

# Tenant Involved Strategies for Achieving Health Equity Through the Right to Healthy, Affordable Housing

SYMPOSIUM

Public Health 2019, Shaw Centre, Ottawa, ON

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# Disclosure Statement

- I have no affiliation (financial or otherwise) with a pharmaceutical, medical device or communications organization.

# MOBILIZING RESEARCH FOR TENANT ORGANIZING TOWARDS SAFE AND HEALTHY HOUSING

Magnus Nowell, Jeff Masuda, and the Right to Remain Collective.

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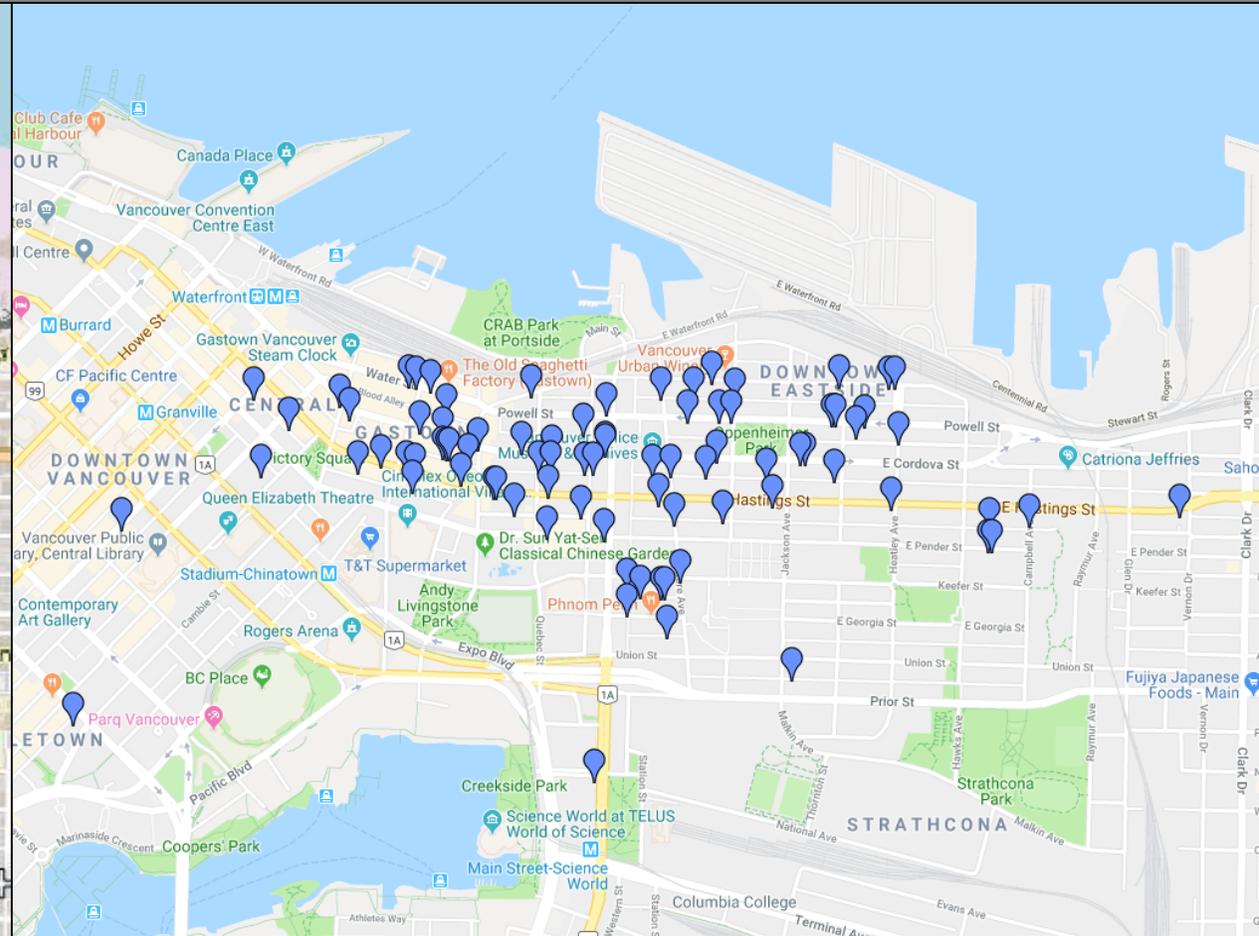
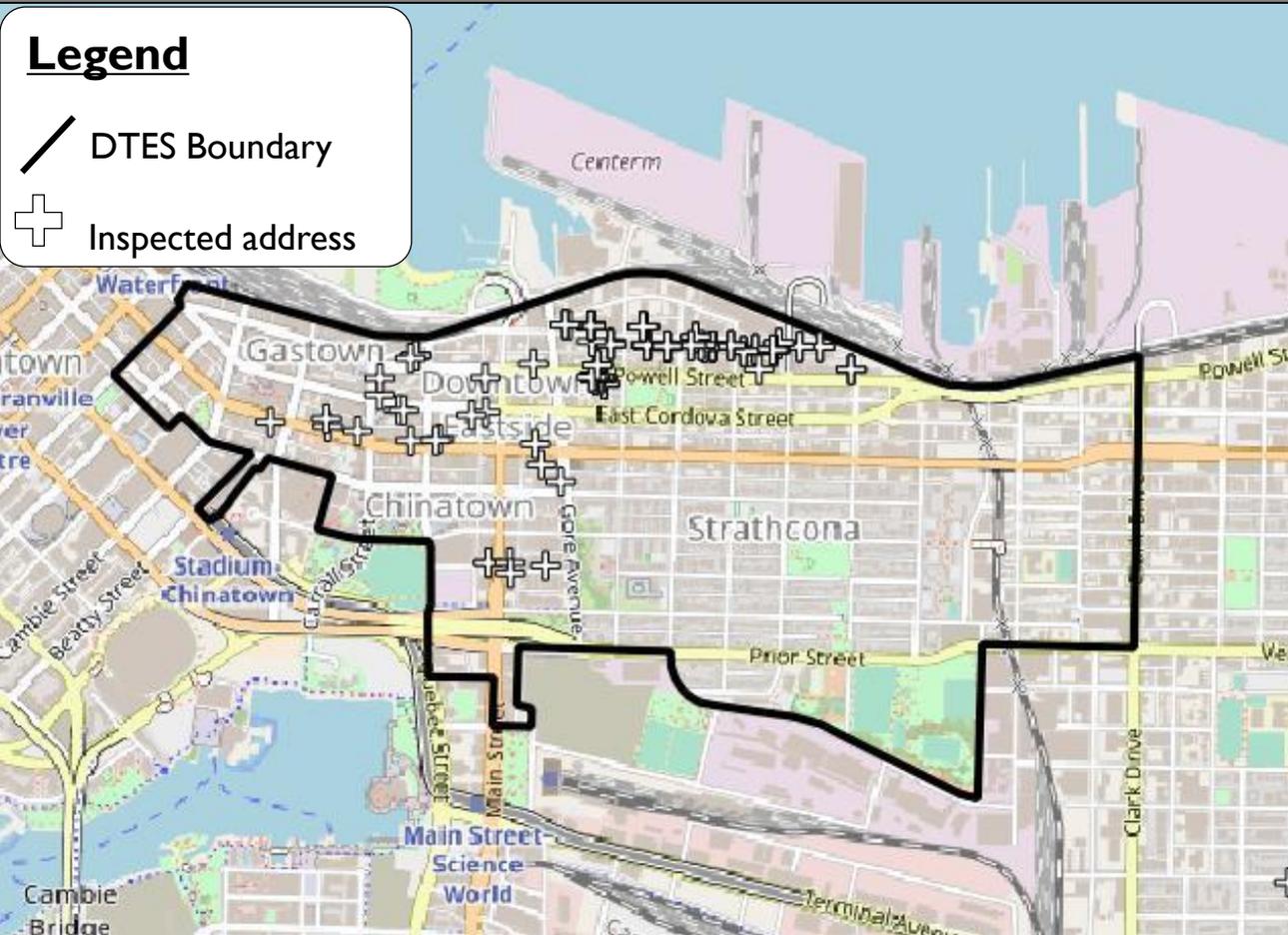
# SETTING THE CONTEXT



