



Safe, stable, long-term: Supporting 2SLGBTQ+ youth along the housing continuum

Final integrated report

SEPTEMBER 2022

Social Research and Demonstration Corporation | Canadian Observatory on Homelessness |
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PREAMBLE

CONTENT WARNING

This report contains references to and descriptions of experiences that may be upsetting or triggering to some readers. This includes but is not limited to homo/bi/transphobia, homelessness, intimate partner violence, identity-based rejection, family conflict, poverty, substance use, and instances of prejudice, discrimination, microaggression, and violence targeting 2SLGBTQ+ individuals.

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ABOUT THE PROJECT TEAM

This research is a collaboration between the [Social Research and Demonstration Corporation](#) (SRDC), the [Canadian Observatory on Homelessness](#) (COH), and [Mentor Canada](#). The project team is comprised of queer researchers and academics, allies, and organizations that collectively aim to support and empower 2SLGBTQ+ youth to thrive by developing, understanding, and promoting evidence-based strategies to preventing and ending youth homelessness.

Thank you to the youth and service provider co-designers

While the service providers and youth that participated in and advised on this project will remain anonymous, we would like to recognize their essential contributions to data collection, analysis, validation, and reporting throughout Phase 2 and onward. We would not have been able to do this work without your trust, your input, and your willingness to share your journeys. We are so grateful for your participation and guidance.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite evidence that 2SLGBTQ+ youth face distinct barriers to accessing housing and housing services, including discrimination, violence, and a lack of tailored housing options and supports,¹ the available literature is underdeveloped. In particular, the *National Housing Strategy* points to significant gaps in housing research on the needs of 2SLGBTQ+ youth.² There is also a notable lack of research on the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth seeking long-term – rather than emergency or transitional – housing and whether they feel supported in the current homeless and housing system.³⁻⁵ In general, more comprehensive data is needed to support evidence-based policy making to improve and better target interventions.⁶

The project, *Safe, Stable, Long-term: Supporting 2SLGBTQ+ youth along the housing continuum*, aimed to address these research gaps, guided by the overarching research question: **What are the barriers and facilitators of access to stable, safe, and long-term housing for 2SLGBTQ+ youth?** We adopted a multi-phased research approach consisting of an environmental scan of the literature and existing services in Canada, followed by qualitative data collection, and knowledge translation activities. We focused on understanding youth’s holistic experiences across their housing journeys, as well as the providers, programs, and policies that exist along the housing continuum. This included those that address the closely connected health, education, employment, and social needs and realities of 2SLGBTQ+ identified youth.

This project is a collaboration between Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH), and Mentor Canada along with service providers and youth who provided their time, experiences, and invaluable insights.

PHASE 1

What we did

We synthesized available literature and data related to 2SLGBTQ+ youth’s experiences and journeys toward being housed. We explored the current research and policy landscape surrounding 2SLGBTQ+ youth housing and homelessness, as well as the prevalence and trajectories of homeless/underhoused 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Our methodological approach encompassed separate but interconnected sources of data, including: a literature review (led by SRDC), secondary data analysis of Point-in-Time (PiT) data (led by COH), and the National Youth Mentoring Survey (led by SRDC and Mentor Canada) to describe the prevalence of 2SLGBTQ+ youth homelessness in Canada. In addition, we conducted an environmental scan composed of a desk review and a service provider survey (led by COH) to describe the current policy and practice landscape.

What we found

2SLGBTQ+ youth, especially transgender youth, report high rates of housing instability

As many as 21 per cent of youth experiencing homelessness in 2018 identified as 2SLGBTQ+ despite making up only 5-10 per cent of all youth, with rates especially high among transgender youth. The true rate of homelessness may be underestimated due to barriers to accurately measuring homelessness in this population, including the need to conceal identities to preserve physical and emotional safety and to access services. Evidence regarding the scope of housing instability among 2SLGBTQ+ youth along the housing continuum is limited.

2SLGBTQ+ youth's unique life experiences shape their housing journeys

2SLGBTQ+ youth's housing journeys are shaped by their unique life experiences. In particular, the barriers they encounter across different life domains tend to compound and reinforce one another. There is an absence of both inclusive and tailored housing programs for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Shelter access is especially limited for trans and gender diverse youth. 2SLGBTQ+ youth who experience homelessness have poorer overall outcomes compared to their non-2SLGBTQ+ peers who experience homelessness while reporting fewer supports.

2SLGBTQ+ youth face limited availability and access to programs and services to support their housing needs

Programs that serve 2SLGBTQ+ populations tend to cluster in major Canadian cities in select provinces and be limited to transitional housing. Few provide targeted 2SLGBTQ+ housing supports, and rarely to youth. Where 2SLGBTQ+ services are offered, they tend to be provided by 2SLGBTQ+ staff, with limited capacity among the broader staff team to meet the unique needs of the 2SLGBTQ+ population. Recommendations for policy, programs, and services noted in the literature include support for protective factors and family-based intervention, training and capacity-building for providers, and population-based services and housing solutions.

PHASE 2

What we did

We used experience-based co-design (EBCD), a methodology rooted in design thinking that has been applied to complex system re/co-design with users, to provide a more fulsome understanding of 2SLGBTQ+ youth experiences across the housing continuum.^{7,8} Given the

paucity of research on 2SLGBTQ+ youth experiences outside of discrete points of the housing continuum, engagement was integral to ensuring that our research methods and findings are grounded in community contexts, and that results could be shared back effectively and appropriately with communities.⁹ We engaged 2SLGBTQ+ identified youth, as well as service providers working to support 2SLGBTQ+ youth access housing, in a collaborative, iterative process of journey mapping and co-designing recommendations.

What we found

Youth and service provider data confirmed and helped contextualize Phase 1 findings

In Phase 2, we explored youth and service provider experiences across youth's housing journeys and with housing-related supports and services in depth. These experience data allowed us to better understand the highs and lows of housing-related service delivery available for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, and **journeys to independent housing** – across states of being unhoused, housed independently but with challenges, and housed independently with more permanence, safety, and security. Many of our findings echoed and helped contextualize the key takeaways from Phase 1 of the project, including the barriers and enablers youth face to both housing and services, and how these influence youth's journeys moving forward.

Youth journeys informed a queer-centered framework for understanding housing access

Working with youth, we identified the need for a **queer-centered housing continuum** that reflects that 2SLGBTQ+ youth journeys are non-linear, recognizes additional housing types, and considers progression and movement within and between housing stages. We also worked with youth to identify key components of adequate housing. Adequacy was not determined by the type or state of housing, but rather by **safety, stability, accessibility, sustainability, and support for holistic wellbeing**. Holistic housing, or being holistically housed, meant not having to make trade-offs between key determinants of wellbeing, such as being able to **explore and express identity**, having **stability and predictability**, having **autonomy, freedom and privacy**, and being **physically and emotionally safe**.

CO-DESIGNED RECOMMENDATIONS

For service providing organizations

Empower 2SLGBTQ+ youth through education, knowledge sharing, and awareness building. Provide education and training for service providers, landlords, and other stakeholders

(e.g., property developers, social housing providers); educate youth about their rights as a tenant, and the services and supports that may be available to them. Encourage service uptake and reduce self-exclusion among queer youth from available formal services.

‘Queerify’ services and supports to create safe, queer-friendly spaces. Normalize and codify the expectation through policies and training that housing and related services and supports be inclusive and safe for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Supports for trans, Indigenous, and Black and racialized queer young people are particularly important. Ensure that policies and practices are informed by 2SLGBTQ+ youth and staff while being mindful to reduce the burden of education on and potential for burnout in these populations by providing supportive resources and compensation.

Advocate for, and invest in, improved access to quality mental health and health care for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Identify networks of allies and ‘safe’ healthcare providers in the community, and find ways to help connect youth with those providers.

For landlords and housing stakeholders

Actively pursue education and training to support improved 2SLGBTQ+ youth housing access. Provide easily accessible information to youth about how to obtain. Create or strengthen networks of landlord-allies who are safe and inclusive of 2SLGBTQ+ persons.

Strengthen allyship for queer youth seeking housing in local communities. Consider ways to mitigate power imbalances between landlords and queer youth renters; ensure compliant on anti-discrimination policies and tenants’ rights are up to date. In consultation with 2SLGBTQ+ youth organizations, normalize availability of inclusive and safe housing for 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

For community members and businesses

Support, develop, and facilitate opportunities for queer youth to connect with mentors, host homes,¹⁰ each other, and allied supports, including by offering, hosting, and identifying spaces where youth can gather and strengthen community ties. Work with 2SLGBTQ+ groups and allies to support community-led initiatives supporting 2SLGBTQ+ youth to thrive.

Offer family-based supports and projects aimed increasing acceptance, reconciliation, and decreasing rejection. Provide education and training to parents and family members normalizing acceptance of and visible presence of the 2SLGBTQ+ people in the community.

Provide opportunities for queer youth to access wrap-around employment services. Expand programs focused on queer youth’s success in employment, including those designed to hire and train youth, and mentor them in their career journeys.

For policymakers

Address existing gaps in services by expanding the breadth and scope of housing-related programs and supports available to 2SLGBTQ+ youth, and especially trans, Indigenous and racialized youth, through formal services. Establish population-specific housing options and services that recognize and support the diverse backgrounds, strengths, and needs of 2SLGBTQ+ identified youth. Build sector capacity to design and implement housing services for queer youth.

Connect with queer youth-serving organizations to develop, implement, and fund initiatives that align with evidence-informed, holistic care. Improve the availability, flexibility, sustainability, and adequacy of funding for housing and related programs, services, and supports for queer youth. Ensure eligibility criteria do not exclude or restrict access for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Invest in tailored, quality mental healthcare for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, and subsidize opportunities for youth to gain and succeed in employment.

Consider how policy can create more just housing systems for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Implement existing promising practices and policies to support housing access for queer youth; normalize and institutionalize 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion within housing sectors and services, and within all levels of governance. Pursue policy responses to poverty and income security among 2SLGBTQ+ youth, including the potential for direct and targeted income assistance. Prioritize 2SLGBTQ+ youth as a distinct and priority population within federal housing policy and funding envelopes. Provide opportunities for 2SLGBTQ+ youth to inform housing policy at local, provincial/territorial, and federal governance levels.

Address existing research and knowledge gaps. Continue to support research on the housing journeys, experiences, needs, and successes of 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Prioritize inclusive, participatory, and community-based research.

CONCLUSION

This project aimed to address existing knowledge gaps related to housing for 2SLGBTQ+ youth and to co-design and prioritize actionable recommendations with youth and service providers. We engaged in in-depth exploration of experience data shared by 2SLGBTQ+ youth and service providers, and ongoing collaboration, validation, and co-interpretation of touch points along queer youth's journeys to accessing housing. Youth who participated shaped definitions of adequate and holistic housing, and identified the need for further exploration of the diverse experiences of queer youth across Canada. Through input and iterative refinement from participants, we co-developed a prototype of a queer-centered housing continuum. While this project represents an important step to better understanding the trajectories of homeless and precariously housed 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Canada, more research and action is needed

meaningfully address these youth’s housing needs. We hope this project’s findings help build the foundation from which policy and programming actors can work to facilitate access to stable, safe, and long-term housing for 2SLGBTQ+ youth.



