronto Family Resources to undertake a study of the rooming house sector in Toronto, to raise awareness of the positive contribution rooming houses make as part of the city’s housing continuum and to work towards increasing the supply of legal, safe and affordable housing for single people with low incomes. The study had three main components: an inventory of “good practices” in the rooming house sector; a profile of rooming house tenants; and business cases for the development and operation of rooming houses.

The good practices identified were collected from both tenants and landlords, and spanned four main themes:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical and location characteristics</li> </ul>	<p><b>From the viewpoint of tenants:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being close to amenities such as public transportation, affordable grocery stores, a pharmacy and services such as libraries and food banks;</li> <li>• Having rooming houses situated throughout the city, not just in downtown locations, and not always near large low income housing developments;</li> <li>• Being part of residential neighbourhoods or neighbourhoods that are mixed use (commercial and residential).</li> </ul> <p>Desirable physical characteristics of rooming houses mentioned by tenants include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The dwelling being indistinguishable from other houses in the neighbourhood;</li> <li>• Minimal alterations to the inside of the house, other than locks on bedroom doors;</li> <li>• Well-maintained house and property;</li> <li>• Each resident having his or her own room;</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organized so that five or fewer residents are sharing a bathroom or kitchen, or having a bathroom and minimal cooking facilities located in each room.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>From the viewpoint of landlords:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessing conversion costs and comparing costs to the rent level afforded by tenants on social assistance;</li> <li>Comparing costs and potential revenue between properties;</li> <li>Investigating zoning and applicable by-laws for the area, determining if prior renovations to the dwelling were legal, and checking for any outstanding work orders on the property.</li> </ul>
• Landlord-tenant relations	<p><b>From the viewpoint of tenants:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Owners treating tenants with respect, courtesy and professionalism, and abiding by provisions of the Residential Tenancies Act;</li> <li>Landlord having a solid knowledge of business practices and being willing to be “hands on” with tenants to help diffuse tensions or listen to concerns.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>From the viewpoint of landlords:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Their own networking or accepting a referral from an existing tenant is a good practice in filling vacancies;</li> <li>Liaising with a housing worker who knows the landlord and the rooming house to identify an applicant who would fit in with existing tenants;</li> </ul>
	<p><b>From both:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need for reciprocal “give and take” relationship between landlords and tenants;</li> <li>Careful screening of potential new tenants;</li> <li>Some rooming house tenants and some landlords need to be able to access community supports that are aimed at meeting the individual needs of tenants. Some tenants need short or longer-term financial assistance. Others need a variety of interventions that may be short term, sporadic or on an emergency basis, long term or on-going.</li> </ul>
• Rooming house management	<p><b>From the viewpoint of tenants:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Landlords should be flexible about the last month’s rent deposit;</li> <li>Doors and locks that work properly and a secure entrance to each floor when tenants are not sharing amenities between floors;</li> <li>Being proactive in making repairs.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>From the viewpoint of landlords:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need for better insurance rates for rooming house owners;</li> <li>Hiring a tenant to assist with monitoring, maintenance and repairs.</li> <li>For large jobs, there is value in hiring a qualified trades person and obtaining detailed, written quotes.</li> <li>Accessing a forgivable loan through RRAP is a good practice to finance extensive repair and renovation work.</li> </ul>

	<p><b>From both:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pay direct for tenants on social assistance is considered a good practice by both; this ensures that rent is paid on time;</li> <li>• Keeping rents down to the level that can be afforded by individuals on social assistance; making use of rent supplements if possible;</li> <li>• Using a lease is a good practice (required in some provinces);</li> <li>• Expectations within the house must be clear to everyone (i.e. expectation that each person clean up after themselves);</li> <li>• Need for adequate insurance coverage;</li> <li>• Need for clear mental health and police emergency response protocols;</li> <li>• Regular and ongoing monitoring of rooming house properties;</li> <li>• Clarity is needed about who is responsible for daily and weekly maintenance and how this work is done;</li> <li>• Hiring a caretaker to monitor and maintain the property daily or several times per week.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rooming house regulation and support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Previous studies point to how strict regulations applied to rooming houses can appear to drive landlords out of the business or impede the creation of a new supply;</li> <li>• Previous studies noted the usefulness of licensing as a way of knowing the number, location and condition of rooming houses and to ensure regular inspections;</li> <li>• Previous studies note that proactive enforcement of regulations through regular inspections is seen as a better practice than inspections triggered by complaints;</li> <li>• Landlords in this study were aware of potential benefits of licensing including the prospect of not having to operate in a climate characterized by the threat of NIMBY or municipal authorities shutting them down.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education in the rooming house sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study noted that education for rooming house landlords is a good practice. Such education could revolve around such issues as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Property management principles for small rental properties;</li> <li>-Zoning, by-law management, rooming house licensing practices and building permits;</li> <li>-Legal issues and relevant legislation including the Residential Tenancies Act;</li> <li>-Dealing with the fire marshal, inspectors, contractors;</li> <li>-How to handle difficult tenants and tenants in crisis;</li> <li>-Roles of housing help workers, housing follow-up workers, and housing support workers in keeping tenancies stable; and</li> <li>-Community resources of landlords and vulnerable low income tenants.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The role of housing workers in the rooming house sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is an important role that housing workers can play to support tenants in finding and maintaining accommodation;</li> <li>• Landlords recognize this important role and may turn to a housing worker to help fill a unit;</li> <li>• A key informant interview with a mental health worker</li> </ul>