# PUBLIC HEALTH AND SROS OVER TIME

**Legend**

- DTES Boundary
- + Inspected address



Public health inspections correspondence, 299 entries cover enforcement of Lodging House Bylaw, 1948 - 1978. (COV Archives S71-2 145A, B, C; 94D, E.)

Buildings with maintenance, health, or safety issues, City of Vancouver. 29 March 2019 [https://app.vancouver.ca/RPS\\_Net/list.aspx](https://app.vancouver.ca/RPS_Net/list.aspx)

# DETERIORATING CONDITIONS AND TENANT ACTION



An SRO room with cockroaches outside the door deemed not safe to occupy by the Fire Department



A bathtub in an SRO filled with debris from the rotting ceiling above



Black mould is common to many SROs

# RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP AND THE DTES SRO COLLABORATIVE



Members of the Right to Remain research team in Vancouver. The team consists of SRO tenants, community advocates, students, and academics. Photo credit: Samantha Pranteau

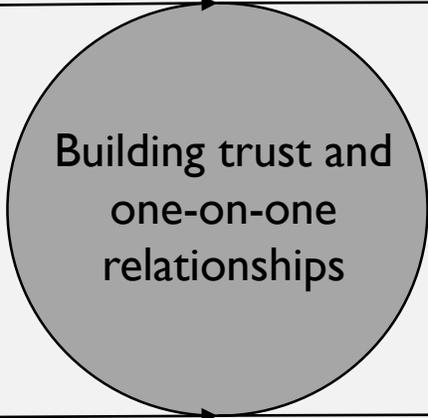
# COMPLEMENTING AND SUPPORTING COMMUNITY ORGANIZING WITH RESEARCH



Tenant-tenant  
interviewing

Meetings, door  
knocking, and group  
discussions

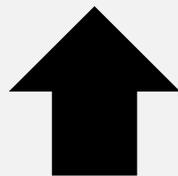
Securing tangible building  
improvements for  
tenants



Tenant-tenant  
interviewing

Focus Groups

Politicizing through  
sharing of archival and  
policy research



We are here

# TENANT-TENANT INTERVIEWS

## MANAGEMENT

**What tenants said:**

- Every SRO is managed differently. There are both good and bad owners, managers, staff, and caretakers.
- Bad management leads to bad conditions.
- Tenant screening is excluding some groups from SRO housing.
- ID and guest policies can control and isolate people.
- Managers save money by refusing to do maintenance, which forces tenants to do the work themselves.
- Managers use threats of violence and evictions to scare tenants into silence.
- Managers are not prepared to support people with mental health challenges.
- Four out of five tenants want to work together to make management better.