PROJECT OVERVIEW

2SLGBTQ+ youth in Canada face compounding and intersectional barriers to having a safe place to call home.¹¹ Compared to their peers, 2SLGBTQ+ individuals in Canada, including youth, are more likely to experience poverty, violence, barriers to employment, mental health challenges, and housing instability.¹²⁻¹⁶ Queer youth are overrepresented in homelessness: it is estimated that 2SLGBTQ+ youth comprise up to 40 per cent of homeless youth in Canada, while they represent only 5 to 10 per cent of the total youth population.^{11,15,17}

Despite evidence that 2SLGBTQ+ youth also face distinct barriers to accessing housing and housing services, such as discrimination, violence, and a lack of tailored housing options and supports,¹ the available literature is underdeveloped. Specifically, data on housing and employment is limited, with the *National Housing Strategy* pointing to significant gaps in housing research on the needs of 2SLGBTQ+ youth.² There is also a notable lack of research on the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth seeking long-term – rather than emergency or transitional – housing and whether they feel supported in the current homeless and housing.³⁻⁵ In general, more comprehensive data is needed to support evidence-based policy making to improve and better target interventions.⁶

Our project, *Safe, Stable, Long-term: Supporting 2SLGBTQ+ youth along the housing continuum*, is aimed at addressing these research gaps, guided by the overarching research question: **What are the barriers and facilitators of access to stable, safe, and long-term housing for 2SLGBTQ+ youth?** We adopted a multi-phased research approach consisting of an environmental scan of the literature and existing services in Canada, followed by qualitative data collection, and knowledge translation activities. We focused on understanding youth's holistic experiences across their housing journeys, as well as the providers, programs, and policies that exist along the housing continuum, including those that address the closely connected health, education, employment, and social needs and realities of 2SLGBTQ+ identified youth.

This final integrated report provides a summary of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of research. We also include an overview of our co-design and engagement efforts, to describe the participatory process by which data was collected and analyzed and knowledge products and recommendations were made. The report synthesizes findings and recommendations across both research phases, to situate our findings in the broader literature, identify remaining gaps, and present co-designed recommendations for service providers, housing stakeholders, community members, and policymakers. A summary of the key terms employed throughout this report is provided in Appendix A.



PHASE 1 SUMMARY

PURPOSE

In Phase 1 of our research, we synthesized available literature and data related to 2SLGBTQ+ youth's experiences and journeys toward being housed. We explored the current research and policy landscape surrounding 2SLGBTQ+ youth housing and homelessness, as well as the prevalence and trajectories of homeless/underhoused 2SLGBTQ+ youth, by answering the following research questions:

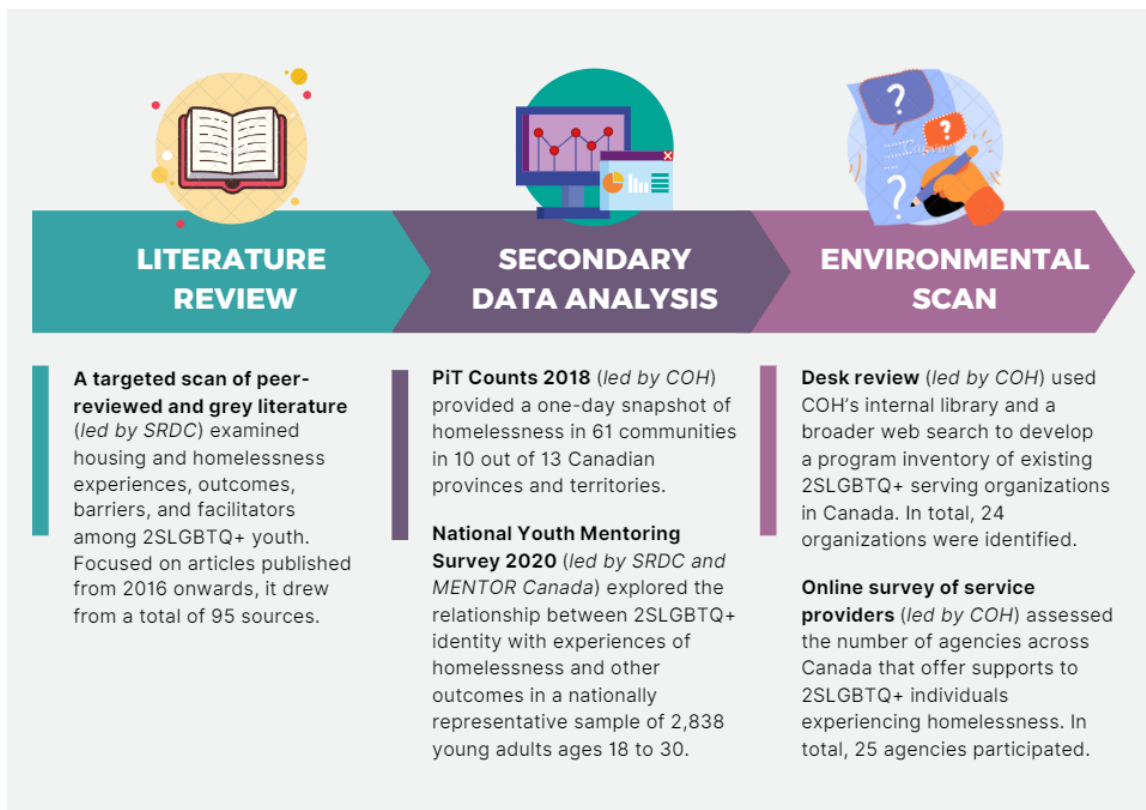
- **What is the scope of housing instability among 2SLGBTQ+ youth?**
- **How are the housing experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth unique in comparison with other groups?**
- **What services and policies are available that support the housing needs of 2SLGBTQ+ youth?**

Our intention was for the Phase 1 findings to offer guidance to policymakers and program providers to facilitate access to stable, safe, and long-term housing for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. These findings informed the scope of Phase 2 of this project and help build the foundation for further research into the experiences and needs of 2SLGBTQ+ youth experiencing housing precarity.

METHODS

Our methodological approach encompassed separate but interconnected sources of data, including: a literature review (led by SRDC); secondary data analysis of Point-in-Time (PIT) data (led by COH) and the National Youth Mentoring Survey (led by SRDC and Mentor Canada) to describe the prevalence of 2SLGBTQ+ youth homelessness in Canada; and an environmental scan composed of a desk review and a service provider survey (led by COH) to describe the current policy and practice landscape. The topics explored and sample size in each method are described in Figure 1. See the Phase 1 report for additional details, such as search terms, data bases, sources, and tools used.¹⁸

Figure 1 Summary of Phase 1 research methods and data sources



FINDINGS

In this section, we highlight key findings from across all Phase 1 data sources to describe the current landscape of 2SLGBTQ+ youth housing and homelessness. In particular, we summarize findings with respect to the scope of housing instability among 2SLGBTQ+ youth; the unique housing experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth in comparison to other groups; and the programs and services both available and needed to support the housing needs of 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Finally, we synthesize the emerging key themes from this research along the housing continuum to describe the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth and their journeys to being housed.

2SLGBTQ+ youth, especially transgender youth, report high rates of housing instability

Across data sources, we found that 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Canada experience higher rates of homelessness in comparison to their non-2SLGBTQ+ counterparts, and that these rates are particularly high for transgender youth.^{11,19-21} National PiT data indicated that approximately 21 per cent of youth experiencing homelessness in 2018 identified as 2SLGBTQ+, despite 2SLGBTQ+ youth representing only 5 to 10 per cent of the overall youth population. Our literature review also suggested that the true homelessness rate of 2SLGBTQ+ youth may be underestimated in this figure, with some sources reporting that 25 to 40 per cent of homeless youth identify as 2SLGBTQ+.^{17,22} Meanwhile, the National Youth Mentoring Survey indicated that 23 per cent of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents had experienced homelessness at some point since the age of 12, almost double the 12 per cent of non-2SLGBTQ+ youth who had experienced homelessness in that same period.

Barriers to accurately measuring the prevalence of 2SLGBTQ+ homelessness include the underrepresentation of 2SLGBTQ+ youth in housing programs and shelters, the absence of data collection related to sexual and gender identity, the need to hide their identity for safety and housing access, and the prevalence of hidden homelessness (e.g., couch-surfing) among this population.^{11,19,21,23,24} The actual prevalence of 2SLGBTQ+ homelessness and emergency shelter use likely varies across communities in Canada, as well as by 2SLGBTQ+ identity and other intersecting identity factors (e.g., Indigenous and racialized youth).^{11,19,24}

Key takeaways

- 21 per cent of youth experiencing homelessness in 2018 identified as 2SLGBTQ+ despite making up only 5-10 per cent of all youth. Rates are especially high for transgender youth.
- The prevalence rate may be underestimated due to barriers to accurately measuring homelessness in this population.
- Evidence regarding the scope of housing instability among 2SLGBTQ+ youth along the housing continuum is limited.

Evidence regarding the scope of housing instability more broadly, including in transitional and social housing, rental discrimination, and home ownership rates for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, is scant. However, 2SLGBTQ+ youth and adults in Canada and the United States report experiences of prejudice, violence, and discrimination when it comes to accessing any type of housing – from emergency shelters²⁵⁻²⁷ through social and rental housing²⁸ to home ownership.²⁹⁻³¹ Due to these past experiences, or in anticipation of them, 2SLGBTQ+ individuals are faced with the need to navigate identity disclosure and concealment in order to access housing and related services and supports.³²⁻³⁵ Altogether, findings point to a heightened level of housing instability for 2SLGBTQ+ youth across the housing continuum.

2SLGBTQ+ youth's unique life experiences shape their housing journeys

Our findings point to unique life experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth that shape their housing journeys. We found that prior to becoming homeless, many 2SLGBTQ+ youth experience familial neglect or instability, identity-based rejection, school-based bullying or harassment, involvement with the child welfare or foster care systems, physical or sexual abuse, and childhood trauma.^{11,22,33,35-40} These barriers encountered across different life domains tend to compound and reinforce one another. For example, challenges in educational environments (e.g., punishment for violating gender norms, identity-based bullying or harassment, a lack of intervention or support from teachers or administrators) have been found in US-based research to result in gender and sexual minority youth's disengagement from school and poorer educational performance.⁴⁰⁻⁴² Negative school outcomes and experiences, particularly when compounded by family conflict or other forms of structural oppression, can lead to 2SLGBTQ+ youth leaving home and/or becoming homeless,^{35,40} with long-term downstream effects on employment and financial prospects, exacerbating barriers to housing access and affordability.^{30,43,44} In our analyses of the National Youth Mentoring Survey, 2SLGBTQ+ youth reported lower rates of high school completion, mental wellbeing, social capital, and self worth.