	<p>highlighted good practices when working with newly housed tenants with mental health issues. These are grouped as follows: -Provide intensive support for the individual at time of move-in; -Provide the landlord with a direct connection to a housing or support worker; -Offer on-going support.</p>
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10. Regional Housing Centre. (2000) *Kamloops Rooming House and SRO Inventory*. City of Kamloops, BC.

The Regional Housing Centre performed an inventory of the licensed rooming houses and SRO's in Kamloops. The purpose was to provide accurate, current information to municipal planners, non-profit housing agencies, and BC Housing so that they may more effectively and proactively generate policy and plans for affordable and/or social housing within the community.

Some key findings that could be considered “good practices” include:

- On-site management appears to significantly lessen tenant tendencies and/or opportunities for drug trafficking, prostitution and property damage;
- One cannot assume that the rooming houses and SRO's provide “affordable” housing, or that they meet our community's total needs for “hard to house” housing;
- The promotion/development of a Landlord's Association, based upon an established code of ethics, might increase landlord bargaining power with governing agencies, and might enhance this sector's management practices;

11. Tremblay, Jacques and Paul Denison. (2010) *Shared Accommodation in Downtown Toronto: A New Approach to an Old Problem*. A Community-Based Research Project of the Toronto Christian Resource Center, Wellesley Institute, Toronto, ON.

Rooming houses are the only truly affordable housing provided by the private market. However, in the former city of Toronto, they are often chaotic living environments that make it difficult for tenants, many of whom are recovering from mental health and/or addiction problems. Landlords generally do not have the skills and capacity to provide social supports to their tenants and are often overwhelmed by this additional burden of “social property management.” The purpose of this report was to examine the possibilities for improving such environments, using supports provided to the house by existing social service agencies and other community organizations. Researchers interviewed 25 tenants and five landlords. Based on this information, the report outlines two models for a particular type of “supported rooming house” that could be developed further in a second phase of this project.

- The Rupert Pilot Project (Ward and Associates 1993) demonstrated that providing dedicated social supports to rooming houses could improve social conditions inside the house and enhance the sense of community among the residents, many of whom had been socially isolated and/or homeless.
- The CRC Self-Help model ([www.crcselfhelp.ca](http://www.crcselfhelp.ca)), which uses dedicated workers in a facilitative role to support their rooming houses, has been successful at keeping formerly homeless individuals stably housed over long periods of time.

The experiences of the Rupert project and CRC Self-Help indicate the success of using targeted and rooming house-specific social supports to help compensate for the inherent limitations of living in small, shared spaces and to take advantage of the potential of shared living to build a supportive community atmosphere.

The researchers, based on previous experience helping to stabilize rooming houses, already had a sense that it often takes three factors to “turn around” a house:

1. Support from local agencies;
2. A landlord who works cooperatively with local agencies and sees him/herself as a provider of affordable housing embedded within the social service milieu in a given neighbourhood; and
3. An engaged tenant.

This describes a potentially new type of supported rooming house - a hybrid between a traditional independent rooming house and other forms of supportive housing - that can create a much more livable environment for its residents.

12. Rooming House Networking Group Event – Comments, feedback and impressions. (May 18, 2010)

Following publication of the above report (Tremblay et al, 2010), a rooming house networking and research event was held on May 18, 2010 at 519 Church Street Community Centre in Toronto. Notices were sent to all licensed rooming house operators, some unlicensed landlords and housing workers. About 85 people attended. The event included a presentation of the rooming house study, *Shared Accommodation in Downtown Toronto: A New Approach to an Old Problem* by its authors Jacques Tremblay and Paul Denison; a question and answer period; a brainstorming session for landlords and housing workers and a brief networking session.