## COMMUNITY

**What tenants said:**

- Community is important for SRO tenants, but its getting harder to find.
- Very few SROs have common areas, making socializing hard.
- Tenants with similar backgrounds tend to hangout together.
- Its harder to meet neighbours when SROs feel unsafe.
- Tenants take care of each other with food, support, and overdose response.
- Tenants also find each other at places like Carnegie, UGM, and the 44.
- Four out of five tenants want to work together to strengthen tenant community.

## CONDITIONS

**What tenants said:**

- SROs have gotten steadily worse in the last 20 years.
- Each SRO has its own unique set of problems.
- Rats and bedbugs are making life very hard.
- Old wiring and plumbing makes life inconvenient and unhealthy.
- Shared bathrooms and poor security make some SROs dangerous, especially for women and people who identify as GBTQ2S+.
- People would rather have their buildings fixed than move out.
- Four out of five tenants want to work together to make conditions better.

Tenants wrote feedback and gave “thumbs up” and “thumbs down” to a summary of interim interview findings at an SRO Collaborative Open House in January, 2019

*“People come and they stay here for years and there’s a reason for that. It has basically become like a community and that’s what I like about this place. You don’t have to hide in your room, you can actually socialize with your neighbours.”*

*“I helped fix a guy’s sink because it was filled with sewage. Like shit and urine and it smelt like vomit. It sat there for half year.”*

*“I check on my neighbour and take his piss pots to empty them because he can’t even go to the bathroom himself.”*

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Tenants “thumbs up” and “thumbs down” to react to a summary of interview findings so far at an SRO Collaborative Open House in January, 2019

## CONCLUSION: LESSONS LEARNED AND MOVING FORWARDS

- Housing is a key social determinant of health whose impact goes beyond physical conditions. Management and landlord-tenant relationships can exacerbate inequitable conditions and further marginalize low-income tenants
- Public health action on housing in the last 30 years has been minimal in the DTES. In its absence, SRO tenants are working together to improve situations
- Relationships are foundational to working collaboratively with community-based organizations. Taking time to build partnerships takes time and energy, but the work is impossible without them
- Being flexible and adapting to changing situations “on the ground” can help strengthen partnerships and ensure that they are mutually supportive

# THANK YOU AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Right to Remain Collective consists of: Samantha Pranteau, Tom DeGrey, Jack Gates, Ron Kuhlke, Erica Grant, Keith Goslin, Wendy Pedersen, Bryan Jacobs, Magnus Nowell, Angela Kruger, Seraphina Skands, Dani Aeillo, Jeff Masuda, Nicholas Blomley, Audrey Kobayashi, and Sarah de Leeuw





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# Rooming houses: Healthy affordable housing?

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Rooming  
houses are  
affordable  
housing