For 2SLGBTQ+ youth who experience homelessness, the research literature revealed longer durations and an earlier age of homelessness compared with other non-2SLGBTQ+ youth who experience homelessness. We found amplified experiences of discrimination, violence and harassment on the street^{11,21,22,45,46} and in emergency shelters.^{21,25-28,45,47} Overall, studies reported on the absence of shelter services that are at minimum inclusive and at best tailored to 2SLGBTQ+ youth, especially outside of urban areas.^{27,28,48}

Barriers to safe and stable housing emerged in both the literature and in our survey of service providers. Unique barriers facing 2SLGBTQ+ youth include

discrimination (e.g., in emergency shelters, by landlords), safety concerns, specific health needs, and the ongoing psychological strain of concealment.^{27,45,49} Emergency shelter access was found to be particularly limited for trans and gender diverse youth due to exclusionary policies, and the common reliance on a gender binary by many shelter and housing programs.^{27,28} We learned that 2SLGBTQ+ youth often need to conceal integral components of their identities, which is a consistent, continuous, and compounding factor when considering their access to housing. A lack

Key takeaways

- 2SLGBTQ+ youth's housing journeys are shaped by their unique life experiences. In particular, the barriers they encounter across different life domains tend to compound and reinforce one another.
- There is an absence of both inclusive and tailored housing programs for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Shelter access is especially limited for trans and gender diverse youth.
- 2SLGBTQ+ youth who experience homelessness have poorer overall outcomes compared to their non-2SLGBTQ+ peers who experience homelessness, while reporting fewer supports.

of emotional and physical safety and ongoing stigma drive youth's decision points and impact the availability and accessibility of options across the housing continuum.

One key insight from our research relates to the barriers 2SLGBTQ+ youth face to accessing safe, stable, and long-term housing, and the ways in which these barriers operate. Barriers such as prejudice and discrimination in employment, health care and education are system-level factors that permeate and reinforce challenges youth experience at community- and interpersonal-levels (e.g., identity-based rejection, involvement in child welfare systems, inaccessible or unavailable housing supports). We found these barriers operate in tandem to inhibit 2SLGBTQ+ youth's movement along the housing continuum, and to be more prevalent or impactful for certain subgroups of 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

The relationships between housing instability with other outcomes also emerged in our study. Compared to non-2SLGBTQ+ peers experiencing homelessness, 2SLGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness were found to face greater stress levels, higher prevalence and severity of mental health challenges, and higher likelihood of justice involvement,^{36,37,46,50} all while reporting fewer sources of support.^{11,46} These experiences were particularly prominent for transgender and racialized youth. Results from our analyses of the National Youth Mentoring Survey showed a high degree of overlap between being 2SLGBTQ+ with other identities, including Indigeneity and disability status, further underscoring the importance of considering and exploring intersectional factors to better understand housing outcomes and experiences of these youth.

2SLGBTQ+ youth face limited availability and access to programs and services to support their housing needs

Our review of 2SLGBTQ+ homelessness supports shed light on some of the available service offerings for 2SLGBTQ+ individuals in Canada, including youth. In total, 24 organizations were identified that provide housing supports for 2SLGBTQ+ populations, across different age ranges. Organizations offer a variety of different types of programs, including housing-specific programs as well as those offering other supports, such as social engagement, health and well-being, education, and outreach. The most common model was limited-term transitional housing. While not an exhaustive list, the inventory helps demonstrate the geographic dispersion of programs and their foci, with an absence of programs in Atlantic Canada and the Territories. Programs tended to cluster in major cities such as Toronto and Vancouver, indicating potential gaps in smaller and more remote communities.

Our online service provider survey provided further insights into the supports available. In total, 25 agencies participated: over half were based in Ontario, with additional representation from Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Quebec. The service provider survey was largely completed by urban and suburban respondents, highlighting and echoing a gap in the literature

of research exploring the needs and experiences of programs and service users in rural communities. Only about a third of the respondents reported that the agencies they work for serve youth. Participating service providers reported providing specific supports to the 2SLGBTQ+ community, the majority of which fell into the category of outreach, case management, and drop-in programming. Notably, respondents indicated that agencies where 2SLGBTQ+ specific supports were offered tended to be provided by 2SLGBTQ+ staff. 2SLGBTQ+ specific housing supports were less commonly reported, and service providers identified a desire for more 2SLGBTQ+ specific housing. Almost one-third of organizations surveyed did not offer services specific to 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, identifying a potential gap in program resources and training to address the specific needs of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, particularly given their over-representation among homeless youth. Over half of respondents identified differences in the needs of 2SLGBTQ+ service users. The unique needs of 2SLGBTQ+ individuals related to experiences of discrimination that 2SLGBTQ+ people, particularly transgender individuals, face in the community when it comes to housing, barriers to accessing health care, higher rates of distress and mental health needs, and unique safety considerations.

Recommendations from service providers

Survey respondents identified the following 2SLGBTQ+ specific supports they would like to see provided in their organizations: more affordable housing, more choice in housing options for 2SLGBTQ+ individuals including congregate settings, more welcoming spaces for transgender individuals, peer programming, and more education on the needs of 2SLGBTQ+ individuals experiencing homelessness. The literature reinforced these findings, suggesting the need for more diverse housing options, beyond transitional to more permanent options for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, including by expanding access to affordable housing.^{28,47,51,52} The literature also highlighted a need for housing options – as well as complementary programs and supports – designed specifically with 2SLGBTQ+ youth in mind.^{23-27,30,33,35} Population-based programs were framed as a promising strategy to better respond to 2SLGBTQ+ youth's unique and specialized needs, and maximize the safety, acceptance, relevance, appropriateness, and effectiveness of services.^{23,26,27,53} Other key recommendations from the literature regarding programs and services to support the housing needs of 2SLGBTQ+ youth along the housing continuum included:

Key takeaways

- Programs that serve 2SLGBTQ+ populations tend to cluster in major Canadian cities in select provinces and be limited to transitional housing. Few provide targeted 2SLGBTQ+ housing supports, and rarely to youth.
- Where 2SLGBTQ+ services are offered, they tend to be provided by 2SLGBTQ+ staff, with limited capacity among the broader staff team to meet the unique needs of the 2SLGBTQ+ population.
- The literature offers numerous recommendations for programs and services, and for policy.

- Expanding preventative and protective family-based interventions^{20,23,24,27,32,54,55}
- Education, training, and capacity building for staff and service providers^{19,20,27,28,30,37,40,45,56}
- Fostering 2SLGBTQ inclusion in shelters, housing and other programs^{20,25-28,33,35,53,57}
- Introducing population-based services and housing solutions^{23-27,30,33,35,42,50,51,58}
- Improving housing availability and affordability, and related policy^{11,28,47,48,51}
- Support for protective factors in social, health, income, employment domains^{22,28,42,44,50,59,60}
- Enhancing data and research capacity^{17,24,30,48,49,61,62}
- Expanding systemic and structural interventions, including increased investment in 2SLGBTQ+ youth-focused research; housing and housing supports, and services; and policy/regulation mitigating systemic and structural discrimination faced by 2SLGBTQ+ youth.^{11,19,30,40,44,52,63}

CONCLUSION

Representing the culmination of Phase 1 of the project *Safe, Stable, Long-term: Supporting 2SLGBTQ+ youth along the housing continuum*, this report synthesizes available literature and data related to 2SLGBTQ+ youth's experiences and journeys to being housed. Our findings suggest that 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Canada face unique life experiences marked by prejudice and discrimination that shape their housing journeys, resulting in high rates of housing instability. Despite select programs in Canada's major cities that provide supports to 2SLGBTQ+ youth, we found this group continues to face limited availability and access to services to meet their housing needs.

Despite what we were able to explore in Phase 1 of our project, we found key gaps in the literature and existing data landscape that inhibited our ability to effectively make recommendations for how to address and improve housing outcomes for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. We used the housing continuum as a framework to search, extract, and analyze data: this supported the current state of the fields of scholarship exploring 2SLGBTQ+ youth and housing, in which research and findings focus on discrete points along this continuum. Figure 2 summarizes key findings from Phase 1 along the housing continuum, including the identified barriers and facilitators to safe, stable and long-term housing. It should be noted that reliable research about 2SLGBTQ+ youth's experiences across the housing continuum is hampered by limited data collection, underrepresentation in shelters/programs, hidden homelessness, a need to conceal identity, and a lack of distinction between different housing types.

Experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth along the housing continuum: Key findings of available evidence

| Homelessness | Emergency Shelters | Transitional Housing | Social Housing | Rental Housing | Home Ownership |
|--|--|---|---|--|---|
| Barriers: Identity-based rejection Family conflict and instability Physical/ sexual abuse, and childhood trauma School-based marginalization, violence and discrimination Child welfare and foster care involvement Poverty and income insecurity Employment experiences and inequities Criminalization and legal barriers Poorer health & well-being Gaps within housing programs Limited access to/availability of long-term housing Systemic and structural discrimination across life domains Lack of specialized services and staff training | | | | | |
| <p>2SLGBTQ+ youth experience higher rates of homelessness, at earlier ages, for longer duration</p> <p>Between 21 and 30 percent of youth experiencing homelessness identify as 2SLGBTQ+</p> <p>About 23 per cent of 2SLGBTQ+ youth report having experienced homelessness</p> <p>Indigenous, racialized, newcomer, women, and trans youth are at highest risk of homelessness</p> <p>Experiences of stigma, violence, and discrimination on the streets is common</p> | <p>Exclusion from shelters: lack of staff training, no referral partners, exclusionary forms and practices</p> <p>Identity concealment in order to access services, with negative health consequences</p> <p>Homo/bi/transphobic discrimination, abuse and violence, particularly for racialized and/or trans youth</p> <p>Youth often unaware of how to report negative or discriminatory experiences in shelters</p> <p>Common experiences of inaction from shelter staff, reinforces reluctance to report</p> | <p>Sexual stigma, particularly for those in relationships with other residents</p> <p>2SLGBTQ+ programs with connections to external supports, emphasize goal setting and communication</p> | <p>Long wait lists, strict rules, mistreatment by staff/ residents, few options in smaller communities</p> <p>Challenges with intake process: lack of prioritization based on age, other forms of vulnerability</p> <p>RainCity Housing in Vancouver an example of promising, population-specific program</p> | <p>Discrimination against same-sex couples, particularly men, and racial minorities (US data)</p> <p>Challenges for trans renters: pressure to conceal identity, unsafe roommates</p> <p>Hesitant to report landlords: expensive, risky and time-consuming, especially in smaller/ rural communities</p> <p>Staying in unsafe/ subpar housing due to low vacancy and high rent costs</p> | <p>Lower rates of home ownership among 2SLGBTQ+ adults</p> <p>Lower mortgage approval rates, higher interest and other fees during mortgage application process</p> |



Facilitators: Strong peer and chosen family networks | Family and natural supports | Safe, inclusive and affirming housing programs, supports, and non-housing environments | Systemic and structural facilitators | Individual-level protective factors

Recommendations for Change

Prevention and family-based intervention | Training and capacity building for providers | Inclusion in shelters, housing, programs | Population-based services and housing | Housing availability, affordability and related policy | Support for protective factors in social, health, income, and employment domains | Enhanced data and research capacity | Systemic and structural interventions



CO-DESIGNING AND CONTEXTUALIZING THE RESEARCH

From the outset, we sought to continuously and meaningfully engage with 2SLGBTQ+ youth with lived experience of housing precarity, and with service providers with experience supporting this population. In Phase 2 of our research, we applied collaborative, participatory principles aligned with experience-based co-design (EBCD), a methodology rooted in design thinking that has been applied to complex system re/co-design with users.⁷⁻⁸ Throughout the co-design process, participants were active drivers of the research, identifying areas of inquiry and further exploration, diagnosing key touch points, and identifying and prioritizing solutions. Given the paucity of research on 2SLGBTQ+ youth experiences outside of discrete points of the housing continuum, including finding and maintaining independent housing, engagement was integral to ensuring that our research methods and findings are grounded in community contexts, and that results could be shared back effectively and appropriately with communities.