The following issues were highlighted in the study: **a) tenant-to-tenant relationships**; **b) maintenance** (including pest control, cleanliness, repairs, etc.); **c) landlord/tenant relationships** (including crisis management); and **d) a range of other issues including training, funding, community development, agency supports and communication.**

In the brainstorming session, landlords (two groups) and housing workers (six groups) were separated and asked to comment on how they saw these issues being resolved. This document summarizes the feedback.

**Tenant-to-tenant relationships** was one of the major issues highlighted in the study. Landlords presented many different ideas as to how to improve tenant-to-tenant relationships. They stressed that facilitating better communication between tenants would help immensely.

Other ideas included:

- Agencies supporting tenants with rent;
- Education around rights and responsibilities for tenants;
- Promotion of effective communication courses for tenants;
- Open and honest communication between landlords and tenants;
- The ability to screen for good tenants;
- More networking amongst support staff; and

- Stress management and crisis intervention.

Housing workers felt that they could help improve tenant-to-tenant relationships by:

- Promoting direct communication among tenants;
- Ensuring that clients remained housed;
- Helping match landlords with appropriate client groups;
- Connecting with landlords more often about the situations in their houses; and
- Getting to know clients/tenants more thoroughly

Housing workers felt that landlords could help in a variety of ways, including:

- Understanding housing worker roles and responsibilities;
- Promoting basic, respectful communication in houses;
- Being willing to work together;
- Helping to understand the hardships that tenants face; and
- Being tolerant and understanding.

**On maintenance** (including pest control, cleanliness, repairs, etc.), landlords thought that good relationships are a necessary factor to issues being resolved. Landlords presented the idea of social enterprise as a way for tenants to provide maintenance support to landlords. Most felt that tenants could play a big role in improving the overall maintenance of the houses.

**On landlord-tenant relationships**, landlords also felt the need for relationship building with their tenants. In encouraging successful tenancies and landlord-tenant relationships, landlords stressed the importance of improved communication that would help to build stronger relationships.

In encouraging stronger relationships, landlords presented the following ideas:

- Have clients at the same location for agency support services;
- Build social supports among clients and connect them to one agency;
- Establish different levels of support with mixed housing models; and
- Maintain strong agency contact.

In terms of building relationships in rooming houses, landlords suggested the following:

- More networking among supports;
- More training courses for landlords and tenants; and
- Make social work training available for landlords so that they can balance the business and personal issues related to rooming houses.

Overall, the rooming house networking/research event successfully helped landlords, tenants and housing workers to work together and brainstorm potential solutions to existing rooming house issues. The general consensus from all groups was that the study and event helped to establish a support network between all relevant stakeholders. This event in itself might be considered a “good practice.”

13. Real Estate Investment Network on Facebook (REIN Space Forums)  
[www.facebook.com/RealEstateInvestmentNetwork](http://www.facebook.com/RealEstateInvestmentNetwork)

The Real Estate Investment Network™ (“REIN™”) is a Canadian based business that has been supporting Canadian real estate investors, from beginner to veteran, since 1992. Its members

have purchased over \$2.6 billion of Canadian real estate, each member purchases their own properties, and this is not a purchase pool, so the information provided is completely unbiased. The network keeps on top of everything to do with Canadian real estate. A recent discussion between rooming house landlords identified the following “good practices.”

- Screen your tenants very carefully with respect to substance abuse and possible violent tendencies; get housing references and housing histories;
- Find someone to be a resident manager or 'house Mom.' Pick someone good, pay them well and reward them often;
- Give your tenants the opportunity to approve a new tenant to make sure that the new person fits in okay with other tenants;
- Keep the property immaculate and very clean to attract the quieter tenants who for one reason or another, don't have a lot of cash right now. Maybe they're students, are on welfare, or have low paying jobs;
- Be kind. Things such as a Christmas cake at Christmas for each tenant will be much appreciated and create good will. Put up a Christmas tree in the common area since many tenants won't have one in their rooms;
- Make sure the rooming house is legal so if a neighbour is nasty, the city won't shut you down; and
- Pick a property in a pleasant, quiet area that will attract quieter tenants. Don't buy in a war zone or a drug zone.