# THE TYPOLOGY OF HOMELESSNESS

UNSHELTERED



EMERGENCY  
SHELTERED



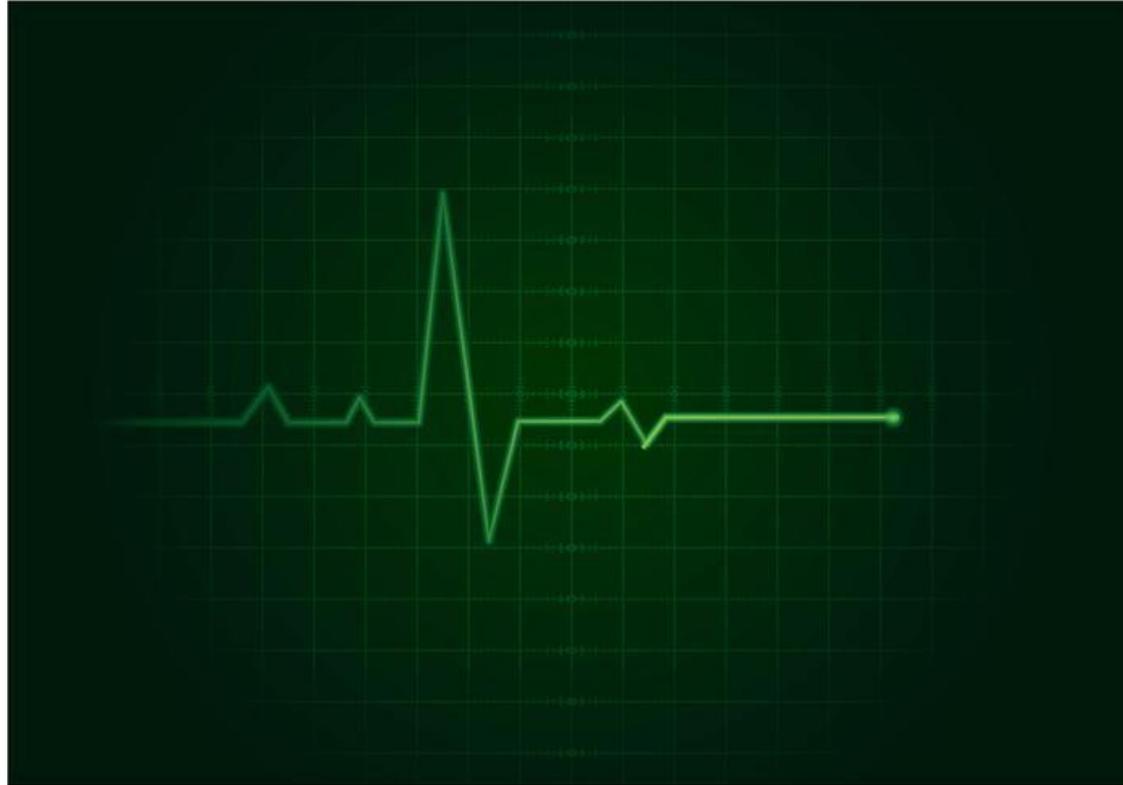
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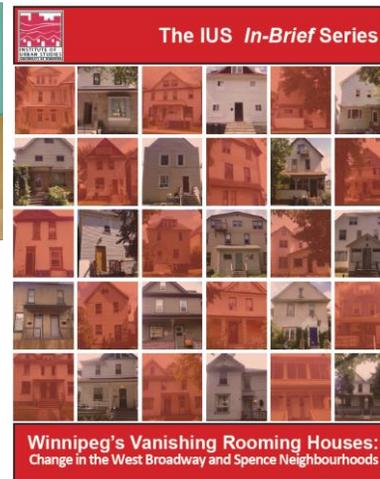
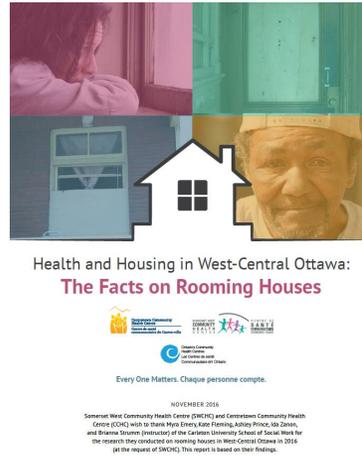
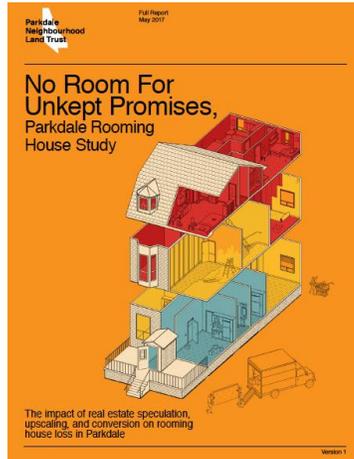
AT RISK OF  
HOMELESSNESS



# Rooming houses and health



# Community rooming house research movement



DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY



Working Paper 2016

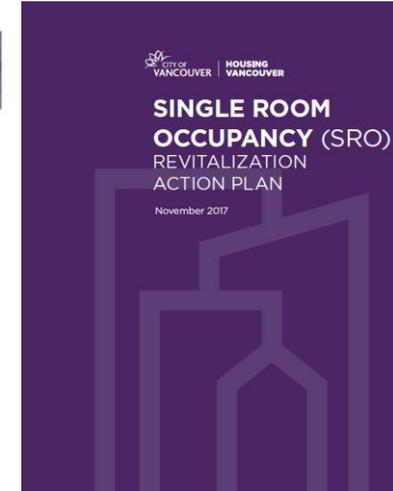
Rooming Houses in Halifax:  
Issues, opportunities, and policies  
Interview Summary Report

Janelle Derksen  
Research Assistant  
School of Planning, Dalhousie University

Research Team:  
Jill L. Grant, Principal Investigator, School of Planning, Dalhousie University  
Howard Ramos, Co-Investigator, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University  
Uytas Lee, Research Assistant, Dalhousie University

Community Partners in the Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership: Halifax  
United Way of Halifax  
Halifax Regional Municipality

This research is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada through the Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership (Grant # 955-2011-1004 to David Hutchings, University of Toronto) <http://neighbourhoodchange.ca/>



An  
example  
from  
Ottawa...



# What have learned from the tenants?

## Improving Health & Housing in Ottawa:

An Update on Rooming Houses in West-Central Ottawa

### CALL FOR ACTION

LANDLORDS:



## Health and Housing in West-Central Ottawa: The Facts on Rooming Houses



Every One Matters. Chaque personne compte.

NOVEMBER 2016

Somerset West Community Health Centre (SWCHC) and Centretown Community Health Centre (CCHC) wish to thank Myra Emery, Kate Fleming, Ashley Prince, Ida Zanon, and Brianna Strumm (instructor) of the Carleton University School of Social Work for the research they conducted on rooming houses in West-Central Ottawa in 2016 (at the request of SWCHC). This report is based on their findings.

