

INCLUSIVE HOUSING Network Guide

A guide to help you learn about inclusive housing, discover how it can provide person-centered options for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and find out how it can be built in your community.

**This is a user friendly version of the original document. You can find the full length version here: [Inclusive Housing Network Guide](#)*

About Us

Developmental Services Ontario (DSO) is the central point of access for adults 18+ who have a confirmed developmental disability and wish to apply for services and supports that are funded by the **Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, (MCCSS)**.

DSO Housing Navigators help people, their caregivers and support networks, as well as the community, learn about individualized housing options, as an alternative to MCCSS-funded supportive housing.

Access our DSO Housing Toolkit here: [DSO Housing Toolkit](#)

To find your local DSO Housing Navigator, visit: [dsontario](#)

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Disclaimer:

The guide was created by **Developmental Services Ontario (DSO) Housing Navigators**. It is based on the values of equity, accessibility, and inclusion and supports housing that gives people choice, independence, and dignity.

Every effort has been made to provide accurate and relevant information.

This guide is not exhaustive, nor does the DSO endorse or guarantee success with every situation and/or resource.

It is intended for educational and informational purposes only. Anyone using the guide should consult with relevant professionals, organizations or governing bodies before making any housing decisions.

The DSO assumes no liability for actions taken based on the information provided.

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Words that are **bolded and marked with an asterisk (*)** are defined in the glossary.*

1. Introduction

Everyone deserves to live in a place that supports their well-being, reflects their needs, and allows them to build a meaningful life.

In Canada today, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) still face significant challenges to finding safe, appropriate and affordable housing, such as:

- With over 52,000 people waiting for Ministry - Funded support services and an aging population, research is showing that **more adults with IDD are living with caregivers who are 60+** (Community Living Ontario)
- In Ontario alone, the **projected wait for affordable supportive housing is over 40 years** (Intentional Community Consortium)
- **90% of people with IDD live below the poverty line** (Intentional Community Consortium)
- It is estimated that **18-30% of chronic shelter users in Ontario have an IDD** (Intentional Community Consortium).

Poverty, unfair treatment and places that are not accessible make finding the right housing even harder.

Purpose of this Guide:

This guide was created by DSO Housing Navigators and intended to educate and inform communities about inclusive housing and how to create opportunities for more inclusive housing models in Ontario.

This guide:

- **Provides Tools and Knowledge** – to help you learn more about Inclusive Housing and how community partners can work together to create it in your community.
- **Shares Best Practices** - for collaboration between people, families, agencies, and governments.
- **Promotes Choice and Dignity** – because everyone deserves the right to choose where and how they live.

Together we can Build Inclusive Housing:

To build inclusive communities, housing systems must deal with unfair barriers from the past and present.

When we collaborate and commit, everyone—no matter their ability, background, or identity—can live with dignity, independence, and belonging.



Why Inclusive Housing Matters:

Housing must work for everyone. People's identities — like their race, culture, gender, and income — affect how easy or hard it is to find a home. Fair housing policies and community-driven solutions are needed to make sure no one is left out.

For people with IDD, inclusive housing helps them live independently and with dignity. It builds stronger, more welcoming communities by encouraging diversity, social support and meaningful integration, while saving money by reducing reliance on hospitals and shelters.



Housing Challenges for Diverse Communities:

Finding a safe and welcoming place to live can be hard for many people with disabilities. It can be even harder for people who also face other barriers—like being Indigenous, part of a racialized community, a newcomer to Canada, or part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

These **overlapping barriers*** might include:

- Experiencing extra discrimination or unfair treatment when looking for housing.
- Not having access to resources or supports that **reflect their culture or identity***.



When housing and communities are designed to include everyone, these overlapping barriers can be reduced or removed. Inclusive design means creating spaces where people feel respected and welcomed, no matter their background or identity. It also means making sure services, supports, and neighbourhoods reflect the diversity of the people who live there. This helps people feel safer, better supported, and more connected to the community they choose to live in.