### **6.1.2. Elsewhere**

14. Government of Australia. Rooming House Standards Taskforce: Chairperson's Report. (2009)

The establishment of the Rooming House Standards Taskforce was announced by the Victorian (Australia) Premier John Brumby on July 15, 2009 as part of the State government's strategy to take “action on those predatory operators of intentionally sub-standard rooming houses who prey on some of the most vulnerable members of our community.” There is increasing evidence that in response to Melbourne's tight rental market, a new model of for-profit rooming house provider has emerged. In this model, operators convert suburban houses to accommodate larger numbers of people and run multiple premises.

“In analyzing the situation in Victoria, the Taskforce also considered best practice examples of RH regulation and reform from like jurisdictions including Queensland, South Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada.” This report does not say what those best practices were.

Guiding principles:

- Placing the onus of responsibility for the conditions of and management practices in rooming houses on rooming house operators;
- Improving and bringing together minimum standards in rooming houses;
- Ensuring active compliance and effective enforcement; and

- Government ensuring access to private affordable rental housing.

The report makes six recommendations relating to the immediate introduction of a range of additional standards, including locks on bedroom doors, bathrooms and toilets, fire management and provision of basic window coverings.

It makes another eight recommendations on improving compliance with and enforcement of rooming house regulations. These include fines for non-compliance with the Act, greater powers to investigate and to act on breaches of legislation. The report also recommends registration of rooming houses, to improve professionalism and reduce exploitative practices in the sector; also recommendations to increase supply of affordable housing.

15. Homelessness & Housing Support Directorate. (2010) *A guide to the licensing and management provisions in Parts 2, 3 and 4 of the Housing Act 2004*. Department for Communities and Local Government, UK.

Rooming houses in the UK are called Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). They are “a key source of housing for significant and often vulnerable groups of people. However, historically, HMOs have often been badly managed and poorly maintained. The Housing Act 2004 introduced a range of measures designed to address these issues and specifically to improve the management of such properties.” This guide provides a detailed explanation of the provisions of the Act. It is primarily aimed at practitioners in local housing authorities but may also be a useful guide to the legislation for private landlords and tenants. Specific “good practices” are not included.

16. Homelessness & Housing Support Directorate. (2010) *Evaluation of the Impact of HMO (Houses in Multiple Occupation) Licensing and Selective Licensing*. Department for Communities and Local Government, UK.

The Building Research Establishment was contracted to review the HMO licensing regime across all local authorities in England. It focused on the practical implications, effectiveness and the impact of HMO legislation since implementation.

- Over 50% of local authorities reported a positive effect of licensing on the physical condition of properties, the quality of management and the quality of accommodation. This indicates that in a short period, licensing has brought about improvements;
- A significant number of mandatory licensable HMOs are in area with large student populations. Study shows that students are benefiting from mandatory licensing;
- Some tenants had experienced significant improvements to the physical condition of their properties as a direct result of licensing, including improved fire safety measures, kitchen and bathroom facilities. Other tenants were not aware of any changes to their property and described problems with damp and a lack of fire safety in their accommodation;
- Local authorities and landlords were concerned about high rate of non-compliance on part of landlords avoiding seeking a license; and
- The study noted that HMOs provide a valuable resource in the housing market.

The case studies highlighted many examples of good practice and failed initiatives, which could valuably be shared by those with current designations and also those considering selective

licensing schemes. It may be useful to provide a forum where local authorities could network and share this. The report also noted that five years is nowhere near long enough to effect change that would be self-sustaining in the medium to longer term. Some conclusions:

- Grants should be made available to HMO landlords, to improve their property;
- National landlords' training course should be developed and delivered in collaboration with the main landlord associations, to provide them with knowledge and skills to operate these HMOs; and
- Need for more tenant engagement, through provision of simple tenants' information package or local tenants' forums to give them an opportunity to receive support and advice from their local authority.

17. Homelessness & Housing Support Directorate. (2010) *Tackling anti-social behaviour: Tools and powers – toolkit for social landlords*. Department for Communities and Local Government, UK.

This guide consolidates in a single document disparate sources of advice to provide a comprehensive reference point for social landlords of the key tools and powers available to them to tackle anti-social behaviour. The main body of the guide provides details of individual tools and powers in a factsheet format. The guide also considers social landlords' role in tackling anti-social behaviour as an aid to strategic development of ASB (anti-social behaviour) services and suggests the broad approach that landlords should adopt in protecting communities from ASB. Not specific to rooming houses.

The guide includes several examples of good practices being used. Also includes a compendium of fact sheets covering key enforcement and intervention options available for use by social landlords. These are specific to UK law.

18. Homelessness & Housing Support Directorate. (2006) *Homelessness Prevention: A Guide to Good Practice*. Department for Communities and Local Government, UK.