# What have learned from others?

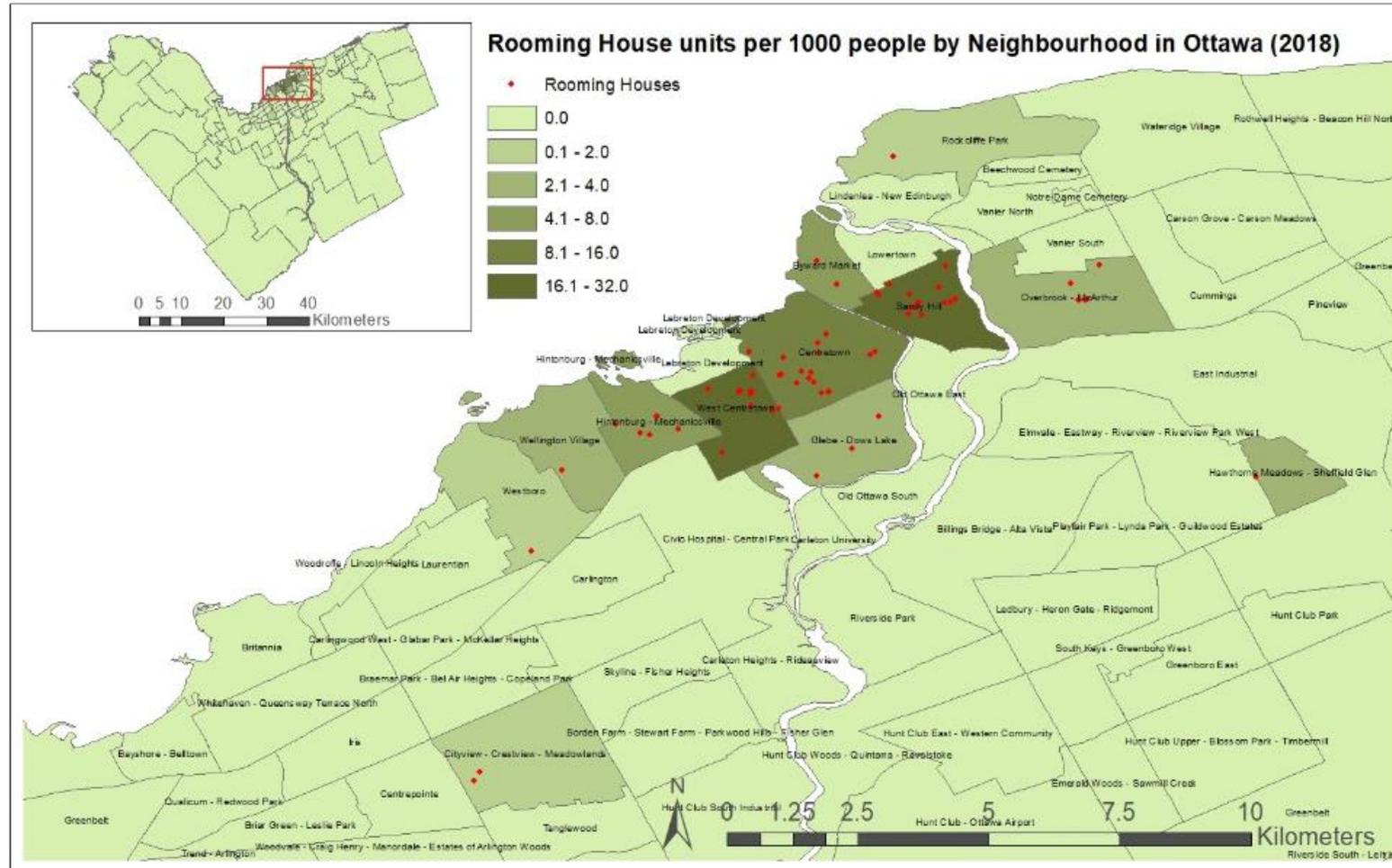
- Rooming house study – student project
- Fall 2019, uOttawa
- Examined challenges in current system from an intersectoral perspectives:
  - Key informant interviews
  - Landlords, politicians, city staff, social/health outreach workers



# Current system presents diverse challenges

- Landlord challenges
  - Inadequate financial incentives, limited credit access
  - Regulatory burden (not seen elsewhere)
  - Reputation/lack of respect
  - Lack power to evict
- System challenges
  - Inadequate social services
  - Deterred from making complaints
  - Unsafe/unhealthy conditions
  - Unlicensed buildings, unenforced regulations





