

The Housing Continuum

Examples of the continuum of housing types required to establish and sustain safe, healthy, and inclusive communities.



Unsheltered Homelessness: People that cannot or choose not to use shelters in the community (or when the community does not have a shelter), such that the person(s) live in places not meant for permanent human habitation. People that are unsheltered cannot be forced to use services. Even if transported to a homelessness services setting like a shelter, there is no legal (or ethical) mechanism to force people to stay and use services.

Shelter: A physical location where people experiencing homelessness can stay, at least for the night. While some shelters are 24/7, others are not. Some shelters have congregate sleeping areas, while others offer more privacy. Each shelter usually caters to one or more population groups experiencing homelessness (e.g. a shelter specifically for women; a shelter specifically for families; a shelter specifically for youth).

Transitional Housing: Transitional housing is an intermediate step between a homeless shelter and permanent housing. Transitional housing most often looks like a regular, multi-unit, residential apartment building. Transitional housing is more long-term, service-intensive, and private than emergency shelters, yet remains time-limited to stays of several months up to years. People, including those experiencing chronic homelessness, do not need to prove they are ready for permanent housing after “graduating” from transitional housing. However, some people experiencing homelessness may choose a transitional housing opportunity to help them stabilize and learn various skills, while getting connected to other community resources. In Canada, a person residing in transitional housing is still considered to be homeless because they do not have security of tenure.

Supportive Housing: A form of housing, usually for people that have experienced homelessness, that, in most instances, offers supports to residents 24/7. There are various forms of Supportive Housing, from congregate living environments with a private or semi-private bedroom, through to fully self-contained units. Supportive Housing has been demonstrated repeatedly to cost less operationally than having the same person remain in homelessness.

Affordable Housing: In Canada, housing is considered “affordable” if it costs less than 30% of a household’s before-tax income. This can include housing provided by the private, public and non-profit sectors. It also includes all forms of housing tenure: rental, ownership and co-operative ownership, as well as temporary and permanent housing.

Market Housing: Housing that is privately owned by an individual (or a company) who generally does not receive direct subsidies to purchase or maintain it. Prices are set by the private market.

For more information, visit

whitby.ca/CommunitySupports