This guide focuses on six "homelessness prevention" activities shown by research as being those most commonly operated by local authorities. These include:

- Housing advice;
- Rent deposit and related schemes;
- Family mediation;
- Domestic violence victim support;
- Assistance for ex-offenders; and
- Tenancy sustainment services.

This document presents "essential principles" for each of the six homelessness prevention activities, although nothing specific to rooming houses. Recommendations aimed at Local Authorities or similar government bodies, rather than small non-profits.

Under "Housing Advice," some that could be applicable to rooming houses:

- Designate staff to establish friendly working relations with landlords and tenants;

- Encourage private landlords to make early contact with staff in the event of problems with tenants;
- Set up an “introductory service” to help match prospective tenants with private landlords; and
- Develop linkages with agencies that could perform “early interventions” for tenants threatened with eviction. Includes indicators.

19. National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2010) *Working with landlords*. PowerPoint presentation prepared for the Annual Conference on Ending Family Homelessness: Beyond Shelter, Los Angeles, CA.

- At Beyond Shelter, landlord outreach, engagement and retention are handled by Housing Relocation Specialists, while case management is handled by Case Managers;
- Rental housing is a business. Landlords are in the business of reducing risk and maximizing return on investment;
- Three biggest issues: rent paid on time; someone to call; property damage;
- Marketing the program is one of the best tools to use in developing a pool of landlords and management companies who are willing to rent directly to your clients;

Ideas for maintaining good relationships with landlords:

- Follow-up with property owner; call regularly, get feedback on rental situation; don't just check in when things are going downhill;
- Keep your commitments: respond within timeframes promised; intervene/mediate when appropriate; ensure committed home visits and case management occurs;
- Keep open lines of communication and create program tools and protocols to facilitate dialogue: Institute “early warning” system with landlords; develop sample communication tool;
- Identify barriers to housing: credit history; income source/employment history; household size/composition; no rental history; lack of move-in funds; credit check fees; non-English speaking; criminal history; poor landlord references; discrimination; eviction history.
- Strategies for overcoming barriers:
  - Explain how prospective tenant has taken responsibility for past mistakes, can demonstrate positive steps taken to resolve those issues;
  - Explain why because of supportive services past rent history will not necessarily predict future rental behaviour;
  - Get a letter from your probation officer stating that you are complying with the terms of your probation;
  - Provide letters on family's behalf to explain damaging information or speak to family's progress/current efforts;
  - Be creative, stress the positives of the family – use report cards, sports awards etc; and

- Poor credit is not necessarily due to not paying rent on time in past; demonstrate history of on-time payments.

20. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. (2006) *Improving the Effectiveness of Rent Arrears Management: Good Practice Guidance*. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London, UK.

This guide is aimed at social landlords and all levels of a landlord's rent arrears management service. It was prepared in response to concerns about rising number of possession actions and evictions by social landlords. Research showed that Possession Actions by social landlords in the decade to 2003 had more than doubled. Vulnerable tenants – people with support needs, including those with mental health and addictions issues – are considered particularly liable to accumulate arrears. Once evicted, former tenants are often disqualified from social housing.

#### Key strategic approaches for landlords:

- Guidelines on the use of possession actions will form an essential component of any rent arrears strategy but must be set within a framework involving a range of alternative and/or complementary measures;
- Rent arrears strategies must emphasize proactive, preventative approaches rather than being mainly reactive enforcement measures;
- In developing rent arrears strategies, landlords should involve all relevant stakeholder organizations and groups;
- Any rent arrears strategy must be backed up by detailed procedure guides for front-line staff; and
- Social landlords should base their strategy on a clear analysis of the incidence and pattern of rent arrears among their tenants.

#### Good practice principles for tenants:

- Give tenants a range of communication options and a choice of dates and times;
- Give tenants adequate notice of interview/visit arrangements and avoid changing them;
- Use a pro-forma for all interviews and visits and ensure that information is recorded systematically and consistently;
- Try to reassure and offer assistance to tenants while maintaining the seriousness of the situation and the need for action to be taken to resolve the arrears;
- Ensure consistency between the tone utilized, and actions agreed upon, in letters and personal meetings;
- Confirm agreed action and further arrangement in writing as soon after visits as possible, and no longer than five days after a visit;
- Allow tenants to have a family member or other supporting figure with them if they wish;
- Arrange follow up visits and phone calls as required. Where possible, ensure these are conducted by the same staff member;
- Monitor any agreement actions and subsequent repayments and take further action at an early stage if these are not being adhered to;

- Encourage tenants to inform the landlord immediately if they are likely to miss an agreed repayment or their circumstances change; and
- Develop cost effective approaches for communicating positively with tenants who have resolved arrears or are sticking to agreed repayment schedules. This can help to maintain a good relationship and reassure tenants.