# What now?

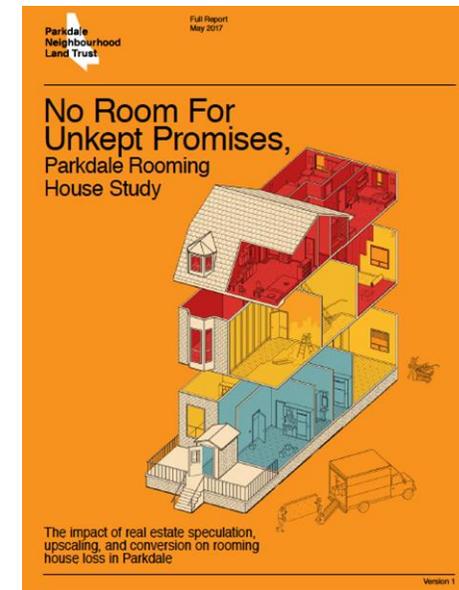
## Community rooming house inventory

### Objectives:

- Assess the number and condition of rooming houses
- Examine the impact of neighbourhood change on conversions, affordability
- Identify strategies to preserve stock, protect affordability, improve conditions

### Methods:

- Based on Parkdale Rooming House Study methodology
- Community based approach



# What now? Rooming houses and health case study

How are health outcomes affected by:

- The physical attributes of a rooming house;
- The characteristics and behaviours of tenants;
- The resources available to tenants.



# Acknowledgements:

- Somerset West Rooming House Advisory Committee
- Students from the course GEG4127: Livable Communities, Healthy Cities



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SOMERSET WEST  
COMMUNITY  
HEALTH  
CENTRE



# RentSafe Equip: Equity-focused Intersectoral Practice for Housing Habitability and Health Equity



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*Presenting on behalf of the RentSafe Equip Research  
Team and the province-wide RentSafe Project Team*

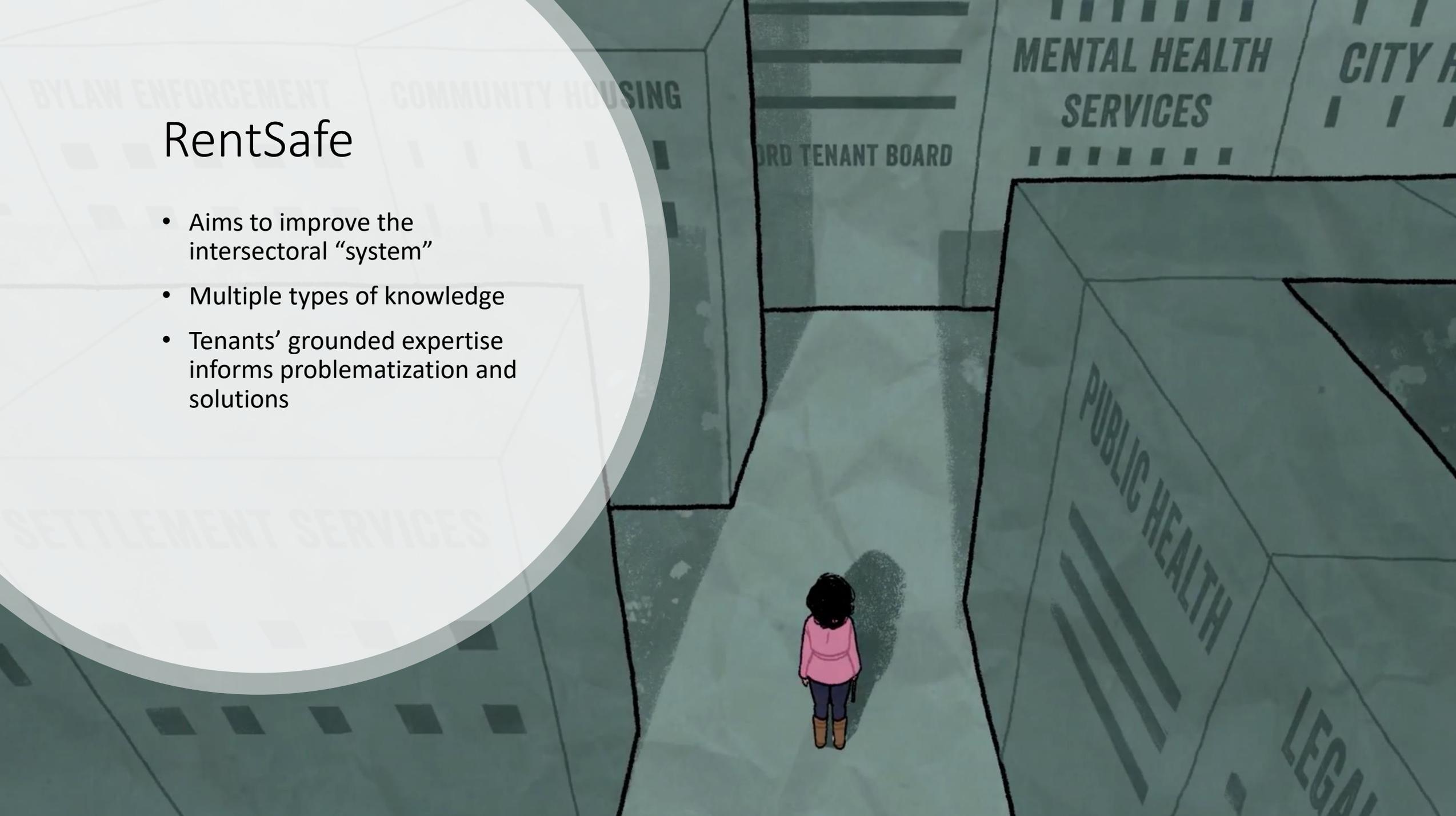
**CE** **HE** the centre for  
Environmental Health Equity

canadian partnership for  
**children's**  
health & environment  
  
partenariat canadien pour la sante  
**des enfants**  
et l'environnement



# RentSafe

- Aims to improve the intersectoral “system”
- Multiple types of knowledge
- Tenants’ grounded expertise informs problematization and solutions