ENGAGING CO-DESIGNERS

As we transitioned from Phase 1 to Phase 2, we worked with COH and Mentor Canada to develop recruitment strategies to engage service providers and youth in the co-design process.

In Spring 2022, we identified 16 service providers from the service provider inventory that emerged from our environmental scan in Phase 1. We selected service providers across Canada that (a) provided either housing-specific services/supports, or services that interact with housing barriers or needs, and (b) are either 2SLGBTQ+ population-focused, or make targeted efforts to address the needs of 2SLGBTQ+ youth. We began recruiting service providers in April 2022, and conducted interviews in June and July of the same year.

Concurrently, we began recruiting youth in May 2022 using outreach on social media (via Reddit, Facebook, and Twitter) posted by SRDC and partner organizations COH and Mentor Canada. We provided a recruitment poster to service providers identified for interviews and within COH and Mentor Canada's networks, with a request to distribute the poster to 2SLGBTQ+ youth. We conducted interviews with youth between June and August 2022.

Engagement of both youth and service providers began with recruitment for semi-structured research interviews. We then progressively involved participants along an iterative, months-long path of data collection, analysis, validation, and review. We built and strengthened relationships with participants throughout these activities and over time. For further details on the relationship between and progression of activities, see Figure 2 in the *Phase 2 Summary* section.

LESSONS LEARNED AND ADAPTATIONS TO THE CO-DESIGN PROCESS

Engaging co-designers

We began recruitment after receiving ethics approval in late April 2022. We faced challenges recruiting youth and service providers for a variety of reasons, including the time of year (leading up to the end of the school year), as well as time and resource constraints of providers working in this space (e.g., one 2SLGBTQ+ youth-serving organization shut down during recruitment due to lack of funding). Recruiting equity-deserving groups for engagement in research, particularly 2SLGBTQ+ youth facing housing precarity, can be challenging, especially when the researchers are not known to those being recruited. Establishing trust in participatory research can also be a lengthy process as these groups often face systematic discrimination. Finally, youth recruitment via social media yielded many spam responses, which delayed reaching eligible participants.

Eventually, through repeated contacts with service provider organizations and social media recruitment, we were able to reach youth with a diverse set of identities and housing experiences from across Canada but excluding the Territories. Once we established a contact with youth, they provided invaluable insights, and engaged enthusiastically throughout all phases of the co-design. Factors that contributed to trust-building with the research team included openness and flexibility in scheduling, adapting the modes of data collection, and being responsive to the accessibility needs of participants.

Hosting co-design events

Initially, we planned to host a series of synchronous or ‘live’ co-design workshops via Zoom with youth and service providers to validate journey maps, and then to prioritize and co-design around them. Given participants’ schedules, we adapted this plan to provide for both synchronous and asynchronous opportunities. Although we did host co-design events, we also reached out to individual youth to gain feedback at each stage of research. Similarly, we provided service providers the opportunity to provide feedback via email follow-up call with the research team to validate touch points and themes. This process allowed us the time and scope to delve deeply into each young person’s experience, and work with them to understand the implications at each point of their journeys, as well as reflect on the collective outputs produced. As a result of our overall engagement efforts, we have successfully established a group of youth with lived experience who are now enthusiastically invested in further contributions to this research, along with a network of service providers and partner organizations interested in distributing and integrating research outputs.



PHASE 2 SUMMARY

PURPOSE

Phase 2 of the project was an exploratory study that built on Phase 1 findings through journey and systems mapping exercises. The goals of this Phase were to (a) collect insights about transitions within and between points along the housing continuum, and (b) explore housing experiences and related services from the perspectives of 2SLGBTQ+ youth and service providers working with them.

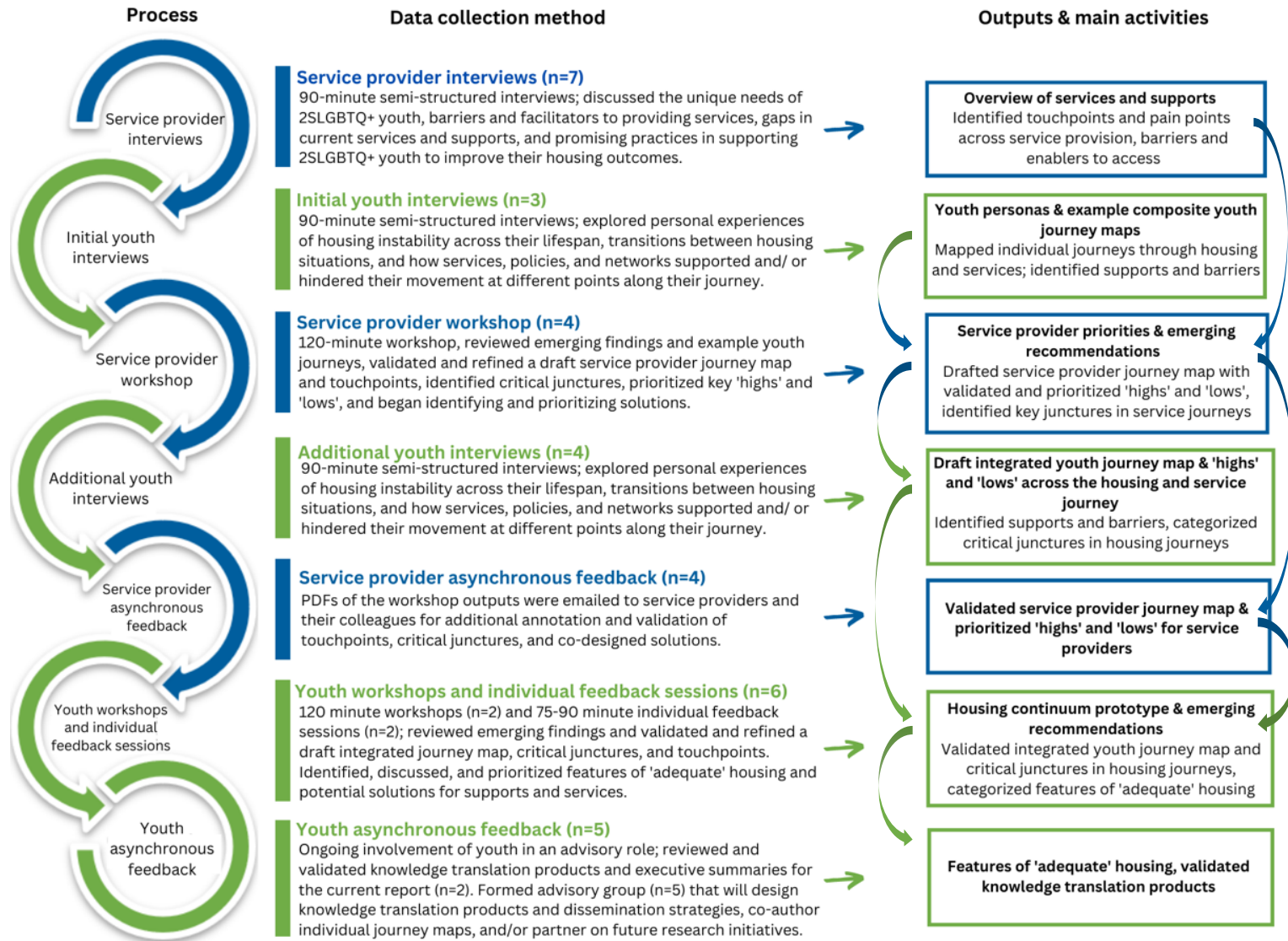
In addition to mapping youth's pathways through housing, we aimed to better understand their needs and priorities, as well as the gaps in programs and services to identify key intervention points. Through in-depth, qualitative exploration of youth and service provider experiences we sought to address the following knowledge gaps:

- **Information about transitions within and between points in the housing continuum:** as literature often focused on efficacy of interventions, services, programs, and supports, the movement between and within these points in the existing continuum was sparse.
- **Information about rental housing and home ownership experiences:** there was a dearth of research reporting 2SLGBTQ+ youth experiences once they transitioned out of emergency, social, and supported housing environments, and into market rental situations.
- **Service provider plans, processes, and approaches to supporting 2SLGBTQ+ youth,** both from specific 2SLGBTQ+ oriented organizations, and more general housing and social supports for youth.

METHODS

The scope of Phase 2 was shaped by Phase 1 findings, which guided our approach to recruiting participants in rural and urban areas across Canada, and our focus on housing precarity 'higher' on the housing continuum to explore trajectories of youth within and between multiple points on the continuum, including rental housing. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect in-depth data from service providers and 2SLGBTQ+ youth who have experienced housing precarity in order to understand how youth experience housing, transitions, and supports throughout their journeys. Youth and service providers were then engaged in a series of co-design workshops, followed by ongoing, iterative opportunities to provide feedback at each stage of data analysis, interpretation, and reporting. All findings related to specific youth experiences, as well as quotes, were member-checked with each youth.

Figure 2 Connecting data collection and co-design activities across Phase 2



Participants

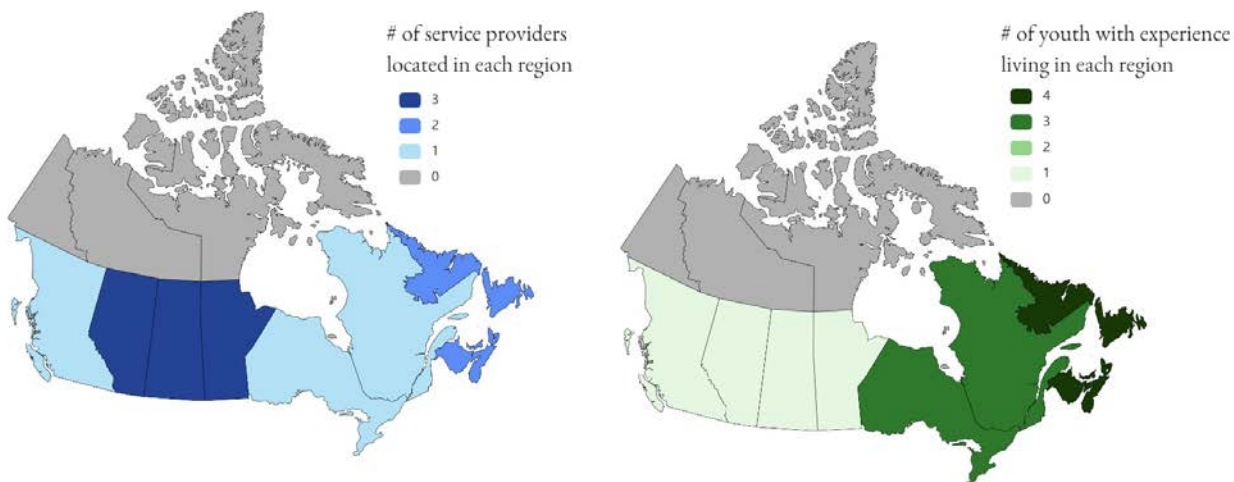
Youth

Youth (aged 18-30) who participated (n=7) described a diversity of housing experiences, including street homelessness, couch-surfing, shelter use, in-patient clinics, supportive and transitional housing, and rentals. All were sexual minorities, and identified as bisexual, queer, lesbian, and/or greysexual/asexual. Five participants self-identified as gender minorities (e.g., transgender, non-binary, and/or genderqueer). One participant identified as Two-Spirit. Youth had experiences living in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Nova Scotia, across urban (n=5) and rural (n=2) locations. Some participants additionally identified themselves as disabled (n=3), neurodivergent and/or autistic (n=5), Indigenous (n=1), racialized (n=1), and white/Caucasian (n=4).

