

Breaking Down Barriers

Affordable LGBT2SQ housing development opportunities for seniors in Winnipeg, Manitoba



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Background

In Winnipeg, many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited and queer (LGBT2SQ) aging seniors encounter intertwining systematic disadvantages and barriers when it comes to choosing housing as they age. Out of necessity, many LGBT2SQ seniors "return to the closet" in the hopes of finding housing they can afford and in order to gain better treatment by staff, visitors and other residents. Focused LGBT2SQ senior affordable housing developments is a means to address the intersecting needs of LGBT2SQ seniors that is equitable, context specific, culturally appropriate, and inclusive.



Methodology

Six individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with Winnipeg representatives from housing development, housing advocates, and LGBT2SQ resource sectors and four precedent developments in the United States were examined to gather information and to understand the challenges of focused LGBT2SQ affordable housing development in Winnipeg.

Research Questions

1. What are some of the opportunities and challenges in developing affordable housing for LGBT2SQ seniors in Canada?
2. What lessons do precedents from other jurisdictions offer Winnipeg?



Findings

LGBT2SQ Population

- 1 **Lack of Knowledge.** The importance of knowledge and familiarity with the LGBT2SQ community to understanding the uniqueness of their needs. There is a significant lack of recognized data and information available.
- 2 **Barriers to Access.** LGBT2SQ people disproportionately represent those who fall through the cracks when trying to access social services. For the senior LGBT2SQ people this becomes more of a concern as they have fewer social networks to assist them in finding adequate affordable housing and staying housed
- 3 **Gaps.** Lack of representation within the services themselves and within the educational system which is caused by the service programs not having a baseline knowledge of the LGBT2SQ community, especially the individuals who identify within the 'T2SQ' part of the acronym.
- 4 **Focused service provision.** LGBT2SQ specific housing can offer a sense of community where residents have a better understanding of the needs and challenges of long-term care and medical needs. They are also better equipped to meet these needs than mainstream senior housing developments.

Housing Development

- 5 **Knowledge, Evidence and Feasibility.** There is a lack of data about the LGBT2SQ community. Without this information it is difficult to establish policies which accurately reflect the community.
- 6 **Capacity.** Non-profits are the main driver of the affordable housing developments. However, many need to partner with an organization which has the capacity to sustain the time and energy required to get a housing development started.
- 7 **Funding.** Rising costs within the construction industry can deter developers to take a risk on affordable housing for a more profitable development. Funding however, can entice developers to include affordable units into a project.
- 8 **Responsibility.** Is there a right answer to who is responsible for developing affordable housing? The governments need to be the ones responsible for getting the housing built by providing the funding but also should establish policies which would generate more affordable housing development by the non-profit sector.

Case Study

Town Hall Apartments
Chicago, Illinois



- An example of modifying existing infrastructure to fulfill a need – the building was previously a neighbourhood police station
- There is one full-time case manager on-site that meets with all residents individually at least twice a month
- The current waitlist has over 475 applicants

Spirit on Lake Apartments
Minneapolis, Minnesota



- Originated from a faith community due to the experience of a parishioner of the Spirit of the Lake United Church of Christ
- There are no age restrictions – 35% of the residents are new comers from East Africa, some with families and children
- All group events and activities are led by the residents with the support of property management

Triangle Square Apartments
Los Angeles, California



- Opened in 2007, it is the first LGBT focused housing in the United States
- 35 of the 104 units are assigned specifically for those living with HIV/AIDS or at risk of experiencing homelessness
- Significant private donations allowed for the provision of a swimming pool, laundry facilities, and free internet.

Stonewall House
Brooklyn, New York City, New York



- All suites are affordable, offered to those who are 62+ and have an income that is less than 60% of the area median income
- LGBT case management and support is offered through SAGE, a national organization focused on supporting LGBT older adults
- Programs are not only for residents – all 60+ adults in the community are welcome to take part in the daily activities, training and services

Recommendations



Census framework. The national census should include a section to capture the demographics of LGBT2SQ people in Canada. This will allow for a better understanding of LGBT2SQ demographics and a better understanding of how many LGBT2SQ people are in need of affordable housing and how many are nearing or are over the age of 65 years.



Policy design. While there is a National Housing Strategy and it acknowledges significant data gaps with respect to LGBT2SQ, specific policy direction on how governments could better support the LGBT2SQ community would help drive programming.



Program development. There are funds dedicated for senior affordable housing within the National Housing Strategy, some of which The Government of Manitoba should allocate specifically towards the development of affordable facilities and services for LGBT2SQ seniors.



An active roll for municipalities. Government alone cannot meet the growing need for affordable housing. The City of Winnipeg should donate and dispose of lands for the development of LGBT2SQ senior housing to experienced non-profit housing developers and providers to deliver and operate. The City can be a leader in facilitating affordable housing through this planning measure and receive increased tax revenue on lands which were otherwise exempt.



Feasibility study. Conducting a feasibility study to address questions of the need of LGBT2SQ senior affordable housing, what services are required, location, and the ratio of affordable to market units needed to be a sustainable development. The study should be conducted by an organization with ties to LGBT2SQ community, the funding for this should come primarily from the city of province

Conclusion

As the aging population diversifies, the response to care must follow. Older LGBT2SQ people require housing which is equitable, context specific, culturally appropriate, inclusive and caters to their intersecting needs. It is clear, there are many challenges facing the creation of LGBT2SQ senior housing, lack of data, funding shortfalls, and little interest from developers all threaten the future of the LGBT2SQ aging population. It is also clear that where there is a desire and interest, there are also many opportunities to create a flourishing community with the development of partnerships between financiers, developers and the LGBT2SQ community itself.