21. Rugg, J. (2008) *A Route to Homelessness? A Study of Why Private Sector Tenants Become Homeless*. Centre for Housing Policy, London, UK.

Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Private Rental Sector (PRS) in the UK had reached its lowest level, accommodating nine per cent of households. By 2006, this proportion had increased to 12%. This report reviews the evidence of links between the incidence of homelessness and the termination of tenancies in the PRS. Tenancies come to an end for a number of reasons; some of the principal ones are outlined here. PRS's are not specifically rooming houses.

Recommendations:

- Government should develop "loss of work" loan scheme or help with advance payments fund to help people living in low rental PRS;
- Housing benefit application forms should have a box that tenants can tick, to give permission for their information to be shared with their landlord (this might alleviate concerns that the tenant will end up not paying);
- Selective licensing as a means of combating slum landlordism should be clearly established;
- People who have lived at the very bottom end of the PRS can offer specific information on poor property management and conditions; and
- Outreach and support teams working with the street homeless have the relevant skills and service links essential to effective working with the most vulnerable people living in very poor quality private renting.

## **6.2. Interview Guides**

### **6.2.1. Interview guide for landlords**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a Researcher with Calhoun Research and Development. We are doing a study to find out how rooming houses are working in Canada, and what could be done to make them work better. The objective of the research is to develop some "good practices" that could be shared with both landlords and tenants of rooming houses. As someone who owns a rooming house, your input is very important.

We will be taking the information that you and other landlords, as well as the tenants, give to us and developing a workshop to help other rooming house landlords and tenants to have a better rooming house experience.

We are asking for about 30 minutes of your time. We would like to hear your opinion on:

- What you think your tenants like about your rooming house.
- What you think works to keep them staying at your room house.
- What challenges you experience with keeping tenants for the long term.
- What recommendations you would have for other landlords to keep their tenants longer.

None of your answers will be shared with your tenants, or other landlords specifically. Your information will be kept completely confidential. In the final report, your name will not be disclosed nor will comments be identified by individual's names.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. What are the key issues or challenges that you face as a landlord?
  - How often do you experience these issues?
  - What do you think can be done to do reduce the number of times you have to deal with this kind of issue?
2. As a business person, I'm sure it's important to you NOT to have a lot of turnover in your rooming house. How would you describe the turnover in your rooming house? (probe: a lot, people leave all the time; most tenants have been there for years etc)
3. What are some of the reasons for tenant turnover in your building?
4. What do you think could be done to mitigate turnover in your building?
5. What kinds of programs or services do you think would be beneficial for tenants that would reduce turnover?
6. If someone developed some kind of a "conflict resolution" service for tenants and landlords of rooming houses, would you use it? would you refer your tenants to it?
7. What would a conflict resolution service have to offer e for you to make use of it?
8. Do you have any suggestions for other landlords about ways to keep their tenants longer?
9. Are you aware of the changes recently made to the Residential Tenancies Act regarding Rooming Houses? If yes, how have they impacted you and your operation?
10. Have you ever experienced difficulty understanding or using the Residential Tenancies Act?

11. What are some of the things you do as a landlord that make your rooming house a good place to live? (i.e. things that people might call "good or best practices")
12. Are there things that you would like to try, but have been unable to? What is stopping you from trying them?
13. Do you have an onsite superintendent?
  - If not, why not?
  - If so, what are their responsibilities?
14. What kind of difference do you think it makes when you have an onsite superintendent or manager?
15. Finally, I'd like to ask you a few questions about your rooming house(s):
  - How many rooming houses do you operate? \_\_\_\_
    - o For each:
      - How many bedrooms? \_\_\_\_
      - How many bathrooms? \_\_\_\_
  - Are there shared facilities such as kitchen, living room? Please describe.
  - How would you describe the gender mix i.e. are your tenants mostly men? mostly women?
  - Do you do an annual review of fire and safety services to ensure they are working, for example, checking your smoke alarms etc? (probe: does person have smoke alarms etc?)
  - Are your tenants involved in the safety of your building (for example, do you ever do fire drills with them)?
16. Do you have final comments about what you think makes your Rooming House a good place to live?

Again, I'd like to thank you for taking the time to speak with me. You have a lot of good ideas about how to successfully run a rooming house, and I'd like to ask you, if we organize a workshop, would you come and share your ideas with other rooming house landlords and tenants?