Service providers

Service providers (n=7) who took part in the study worked at organizations offering transitional or supportive housing, wraparound supports, and case management, among others. Participants represented a mix of roles, including frontline workers (n=3), program managers (n=2), and director-level staff (n=2). All but one service provider worked at organizations that provided housing supports, and five worked in programs that directly provided housing. Participants staffed programs operated across British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Newfoundland and Labrador. Figure 3 below shows the geographic distribution of youth service provider participants.

Figure 3 Geographic spread of service provider and youth participants



FINDINGS

Many of our findings from Phase 2 echoed those of Phase 1. Overall, youth tended to describe key types and stages of housing more broadly than those represented by the current housing continuum.⁵ Furthermore, they tended to characterize their journeys by key experiences and the level of precarity perceived within each stage of housing: **place of origin**, being **unhoused**, being **housed through a support/service**, and **independent rentals**. Fulsome descriptions of these housing junctures, supports/services, and the factors impacting transitions, experiences, and barriers/facilitators related to each, can be found in the full Phase 2 report.

In the following sections, we describe four key takeaways from Phase 2: youth's journeys through and experiences with supports and services; youth's journeys through housing, presented as an updated housing continuum; features of 'adequate' housing for 2SLGBTQ+ youth; and the critical trade-offs youth are faced with when navigating housing precarity. Each are followed by a related stand-alone infographic. Finally, we summarize key takeaways and remaining knowledge gaps, followed by recommendations brought forward by youth and service providers, organized by relevant audience.

Supports and services

Youth and service providers described a vast array of formal and informal supports that aided youth in attaining and maintaining shelter and housing independence. These supports were both direct (e.g., connections to available rentals/landlords; knowledge about tenancy rights; financial support; transitional housing programs) and indirect (e.g., access to and advocacy within healthcare, employment, and education; connections to the 2SLGBTQ+ community; access to food banks). Most often, youth relied on their informal networks of friends, co-workers, and members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community for temporary shelter, access to resources, financial assistance, and connections to services and housing opportunities.

Individual-level barriers to accessing support included a lack of awareness of service availability, eligibility criteria, or purpose; fear or discomfort accessing services due to violence/discrimination or negative past experiences; a lack of connections to services or informal support networks; and guilt relying on networks or using service resources. All youth that accessed or attempted to access formal services in the past reported struggling to connect to or being rejected from at least one service. A lack of transparency heavily discouraged their willingness to seek further help.

Service-level barriers to accessing supports included a lack of appropriate services and long waitlists; inaccessible and onerous application processes; inaccessible locations and hours of operation; and strict eligibility criteria (e.g., age, identity, level of need, current housing) that

leave gaps in services. These barriers were noted by both youth and service providers, and most were linked to insufficient funding and resources which influenced a lack of codified policies and training for staff, and lower capacity to meet demand and accommodate higher-need youth.

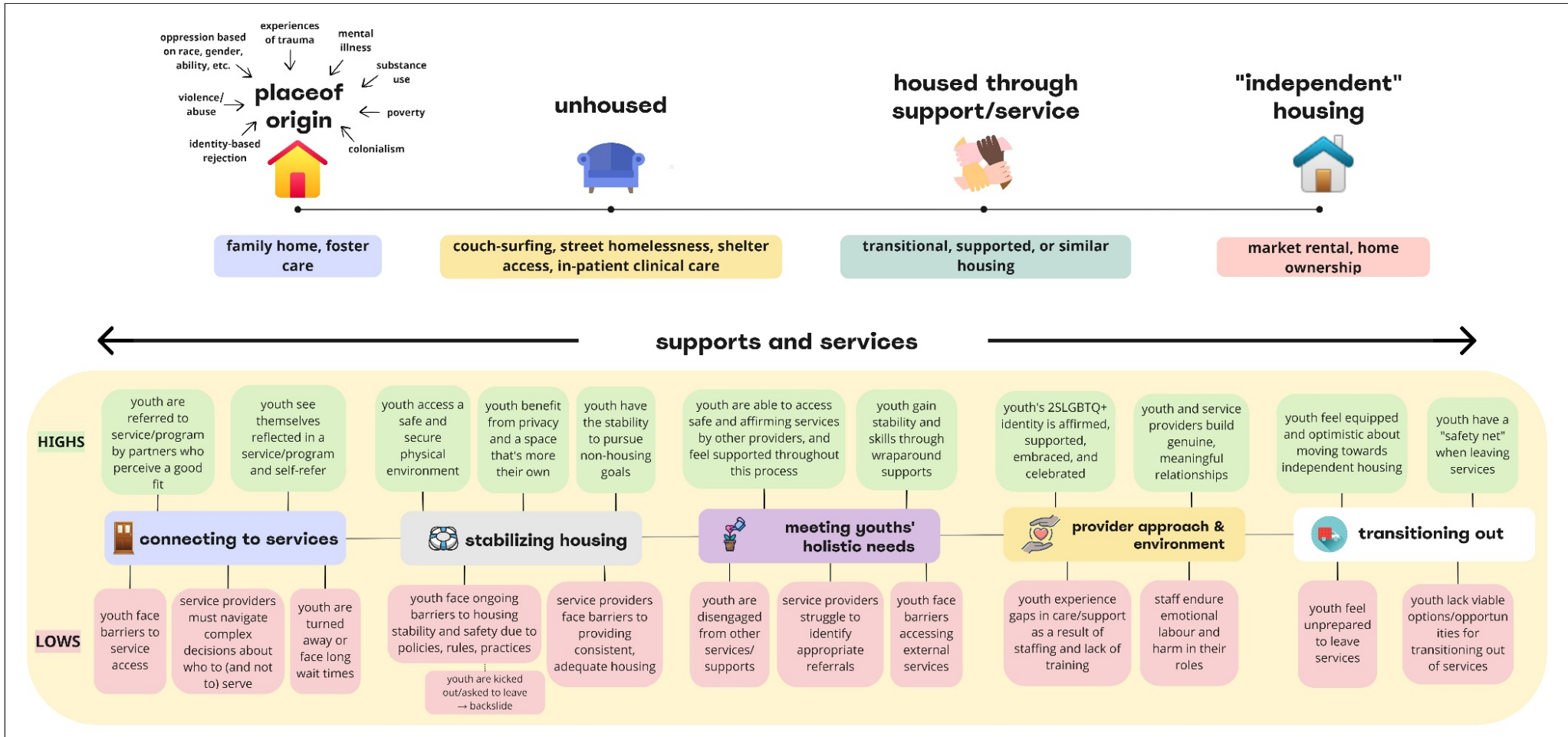
System- and policy-level barriers included a lack of targeted, long-term funding for the 2SLGBTQ+ community-focused initiatives, and lack of funding infrastructure to build programs; lack of research to substantiate grant/funding applications and inform program development; lack of available and affordable housing; insufficient tenancy rights and rent control; and complex, costly, and onerous applications to access assistance.

Youth identified features of services and supports that they felt made them more beneficial, welcoming, and accessible. Common features of these supports included building enabling environments by fostering connections to peers and community, offering queer-exclusive spaces while maintaining youth's anonymity and confidentiality, staff with lived experience who approach care with empathy and compassion, harm-reduction and trauma-informed care, and access to welcoming, affirming spaces.

The need for wrap-around services remained pertinent even as youth's needs shifted across their housing journeys. We found that youth in independent housing needed support from services to navigate housing transitions and landlord relationships, as well as wrap-around services to help stabilize needs peripheral to housing, including education, employment, and healthcare. While these supports are similar to those offered through transitional housing programs and case management, youth that live independently struggled to connect to, and qualify for, such services. Some youth experiencing rental precarity did not consider themselves eligible for such wrap-around supports when they were not explicitly linked to housing. At the same time, the majority of youth have self-excluded from housing supports, feeling they were not in enough need. Others had attempted to access supports but were 'ineligible at the margin,' most often because their income was too high to qualify, yet too low to afford the resources they needed. As a result, youth that had experience living independently felt that help was not available to them unless they fell further into precarity or lost their housing.

Figure 4 displays a map depicting youth's journeys through formal services, co-designed and validated by service providers and youth. It represents key touchpoints as identified and prioritized by participants within the formal service landscape for 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

Figure 4 Touchpoints along 2SLGBTQ+ youth's journeys through housing-related services and wrap-around supports



Revisiting the housing continuum: prototyping a queer-centred continuum

In conversations with participants, and through mapping youth’s holistic lifelong journeys, we found that the housing continuum⁵ largely obscures the complexity of 2SLGBTQ+ youth’s journeys, prescribes norms and expectations that may not resonate with the youth, and may in fact serve to further marginalize their distinct experiences. We noted four main challenges in applying the housing continuum to 2SLGBTQ+ youth’s housing journeys.

Non-linear and oversimplified. 2SLGBTQ+ youth experienced a high degree of transience and movement between housing types in multidirectional ways, including movement “forward” and “backward” on the continuum and cycling between and within housing types. Progression through housing types is not step-wise; youth may move from one end of the continuum (e.g., homeless) to the other (e.g., affordable rental) with few or no steps in-between; this has implications for the supports youth need to aid their transitions and their ability to access them.

Omission of key housing types. Some key housing/shelter types were identified by youth as missing, such as the family home/foster care, in-patient clinics, and the criminal justice system. The inclusion of housing types, such as social and community housing, on the continuum are important because they highlight the gaps in available services and use by youth.

Progression across the continuum. The organization of the continuum by housing type (e.g., homeless, emergency shelter, affordable rental) implies increasing stability and ‘progression’ moving left to right.^{64,65} However, youth described varying levels of housing insecurity across housing types, which did not necessarily dissipate as they moved into or toward affordable rentals. Additionally, most saw market ownership as aspirational rather than an attainable goal.

Lack of context. Without recognizing the context in which it operates, this housing framework risks perpetuating the assumption that access to various housing types is distributed equitably within society. In reality, 2SLGBTQ+ youth are under- or overrepresented in different types of housing and the distinct, structural barriers they face – along with the systems that produce them – are not depicted. Across the continuum, we found 2SLGBTQ+ youth face unique and compounding barriers, including identity-based rejection and discrimination by staff, landlords, and roommates, safety concerns, a lack of tailored services, and exclusionary policies.

Together with youth, we sought to adapt the housing continuum to more closely reflect their experiences and holistic journeys. This prototype, represented on the following page, more intentionally visualizes youth’s movements through housing, and shifts away from structuring the continuum based on the type of housing and towards the quality, characteristics, and acceptability of housing. The next graphic on subsequent page depicts a more in-depth journey map through the independent rental stage.