Watch 'My voice is power' video at <https://rentsafe.ca/my-voice-is-power/>

# RentSafe EquiP in Owen Sound

*Equity-focused Intersectoral Practice for housing habitability and health equity*

- Community-based participatory action research
- Emphasis on:
  - human relationships
  - ‘reversing the gaze’



RentSafe EquiP Intersectoral Retreat, November 2018

Photo credit: Aaron Bailey



Learning Exchanges



Intersectoral Retreat



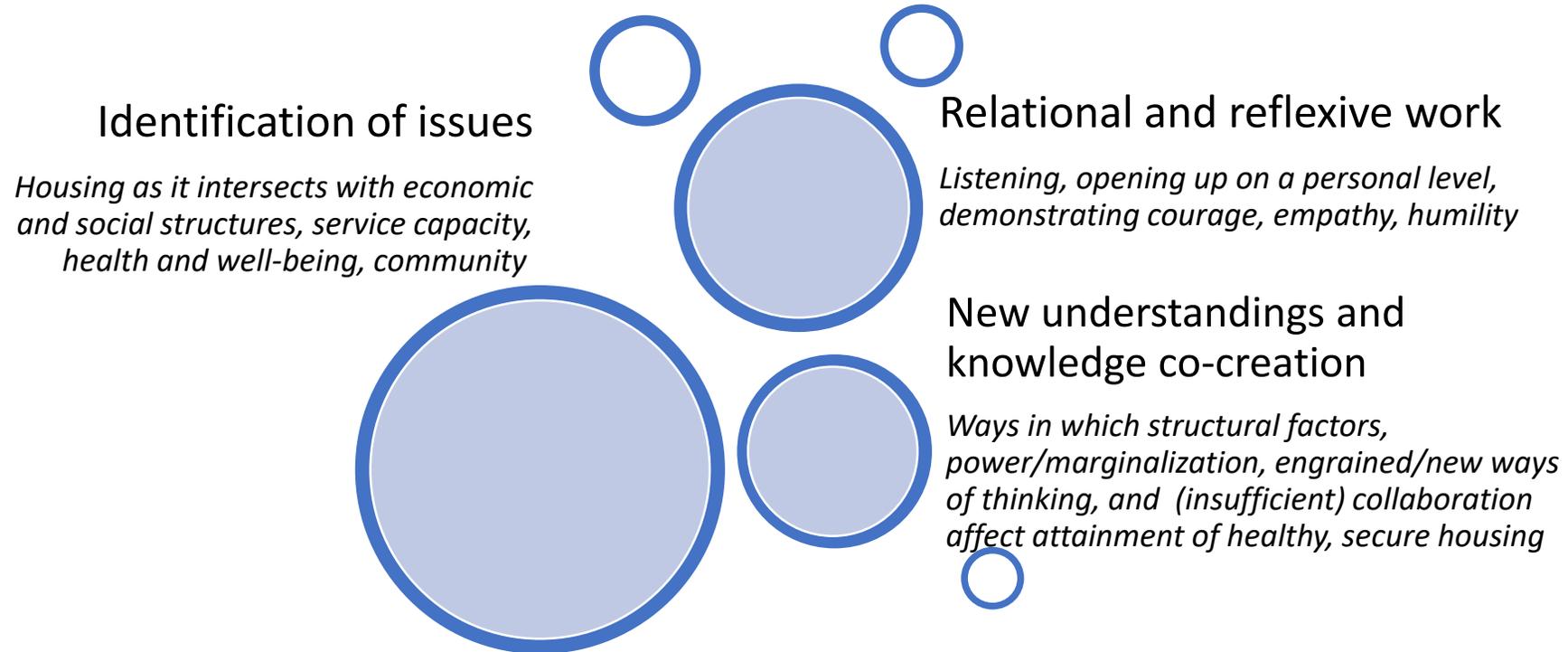
Sustained intersectoral practice

# RentSafe Equip Learning Exchanges

- Convened with tenant co-researchers
- 11 sessions, 45 participants from 16 agencies, organizations and sectors



# What was happening in the Learning Exchanges?



# Learning Exchange Themes



“If you don’t have good housing, how can you be a productive member of society? How can you be fully functional human being? If you don’t feel safe and secure in *your own home.*”

“... Attitudes that ...people are poor because they've messed up their lives, they made bad choices, and they deserve what they get, which is substandard housing and no rights.”

“...It’s a culture within the staff too, because they’ve always been told ‘nope, can’t go beyond this. Nope, can’t do this. Nope can’t do that.’”

“It's very hard to break out of that, because people get very uncomfortable. They don't like to be made uncomfortable. It's easier to keep the tunnel vision.”