### **6.2.2. Interview guide for program coordinators**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a researcher with Calhoun Research and Development.

We are doing a study to find out how rooming houses are working in Canada, and what could be done to make them work better. The objective of the research is to develop some "good practices" that could be shared with both landlords and tenants of rooming houses. We know that there are already some programs that have been developed in Canada that help tenants maintain their tenancies, and also help tenants and landlords to work out any problems. We would like to talk to you about your program. Any information you share will potentially give some ideas to agencies/organizations in other locations to implement similar programs. We are asking for about 30 minutes of your time.

1. Description of program
2. What were the elements of the program that made it successful?
3. Barriers/challenges/constraints to success?
4. Lessons learned/best practices?
5. Was your program evaluated? If so, can we get a copy of the evaluation?
6. Are you aware of other programs that help people to live/stay in rooming houses?
7. Other comments?

### 6.3. List of organizations participating in the research

<b>Organizations participating in the research</b>
Best Practice Housing Downtown Eastside, Vancouver BC <a href="http://www.communitybuilders.ca/bestpracticehousing.html">www.communitybuilders.ca/bestpracticehousing.html</a>
Centre 507 Association of Ottawa <a href="http://www.centre507.org/">www.centre507.org/</a>
Community Housing Federation of Victoria, Australia <a href="http://esvc000034.wic056u.server-web.com/index.htm">http://esvc000034.wic056u.server-web.com/index.htm</a>
Fredericton Community Action Group on Homelessness <a href="http://www.cagh.ca/">www.cagh.ca/</a>
Greater Moncton Homelessness Steering Committee <a href="http://www.monctonhomelessness.org">www.monctonhomelessness.org</a>
Greater Saint John Homelessness Steering Committee, Saint John, NB Human Development Council <a href="http://www.sjhdc.ca/">www.sjhdc.ca/</a>
Housing Help Association of Ontario <a href="http://www.findhousinghelp.ca/">www.findhousinghelp.ca/</a>
Rooming House Working Group, Housing & Homelessness Supports and Initiatives, Shelter Support and Housing Administration, City of Toronto <a href="http://www.toronto.ca/housing/rhwg.htm">www.toronto.ca/housing/rhwg.htm</a>
Rupert Community Residential Services of Toronto Inc. <a href="http://www.web.net/rupert/faq.htm">www.web.net/rupert/faq.htm</a>
The Well/La Source, Ottawa <a href="http://www.the-well.ca/">www.the-well.ca/</a>
WoodGreen Community Services, Toronto <a href="http://www.woodgreen.org/ServiceDetail.aspx?id=200">www.woodgreen.org/ServiceDetail.aspx?id=200</a>
RENT, A program of EYET Family Resources Toronto, ON <a href="http://www.eyetfrp.ca/issues/housing.cfm">www.eyetfrp.ca/issues/housing.cfm</a>

#### **6.4. Dissemination plan for research**

The report will be distributed to policy-makers and practitioners in a number of ways:

- It will be sent electronically to every federal and provincial Minister/department whose mandate is housing in the country;
- It will be sent to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities ([www.fcm.ca](http://www.fcm.ca)), with a request that it be posted on their “Affordable housing and homelessness” page;
- It will be submitted to a number of websites, with a request that it be posted, including:
  - The Homeless Hub [www.homelesshub.ca/](http://www.homelesshub.ca/)
  - The Hidden Homeless [www.hiddenhomeless.ca/](http://www.hiddenhomeless.ca/)
  - Stop Homelessness <http://stophomelessness.ca/>
  - Shared Learnings on Homelessness [www.sharedlearnings.org/res.cfm](http://www.sharedlearnings.org/res.cfm)
  - Raising the Roof [www.raisingtheroof.org/](http://www.raisingtheroof.org/)
- It will be sent to every HPS designated community in Canada;
- Workshops have been held in two NB cities, and contacts have been made to landlords in three cities. We will send the good practices flyer to known rooming house landlords. We will also send to the Rentalsman’s office in New Brunswick, with an invitation to copy and distribute to landlords/tenants. We will also send to Rentalsman’s offices across the country.
- It will be posted on the websites of the Greater Moncton Homelessness Steering Committee, the Fredericton Community Action Group on Homelessness and the Human Development Council in Saint John.

#### **6.5. Good practice flyer for landlords and tenants**

The good practices flyers are on the next two pages, in a format printable for distribution by landlords. The flyers will also be sent separately.

# Good Practices

## Rooming House Landlords

Rooming houses are an important kind of housing for people exiting homelessness, on social assistance or limited income. It is often the most affordable option, but sometimes the living conditions are less than acceptable.