PROTOTYPING A QUEER-CENTERED HOUSING CONTINUUM

+ POSITIVE DRIVERS

1. Conflict resolution
2. Support network provides housing/shelter
3. Income security (job, student loans, network support)
4. Rent with roommate/friend(s)/ partner(s)
5. Assistance searching for housing
6. Time to search for appropriate housing
7. Luck
8. Income security

- NEGATIVE DRIVERS

1. Lack of other options
2. Sense of urgency
3. Lack of knowledge/awareness of rental rights, processes
4. Kicked out/evicted
5. Risk/threat to safety
6. Services not appropriate (e.g., gender segregated)
7. Aging out
8. Unable to afford rent (rent increase, loss of income, roommate moves/refuses to pay)
9. Ongoing risk/threat of precarity; job loss, breakup, eviction

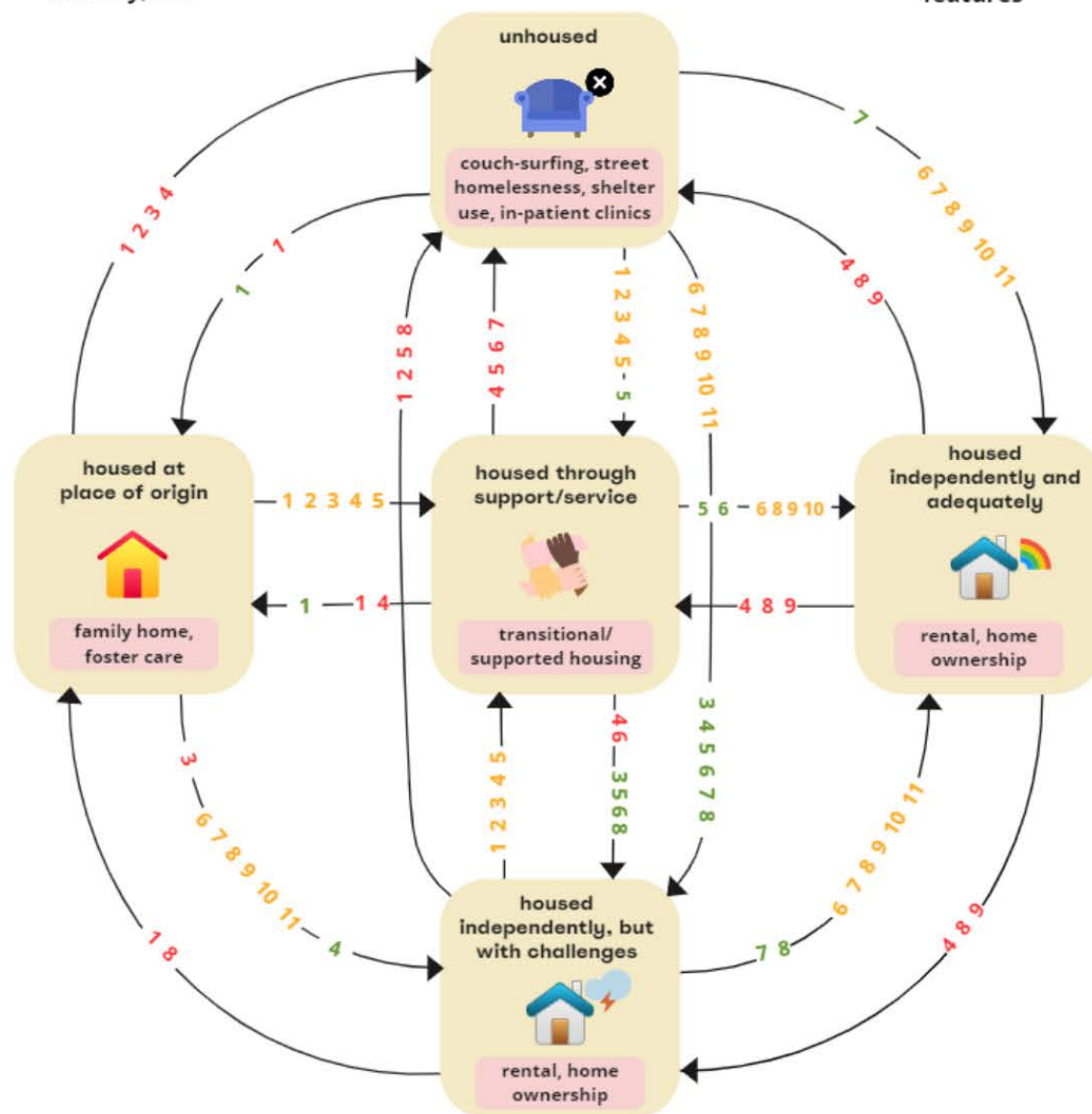
! BARRIERS

1. Lack of services, long waitlists
2. Lack of awareness of services
3. Self-exclusion (safety/stigma/other)
4. Perceived/actual eligibility criteria
5. Services not appropriate (e.g., gender segregated)
6. Low rental availability, lack of affordable options
7. Lack of/limited support
8. Resource constraints (time, income)
9. Risk of discrimination
10. Requirements (large deposits, credit checks, employment references)
11. Lack of knowledge/awareness of rental rights, processes

housing adequacy varies depending on household structure, pre-existing conflict, support for identity, etc.

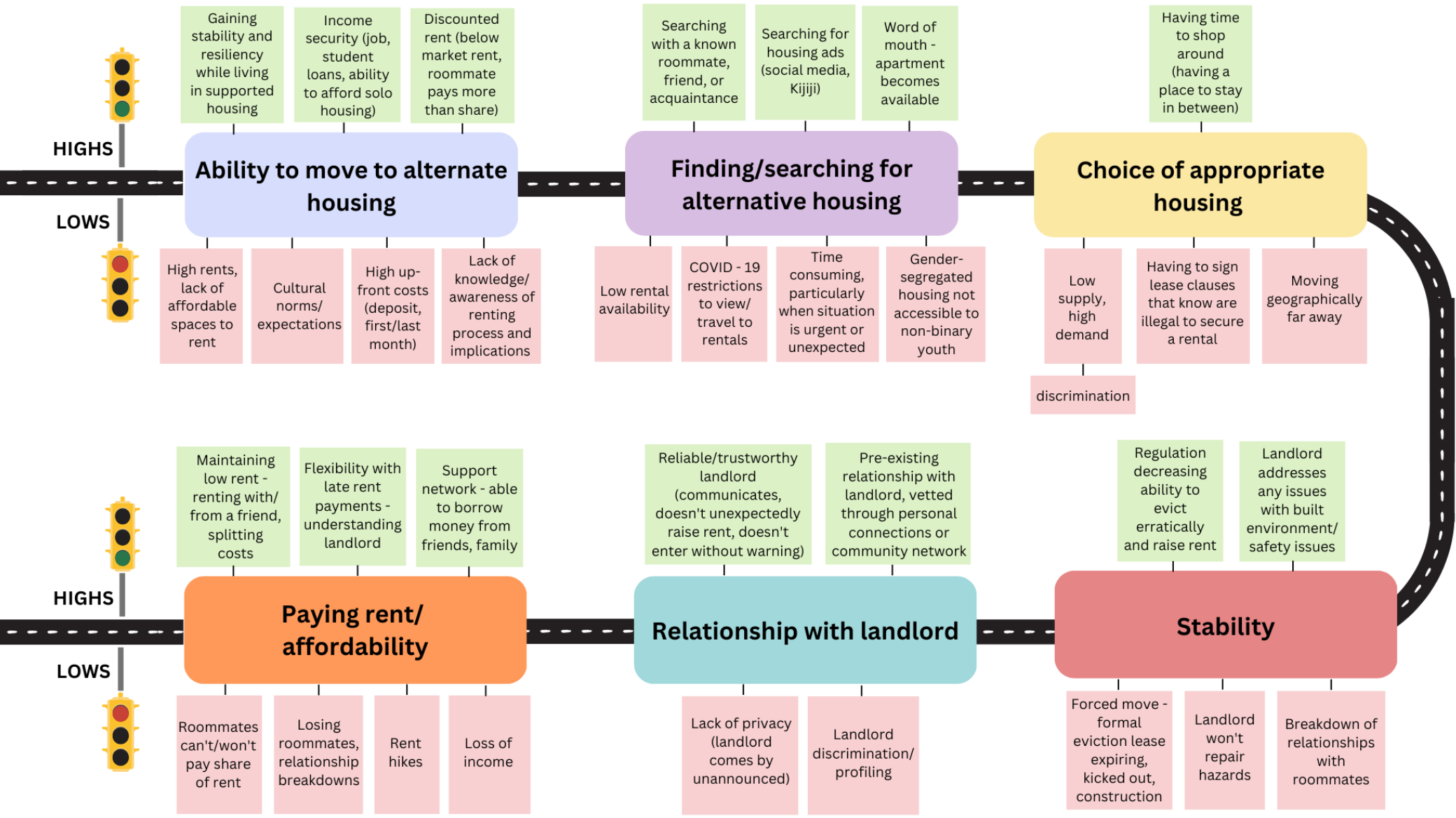
housing is inadequate to meet basic needs; safety, stability, and accessibility are limited/at risk

housing is adequate to meet basic needs; safety, stability, and accessibility are core features



Pathways through independent rental housing for 2SLGBTQ+ youth

FINDING INDEPENDENT HOUSING 



MAINTAINING INDEPENDENT HOUSING 

Features of housing adequacy for 2SLGBTQ+ youth

Numerous sources have defined features of housing necessary to meet basic housing needs. Some frameworks focus on the features of housing itself; for example, the Core Housing Need,⁶⁶ a framework used federally as a proxy for housing acceptability,⁶⁷ categorizes housing standards based on the need for major repairs, cost as a proportion of gross household income, and size and space available for residents. More comprehensive examples encompass the core needs of individuals beyond housing directly, including how well housing and its location support emotional, physical, spiritual, and cultural needs and connections, long-term stability, sustainability, and security.⁶⁸ A key finding from our study is the experience and perception of housing precarity and insecurity across youth's housing journeys, including in independent rentals. Past experiences of identity-based rejection, violence, harassment, and discrimination impacted 2SLGBTQ+ youth's experiences in, and ability to maintain, housing. In addition, the cyclical nature of their housing journeys and the compounding factors 2SLGBTQ+ youth experience meant that predictability and stability were paramount to the youth we engaged. Youth described similar features or principles of housing adequacy as those found in the literature, ultimately drafting five categories of principles that impacted their perception of precarity and housing adequacy. These included: **safety, stability, accessibility, sustainability,** and support for **holistic wellbeing**. Rather than focusing on housing type (e.g., rentals) or living situation (e.g., with roommates, alone), the housing features identified captured a combination of housing location, environment, affordability, accessibility, and relationships.

When asked what defines 'good' housing, youth agreed that 'good' was too subjective a term, and suggested housing be framed as 'adequate' or 'inadequate.' Housing that is 'adequate' is not necessarily 'good' housing, but rather 'good enough.' Although youth felt that there was a distinct difference between independent housing that is 'adequate' (or 'good enough') and housing that is 'inadequate,' this difference was difficult to articulate. For housing to be adequate, it did not need to meet all proposed qualities, but there was no universal threshold or number of necessary qualities identified by the youth – this was ultimately based on individual perceptions and past experiences. Youth further distinguished the difference between 'adequate' and 'ideal' (or 'good') housing – and agreed that ideal housing would meet all of the identified qualities. At the same time, while having all qualities met made housing adequate, it did not necessarily make the housing ideal, as the identified features are designed to meet only basic needs.

The infographic below describes the features youth described as essential to achieving 'adequate' housing.