# RentSafe Equip Intersectoral Retreat



- Four-day immersive retreat
- Equity-focused practice reflected in retreat design
- Participant response: “I think it [this] is the *only* way.”



# Concluding thoughts

- Humility
- Suspending pre-conceived notions of the 'problem'
- Courage



National Collaborating Centre  
for Determinants of Health  
Centre de collaboration nationale  
des déterminants de la santé

RESOURCE  
SUMMARY

# Resources

- RentSafe reports, videos, podcasts:

[www.rentsafecanada.ca](http://www.rentsafecanada.ca)

[www.logementsain.ca](http://www.logementsain.ca)

- NCCDH Resource Summary
- Phipps & Masuda (2018). Toward Equity-focused Intersectoral Practice (Equip) in children's environmental health: The transformational story of RentSafe. *CJPH*.

Towards healthy homes for all:  
What the RentSafe findings mean  
for public health in Canada



# Acknowledgements

- Dr. Jeff Masuda
- RentSafe Equip Research Team and Advisors
- RentSafe Project Team
- CEHE and CPCHE colleagues
- Canadian Institutes for Health Research
- Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship
- Ontario Trillium Foundation





# The Giiwe Project

Carlos Sanchez-Pimienta, & Jeff Masuda

Centre for Environmental Health Equity

School of Kinesiology and Health Studies, Queen's University

In collaboration with M'Wikwedong Indigenous Friendship Centre

Contact: [cesp@queensu.ca](mailto:cesp@queensu.ca)

Public Health 2019 | Symposium on Tenant Involved Strategies for Health Equity on Housing  
May 1st | Ottawa, Ontario, Canada



M'Wikwedong Indigenous  
Friendship Centre



# Context

- M'Wikwedong
- Grey and Bruce Counties
- Relationship between CEHE and M'Wikwedong



Grey and Bruce Counties

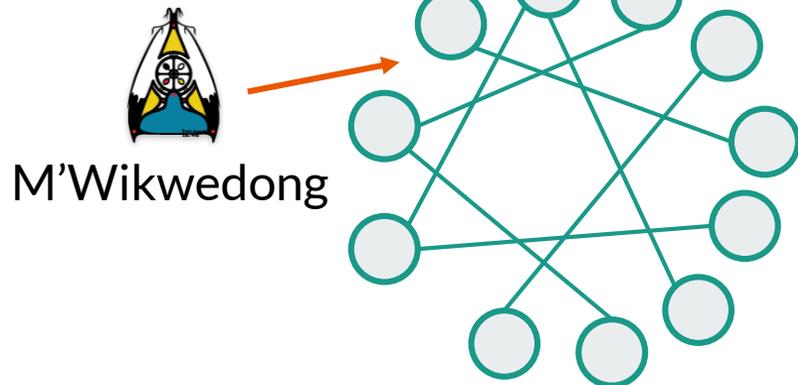
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# Working as an Indigenous Court Worker

# Giiwe's goal

To foster more coordinated housing-related services in Grey County that respond to Indigenous-specific housing needs and preferences.

From



Already established partnerships  
Indigenous issues as extra-components

To



New Indigenous-led partnership  
Indigenous-specific

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# Giiwe Project Components

- Giiwe Circles
- Traditional Knowledge Sharing
- Co-creation of initiatives for Indigenous homelessness reduction



Some Giiwe Project Partners

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# The developmental evaluation

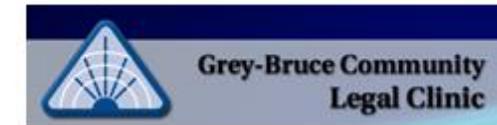
Initial - Ongoing - Final

# Inter-agency coordination on homelessness

## Established and sustained the only Indigenous-led inter-agency collaboration in Grey Bruce

- Involved 11 core organizations and occasional guests
- Facilitated referral process by providing a trusted go-to-person in each organization
- Established formal inter-agency agreements to better serve Indigenous peoples

*“As a front-line worker (...), I often felt that I was fighting against the world; and you guys were the world. Now, I feel you are doing the same fight.”*  
M’Wikwedong Staff Member



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# Responding to Indigenous-specific needs

- Increased knowledge of local Indigenous history and current contexts
- Raised awareness of programming available to support Indigenous home-seekers
- Contributed to implementing Indigenous-specific procedures for service delivery
- Built momentum among participants to advocate within their own organizations for improved services for Indigenous peoples

*“I feel a lot more culturally informed, (...) It's been really good to be able to bring that back to the organization and say ‘If we do have somebody who comes in who identifies as being Indigenous, these are the steps we're working on.’”*

Emergency Housing Staff



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# Giiwe & Public Health



# What did I learn as a PH practitioner from Giiwe?

- Trusting relationships are key assets for PH action
- Giiwe was successful because it allowed M'Wikwedong to 'set the stage' for Public Health action
- Innovative action on health equity requires offering our own organizational capacity to support community initiatives

# Thank you!

## Contact:

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## Potential discussion questions

- How do you know when you are building grounded relationships with community partners?
- In the absence of existence tenant mobilization, how can public health work towards equitable and safe housing?
- Should all public health strategies include people with lived experience?
- How can public health better engage with tenants?