As a landlord, you have a business to run. High tenant turnover is NOT good for business. Research shows that tenants stay longer in a rooming house that uses good practices. Here are some good practices, identified through our research.

🏠 The basis of all landlord-tenant relationships must be respect. *“If you treat tenants courteously and with dignity, they will be a better tenant.”* A good practice is to do something nice for the tenant everyone once in awhile. *“I offer a drive to the food bank each week and I think they appreciate that. It pays off for me.”*

🏠 Check references for all tenants, and involve existing tenants in decisions regarding new tenants is a good practice. Calling local Rooming House owners is a good way to check references. Talk to other landlords as well.

🏠 Having an on-site manager or superintendent is a “must have”. It can improve relationships inside the rooming house substantially and reduce crime, property damage, and undesirable visitors.

🏠 Post “house rules” and enforce them firmly but fairly. Make expectations clear to everyone, and follow up with those who do not respect the rules. “Deal with the rule breakers fast – one tenant can make the whole house unlivable.”

🏠 Having a tenant-to-bathroom / kitchen ratio of around 4-5:1 is a good practice, and have someone clean them daily with tenants being responsible for cleaning up after themselves.

🏠 A house that has some ‘comforts of home’, such as a table with lamp in a hallway, framed art, or common areas for people to gather such as a living room, can instill a sense of community and pride in their space.



**All provinces have a Residential Tenancies Act that outlines the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords. Some legal requirements for landlords can include:**

- Secure doors and locks to help keep tenants safe;
- Clean accommodation that is in good state of repair;
- All notices served in writings.

**Check your provincial legislation. In NB, go to the Service NB website [www.snb.ca](http://www.snb.ca)**

🏠 Safety for tenants should be a priority. Each tenant should have a working lock on their door, fire and smoke alarms should be in working order and tested regularly, hallways and fire escapes should be safe and well-maintained.

🏠 Security cameras in common areas will reduce crime. “As soon as I put cameras in, the crime in and around the building dropped.”

🏠 Being knowledgeable about community resources to help tenants with mental health problems, addictions, health problems is a good practice. “Knowing where to send them to get help can solve a problem in my rooming house.” Posting this information on a bulletin board hung in a common area is a practical idea.

🏠 Using a ‘neutral’ mediation service for problems with a tenant is a good practice, and can reduce evictions or people moving out.



The development and promotion of a Landlord’s Association, based upon an established code of ethics, is a good practice. It can lead to increased bargaining power with government, shared knowledge about tenant management, and up-to-date information about grants/loans for renovations or repairs to rooming houses.

# Good practices


## Rooming house landlords & tenants





A rooming house is a business, and your landlord must be able to make a return on their investment if they are going to be able to offer low rents, and safe housing.


Often times, when there are many people living together, sharing common space, difficulties arise. However, there are things that you can do to make living in a rooming house as good an experience as possible.


First and foremost, the basis all tenant-landlord relationships must be **respect**.


 As a tenant, you must **pay your rent on time**...every month. If you can set up direct payment with your bank, that would be ideal. If rents are paid on time, all the time, the landlord is better able to keep the house well-maintained and keep the rents down.


 You must **adhere to the Rooming House rules**. They are created for a reason – to keep the place safe and comfortable for *everyone*. It's important that you know the rules and follow them.

 If you have **suggestions** for ways to make the rooming house a better place to live, share them respectfully with your landlord. There may be reasons why your ideas cannot be implemented, but sometimes it's worth trying!

 A lot of conflict in rooming houses comes from the way people **take care of the shared spaces**. Tenants can play a big role in keeping the rooming house clean and safe by cleaning up after yourself when you use common facilities like the kitchen and bathroom. If everyone does their part, it will be a more comfortable place to live.

 Doing your part to **help keep the building maintained** can also make it safer for everyone. If you have handyman/woman skills, let your landlord know...maybe you can help with overall maintenance in the building. This would help to keep the building safe and a better place to live for everyone in the building.

 If you have a problem with another tenant or the landlord, try talking to them directly about it first. If this doesn't work, considering trying a **tenant-landlord mediation service**.

 Think about how your activities and behaviours might affect someone else in the building...are your visitors loud when they are coming and going? Do you think your stereo or TV might be bothering others during quiet time? Do you clean up after yourself in the kitchen and bathroom? Do you treat others in the building with respect?



Everyone in the building has a role to play in creating a safe, affordable, clean, comfortable place to live. **What role do you play?**