Features of 'adequate' housing

We asked 2SLGBTQ+ youth: what is 'good' vs 'good enough' housing?
What makes housing 'adequate' and 'inadequate'?

It's different for everyone. Youth agreed that there is no universal formula or threshold of features that determines what makes housing adequate. However, the youth we engaged agreed that all of the features described below are equally important, and for housing to be 'adequate', all of these basic needs must be met.

SAFE



The residence, neighbourhood, and community are 'safe' physically and emotionally. Physical wellbeing is not jeopardized by violence/abuse from roommates, family, partners, landlords, or neighbours, nor by environmental and structural hazards. There is space, privacy, and support to openly explore and express identity.

- Space & privacy
- Emotional supports
- Emotional safety
- Physical safety - from abuse/violence & environmental hazards
- Freedom to express self & identity
- Community

STABLE



Youth have a sense of agency and control over their living situation, without fear of eviction. There is a sense of permanence if the housing is available as long as needed, even if the situation is short-term. The housing must be affordable and sustainable into the foreseeable future, which may be jeopardized by rental increases or changes in income and employment.

- Agency & control
- Permanence
- Predictable, consistent (rent, space, roommates)
- Affordable
- Sustainable

SUSTAINABLE



As a branch of stability, sustainability refers to the ability to maintain a living situation in the long-term; it is not just 'okay for now' or affordable by inconsistent means. Youth can access everything they will need in the longer-term, such that the residence remains suitable into the future, including access to employment, services, and community.

- Affordable
- Access to community, networks, healthcare, services & employment
- Rent stability and predictability

ACCESSIBLE



The residence is located in close proximity to supports and community, employment/education, and services. Internet/cellular service and public transit are available, reliable, and comprehensive. Youth's physical, mental, and emotional needs and abilities are respected by roommates, family, and landlords, and they are free from triggering environments and events.

- Physically & mentally accessible living space
- Affordable
- Access to community, networks, healthcare, services & employment
- Access to transit & technology
- Inclusive

HOLISTIC LIVING



Attaining safe, stable, sustainable, and accessible housing is not at the cost of youth's wellbeing or access to other resources. Trade-offs are not necessary to attain and maintain housing, especially those of affordability and location. Youth have space to address their physical/mental health, cultural and spiritual wellbeing, and community/cultural connections.

- Affordable
- Freedom to express self & identity
- Cultural/spiritual connections
- Connection to community, Elders, mentors

Trade-offs

2SLGBTQ+ youth's movement through housing was characterized by constrained agency, wherein limited access to income and resources forced them to make difficult decisions, trading-off between basic needs to remain housed. Poverty, income insecurity, and a lack of affordable housing were among the most urgent challenges identified by the participants, with major consequences for housing mobility. Youth's housing journeys were intimately informed by their access to economic and household resources, including income, food, and hygiene facilities – and most often, a lack thereof. Youth described sacrificing one resource or service to afford another, or obtaining lower quality/quantities of resources at the cost of non-material needs such as health, security, safety, and privacy. No youth we spoke to had been in housing that met all of their basic needs. We identified four key needs that were directly impacted by housing and shaped youth's experiences within, and drove transitions between, housing types.

Exploring and expressing identity. Youth navigated identity disclosure across their housing journeys. They described living in situations where exploring and expressing their 2SLGBTQ+ and intersecting identities (such as neurodivergence) put them in danger of violence, abuse, or eviction, or necessitated hiding them. The ability to explore and express their identities was supported by living alone or with friends/partners, in housing with 2SLGBTQ+ peers, and through supportive community connections outside of housing.

Stability and predictability. Youth described a constant state of vigilance that characterized their housing journeys, and a sense of needing to be prepared to leave or be kicked out at any time. This sense of precarity was grounded in expectations and perceived risk of identity-based rejection, relationships with roommates and parents, eviction, rent increases, and loss of income.

Autonomy, freedom, and privacy. Most 2SLGBTQ+ youth saw autonomy, freedom, and privacy as privileges that remained out of reach. Many living situations – with roommates, landlords, and family – restricted youth's ability to freely be their authentic selves for fear of eviction, violence/harassment, and discrimination.

Physical and emotional safety. Exposure to violence, abuse, and harassment from roommates, partners, or tenants in shelters/supportive housing was often connected to youth's 2SLGBTQ+ identities. Participants described the toll that constant vigilance and identity concealment had on their mental health. They also noted numerous environmental hazards they encountered in rentals, such as mold, mice, and dangerous structures, impacting tenants' physical health.

Youth described prioritizing different needs throughout their journey and the trade-offs they had made to meet their most pressing personal needs. Each youth we spoke with navigated decisions differently, and made different trade-offs along various points of their journeys. The infographic below highlights examples of common trade-offs youth reported making through their journeys.

When housing is unaffordable:

2SLGBTQ+ youth's trade-offs between affordable housing and holistic needs

With finite access to income, youth may have limited access to resources/necessities that cost money. Youth who cannot afford to fulfill all of their needs may choose a lower quality/quantity of resources, or forego one or more resources altogether to afford another. These include (but are not limited to):



Rent/housing



Healthcare



Utilities



Food



Education

Making trade-offs

Often, youth's housing type or living situation influenced their ability to meet numerous non-material, holistic needs. These needs were sometimes at odds with each other, which necessitated youth making difficult decisions between them. Often youth's choice of housing was determined by cost/affordability, driving some youth to make trade-offs among these holistic needs and resources such as food, utilities, and healthcare. Thus, less affordable rent may be mitigated by youth forgoing healthcare, food, and utilities rather than trading safety or autonomy for housing they could 'afford'.

Below are examples of common trade-offs.

Living with family



- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Rent affordability | Lease stability & predictability |
| Access to resources | Safely explore & express identity |
| | Privacy, freedom & autonomy |
| | Mental health & wellbeing |

Renting alone



- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Safely explore & express identity | Rent affordability |
| Privacy, freedom & autonomy | Access to resources |
| Physical health & safety | |
| Mental health & wellbeing | |

Renting with roommates



- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Rent affordability | Safely explore & express identity |
| | Privacy, freedom & autonomy |
| | Physical health & safety |
| | Mental health & wellbeing |

Renting with friend(s)/partner(s)



- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| Rent affordability | Lease stability & predictability |
| Access to resources | |
| Access to community | |

Living in hazardous building



- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Rent affordability | Physical health & safety |
| | Lease stability & predictability |

Living in rural/remote area



- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Rent affordability | Access to resources |
| | Access to community |

What drives these decisions?

There is no formula or universal pattern.

Each youth makes different trade-offs based on their priorities and needs over time. These may be driven by their past experiences, access to other resources/supports, most pressing needs, and more.

2SLGBTQ+ youth, compared to their cis-heterosexual counterparts, experience:

- an increased risk of violence and harassment from roommates and family based on identity, driving the need for privacy and community connections
- increased risk of being evicted/kicked out for identity-based rejection
- negative impacts to mental health/wellbeing as a result of hiding their identity
- higher rates of mental illness and substance use disorders, increasing the need for access to healthcare, services, and community
- higher healthcare costs, particularly for trans youth who medically and/or socially transition

How does this uniquely impact the 2SLGBTQ+ community?

CONCLUSION

This phase of research aimed to address existing knowledge gaps related to housing for 2SLGBTQ+ youth and to co-develop a prototype queer-centered housing continuum. Despite its contributions regarding journeys to safe, stable, and long-term housing for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, several research and knowledge gaps remain to be addressed. First, exploring housing access for queer youth across more and different contexts, by expanding the group of youth informing this type of work, is needed to validate the queer-centered continuum, and informing policy that can enhance queer youth's access to housing. Second, in terms of geography, we did not connect with youth or service providers in remote and Northern contexts. Youth living in rural, remote, and Northern contexts face unique challenges to housing and service access that require in-depth exploration. Although youth who contributed to this work were a diverse group, expanding understanding of 2SLGBTQ+ experiences necessitates involving more young people to facilitate a deeper, intersectional understanding of how various factors influence access at different points in the journey to access housing.



CO-DESIGNED RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR SERVICE PROVIDING ORGANIZATIONS

Empower 2SLGBTQ+ youth through education, knowledge sharing, and awareness building

- Provide **education and training** (e.g., on equity and anti-oppression, affirming and including 2SLGBTQ+ youth, and human rights and legal obligations) to service providers, landlords, and other actors (e.g., property developers, social housing providers) within the housing system interacting with 2SLGBTQ+ youth.
- Ensure that 2SLGBTQ+ youth are **aware of the formal services and supports available to them**, and that this information is readily available and shared in the appropriate fora.
- **Encourage service uptake and reduce self-exclusion** among 2SLGBTQ+ youth, including through (a) building broader understanding of the causes and experiences of housing instability and insecurity, (b) combating stigma and shame associated with poverty, homelessness, and/or service use, and (c) ensuring 2SLGBTQ+ youth see their experiences reflected in eligibility criteria, particularly given the high rates of hidden homelessness.
- Establish or strengthen **formal and informal channels for 2SLGBTQ+ youth to access information** about housing opportunities, services, landlords, and/or roommates. Social media platforms dedicated to 2SLGBTQ+ housing, crowdsourced information about safe landlords or buildings (e.g., something similar to Rate My Professors), and related approaches were identified as actual or potential ways to equip 2SLGBTQ+ youth with knowledge about where, from whom, and with whom they live or access services.
- Build **knowledge and capacity among 2SLGBTQ+ youth** via accessible workshops or materials on tenant rights, budgeting and financial management (e.g., paying bills, filing income tax), applying for and accessing benefits (e.g., social assistance), and navigating the mental health system.
- **Strengthen allyship** for 2SLGBTQ+ youth seeking housing in local communities. Consider ways to mitigate power imbalances between landlords and 2SLGBTQ+ youth renters. This includes improvements to anti-discrimination and tenants' rights legislation that favours 2SLGBTQ+ youth renters, more accessible and equitable complaint processes, and ensuring compliance and engagement with inclusive housing policies.

'Queerify' services and supports to create safe, queer-friendly spaces

- Normalize and codify the expectation through policies and training that **all housing and related services, supports, and programs be inclusive and safe for 2SLGBTQ+ youth**. While these population-specific were described as crucial, a “no wrong door” approach should ensure that 2SLGBTQ+ youth are supported and affirmed regardless of where they may go. Supports for trans, Indigenous queer and Black and racialized queer young people were noted as particularly important.
- Establish **dedicated positions or roles** within housing-related services, for instance outreach workers, counsellors, or housing support workers focused primarily or exclusively on 2SLGBTQ+ youth.
- Consider ways to increase the **representation of 2SLGBTQ+ people in frontline service delivery roles**, recognizing the value and importance of lived experience in these positions.
- Explore opportunities to **reduce strict eligibility criteria or conditions** for accessing formal services, for instance, removing requirements for substance abstinence or extending eligible age ranges. Seek to recognize and mitigate bias during application and intake processes, recognizing that some 2SLGBTQ+ youth accessing services may not align with stereotypes or expectations about the “typical” client.

Offer holistic supports

- Expand the **breadth and scope of housing-related programs and supports** available to 2SLGBTQ+ youth through formal services. Examples shared included pro bono legal support, help finding and securing housing, donations or community swaps for furniture and homeware items, and advocacy in interactions with landlords or in the rental market more broadly.
- Implement **existing promising practices and policies** related to housing services for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, including those involving staff education and training, gender inclusion, harassment and violence, anonymity and privacy, and so on.
- Facilitate more opportunities for **peer mentorship and support** among 2SLGBTQ+ youth.
- Support initiatives that enable 2SLGBTQ+ youth to **socialize and connect with one another**, including through dedicated physical space that is accessible and age-inclusive.
- Seek opportunities for the housing system to acknowledge, validate, support, and strengthen **queer kinship and chosen family** in the housing journeys of 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

- Provide additional **in-kind supports** to 2SLGBTQ+ youth experiencing housing instability or insecurity, including those improving food security (e.g., grocery store gift cards), access to technology (e.g., cell phone), and affirming gender expression (e.g., binders, clothing).

FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND BUSINESSES

- Actively pursue **education and training** about how to provide inclusive opportunities for 2SLGBTQ+ youth to access rental housing, including on equity and anti-oppression, affirming and including 2SLGBTQ+ youth, and human rights and legal obligations.
- Support, develop, and facilitate initiatives and **opportunities for queer youth to connect with mentors, host homes,¹⁰ each other, and allied supports**. Facilitate more opportunities for **peer mentorship and support** among 2SLGBTQ+ youth.
- **Offer family-based supports and projects aimed increasing acceptance, reconciliation, and decreasing rejection**. Provide education and training to parents and family members normalizing acceptance of and visible presence of the 2SLGBTQ+ people in the community.
- Seek opportunities for the housing system to acknowledge, validate, support, and strengthen **queer kinship and chosen family** in the housing journeys of 2SLGBTQ+ youth.
- Improve access to **institutional, structural, and financial support for community-led, grassroots initiatives** supporting 2SLGBTQ+ youth.
- Provide opportunities for 2SLGBTQ+ youth to **access and succeed in employment**, including at the service delivery (e.g., wraparound supports or grants to support career transitions), employer (e.g., education and training, workplace flexibility and accessibility), and policy (e.g., living wage laws, stronger anti-discrimination legislation) levels.

FOR DECISION- AND POLICY-MAKERS AT ALL LEVELS

Address gaps in services identified in the literature and through this project's findings

- Expand the **breadth and scope of housing-related programs and supports** available to 2SLGBTQ+ youth through formal services. Examples shared included pro bono legal support, help finding and securing housing, donations or community swaps for furniture and homeware items, and advocacy in interactions with landlords or in the rental market more broadly.

- Establish more **population-specific housing options and services** tailored to 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Establish population-specific supports that reflect the diversity of backgrounds, needs, and experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth. This could mean offering supports that span various housing types (e.g., shelters, transitional homes, educational residences, rental apartments), offer youth choice in terms of approach (e.g., harm reduction as well as abstinence-based models), and create dedicated space for specific youth (e.g., gender minority youth, Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer youth).
- Explore additional opportunities to **build sector capacity** to design and implement housing services for 2SLGBTQ+ youth (e.g., fora for sharing promising practices and lessons learned, guidance for those seeking to establish population-specific programs, etc.).

Connect with 2SLGBTQ+ youth-serving organizations to develop, implement, and fund initiatives that align with evidence-informed, holistic care

- Improve the **availability, flexibility, sustainability, adequacy of funding** for housing and related services, programs, and supports for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Expand funding opportunities that reflect the need for permanent services and that offer predictability for both youth and providers, including funding that covers administrative or overhead costs (e.g., physical space or buildings, staff).
- Advocate for, and invest in, improved access to quality of **mental health and health care** that is appropriate, affirming, and inclusive of 2SLGBTQ+ people and youth. Identify networks of allies and ‘safe’ healthcare providers in the community, and find ways to help connect youth with those providers.

Consider how policy can create more just housing systems for 2SLGBTQ+ youth

- Implement **existing promising practices and policies** related to housing services for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, including those involving staff education and training, gender inclusion, harassment and violence, anonymity and privacy, etc., at all levels of governance.
- **Normalize and institutionalize 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion** across the housing system, including among service providers, banking professionals, developers, and policymakers.
- Pursue policy responses to **poverty and income insecurity** among 2SLGBTQ+ youth, including the potential for direct and targeted income assistance (e.g., basic income guarantee, improving access to and adequacy of provincial social assistance).

- Provide 2SLGBTQ+ youth with **direct and targeted income assistance** at key moments in their housing journeys. This could include financial support for those leaving unsafe housing, renters (e.g., urgent rent support, money for security deposits), or first-time home buyers, and could be coordinated by government, non-profit, or community-based actors.
- Prioritize 2SLGBTQ+ youth as a **distinct and priority population** within federal housing policy and funding envelopes.
- Reduce **barriers to rental and ownership** for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, for instance, through alternate or more flexible approaches to credit scoring, debt or student loan relief, or other opportunities to help youth qualify for a lease or mortgage.
- Invest in **Housing First approaches** to respond to 2SLGBTQ+ youth homelessness.
- Pursue policy interventions that **mitigate power imbalances between landlords and 2SLGBTQ+ youth renters**.
- Increase the **supply of available and accessible housing** for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Suggestions included the introduction of new affordable and subsidized/rent-geared-to-income units as well as stronger regulation of existing developments (e.g., restrictions on short-term rentals such as Airbnb).
- Protect 2SLGBTQ+ youth and all renters against **unsustainable and unpredictable rent increases** (e.g., via stronger rent control policy).
- Explore opportunities for **2SLGBTQ+ youth to inform Canada's housing system** by drawing on their own lived experience, and compensating them for their contributions. This could take the form of advisory groups, individual consultants, or wider consultation to seek input on housing policy, programs, and related endeavours.

Address existing research and knowledge gaps

- Continue to support research on the **housing journeys, experiences, needs, and successes of 2SLGBTQ+ youth**. In particular, pursue research that adopts an intersectional approach and that invites further nuance and specificity through a narrower focus on particular histories, identities, or contexts. For example, future research could explore the distinct housing experiences and journeys of 2SLGBTQ+ youth who are neurodivergent, trans or non-binary, trauma survivors, or who live in remote, rural, northern, or on-reserve settings.

- Prioritize **inclusive, participatory, and community-based research** that is informed by 2SLGBTQ+ youth, meaningfully engages affected communities, and that values lived experience as a valid and necessary contribution to evidence generation.

While this project represents an important step to better understanding the trajectories of homeless and precariously housed 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Canada, more research and action is needed meaningfully address these youth's housing needs. We hope this project's findings help build the foundation from which policy and programming actors can work to facilitate access to stable, safe, and long-term housing for 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

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APPENDIX A: KEY TERMS

2SLGBTQ+: An acronym that stands for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, with the “+” representing all other gender and sexual minority identities (e.g., Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual, Non-binary, Questioning). Other acronyms used to refer to the sexual and gender minority community include 2SLGBTQQIAA+, 2SLGBTQIA+, LGBTQ2S+, LGBTQ2IA+, LGBTQ+, LGBTQ, LGBTQ2S, LGBT2SQ+, and LGBTQIA+. While this report uses the 2SLGBTQ+ acronym, other researchers, organizations, or institutions may use alternate acronyms based on their own organizational policies.

Cisgender: A term to describe someone whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth (e.g., someone who was assigned female at birth and identifies as a woman); the opposite of transgender.^{69(p519)}

Emergency shelters: Emergency shelters include overnight shelters and hotel stays for people who are homeless, as well as shelters and hotel stays for those impacted by family violence.⁷⁰

Gender minority: People whose gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth, whether that’s transgender men, transgender women, or non-binary people, who may or may not also identify as transgender.⁷¹

Hidden homelessness: Hidden homelessness refers to the experiences of living “without guarantee of continued residency or immediate prospects for accessing permanent housing.”⁷² The distinction on surveys is often made, for example, between questions such as “Have you ever been homeless, that is, having to live in a shelter, on the street, or in an abandoned building?” to measure homelessness, and “Have you ever had to temporarily live with family or friends (i.e., couch surfing), in your car or anywhere else because you had nowhere else to live?” to measure hidden homelessness.⁷³

Homelessness: Homelessness describes individuals, families, or communities without “stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it”, and the societal barriers and systemic issues that drive that lack of housing.⁷²

Home ownership: Home ownership in this report includes both affordable home ownership and market home ownership, and can include multi-unit and single family home ownership, or shared equity models such as mobile homes or housing cooperatives.⁵

Housing continuum: The housing continuum is a model of housing that delineates eight different housing experiences on a horizontal axis, from homeless on the far left, moving through emergency shelters, transitional housing, social housing, affordable rental housing, affordable home ownership, market rental housing, and ending at market home ownership on

the far right. While the traditional supposition would be that individuals will move from left to right with homeownership as the ultimate goal, here we use the housing continuum as a more general way of identifying different housing scenarios, with the acknowledgment that movement along the continuum is not necessarily linear or unidirectional.⁵



Housing instability: Definitionally, housing instability varies across sources, but generally encompasses a threat to housing security across such dimensions as housing type, housing history, housing tenure, financial status, legal standing, education and employment status, harmful substance use, and assessments of satisfaction and stability.⁷⁴ This can encompass a wide variety of experiences related to housing, including homelessness and shelter use, challenges with paying rent, overcrowding, safety concerns related to housing, frequently moving, or spending the majority of household income on housing.

Intersectionality: Grounded in Black feminist thought, intersectionality proposes that “race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive characteristics, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities.”⁷⁵

Point-in-Time counts: The point-in-time counts are a Canadian community level measure of homelessness, including both sheltered and unsheltered homelessness. Point-in-time counts are an annual survey or ‘snapshot’ of homelessness on a given day.

Rental housing: Rental housing in this report refers to both affordable rental housing and market rental housing. This includes purposeful long-term rental units and private rentals, as well as different housing types (e.g., apartments, townhomes, single family homes, etc.).⁵

Sexual minority: Sexual minority refers to individuals whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, pansexual, etc.).

Social housing: Social housing refers to government-assisted housing that provides lower cost rental units to households with low-to-moderate incomes, including public housing, not-for-profit and cooperative housing, rent supplement programs, and rural and Indigenous housing programs.⁷⁶

Transgender: Transgender describes someone whose sex assigned at birth is different than their gender identity. For instance, someone who was assigned female at birth and identifies as a

man (trans man). Transgender is an umbrella term for those choosing to identify as such, and includes those who are trans binary (i.e., identify as transgender and as a man or woman) or trans non-binary (i.e., identify as transgender but not as either a man or woman, including genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, and so on).⁷¹

Transitional housing: Transitional housing bridges the gap between unsheltered homelessness or emergency shelter accommodation and more permanent housing. Transitional housing typically also provides services beyond basic housing needs, offers more privacy for residents, and emphasizes social engagement, with a set time limit on accommodations.⁷⁰

Two-Spirit is an English umbrella term coined by Indigenous members of the LGBTQ+ community that transcends Western and colonial ideas of gender and sexuality. Often used to describe someone who possesses both masculine and feminine spirits, Two-Spirit is a cultural term reserved only for those who identify as Indigenous.⁷⁷ Some Indigenous people identify as Two-Spirit rather than, or in addition to, identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer.

Youth: A broad definition of youth has been used in this report. No strict age limit or cut-off was imposed, but different sources referenced used a variety of age ranges, from under 18 years old to under 30 years old. When exact definitions of youth are used, they are referenced in the text.



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