What We Need:

Inclusive housing requires intentional planning so that homes and communities work for people with different backgrounds, experiences, and abilities. To ensure housing works for everyone, we need to consider what people need to live safely, comfortably, and with choice in their daily lives.

Some key ways to make this happen include:

- **Creating housing options that fit different identities, cultures, needs, and experiences** – so that everyone can find a place that works for them.
- **Focusing on input from people with lived experience* and the community** – ensuring housing decisions reflect the voices of those who will live there.
- **Offering supports and services that let people choose where and how they live** – giving people the freedom to make decisions about the things that affect their daily lives.
- **Creating housing that follows the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)** – protecting the rights of people with disabilities and promoting equality.



2. What is Inclusive Housing?

Inclusive housing means homes that welcome everyone, including adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD). It helps people live where and how they want, with the supports that they need.

Inclusive homes are:

✓ **Affordable**

✓ **Adaptable to Different Needs**

✓ **Easy to Access**

✓ **A Part of the Community**



More than Just a Building:

A home becomes inclusive when it provides not only walls and a roof, but also offers meaningful supports, a welcoming community, and opportunities for everyone, regardless of their abilities, to thrive.

This includes providing:

- **Support for independence** – help with things like cooking, finding a job, or staying healthy.
- **Connection to the community** – being close to buses, schools, shops, and parks.
- **Respect for everyone** – honouring people's identities, cultures, and personal goals.
- **Fair rules** – policies that protect people from unfair treatment or discrimination.
- **Safety and belonging** – a home where people feel safe, valued, and part of the neighbourhood.



Steps We Can Take to Make Housing More Inclusive:

There are many ways inclusivity can be built into both new and existing housing projects. Doing this takes thoughtful planning, **intentional collaboration***, and a shared focus on creating housing that puts people at the center.

Some important steps to doing this include:

- ✓ **Listening to People with Disabilities** – Their voices should help guide housing plans.
- ✓ **Supporting Indigenous-Led Housing** – Housing that is created and guided by Indigenous communities, with respect for cultural traditions.
- ✓ **Making Fair Rules** – Everyone should be treated equally, especially groups who are often left out.
- ✓ **Training Housing Staff** – Staff need to understand disability, culture, and gender.
- ✓ **Collecting Information** – Data helps show where housing needs are greatest.
- ✓ **Working Together with Community Partners** – Real and lasting change is possible when self-advocates, families, municipalities, service agencies and housing providers come together to create person-centered housing solutions.

3. Partners in Creating Inclusive Housing

Building inclusive housing takes teamwork from people with disabilities, families, builders, support agencies, and governments. Together, they ensure homes are safe, affordable, and foster independence, dignity, and belonging.

People with Lived Experience:

- People with disabilities and their families bring essential lived experience, shaping housing that supports real needs, choice, and independence
- They know best what works and what doesn't work for them



Housing Providers and Developers:

- Builders, non-profits, and housing agencies can create accessible, affordable homes and create partnerships with mixed-income or shared housing groups that can promote the expansion of inclusive options.



Community Support Organizations:

- Support agencies provide life skills, jobs, mental health, and connection—when paired with housing, people thrive and feel part of the community.



Government & Policy Makers:

- Governments shape housing policies through funding, incentives, and rules, while advocacy ensures inclusivity stays a priority.



Advocates & Allies:

- Community and disability groups drive awareness, fight discrimination, and advocate for inclusive policies, especially for those who are facing multiple barriers.



How Can We Work Better Together?

- **Partner with local housing authorities** to connect people with housing and services.
- **Work with municipalities** to get approvals, land, or funding.
- **Encourage teamwork between developers and non-profits** to create lasting, inclusive housing.
- **Use many funding sources like government, private donors, and partnerships** to keep housing sustainable long term.

Conclusion:

Inclusive housing works best when everyone is involved. By listening to people with lived experience, building strong partnerships, and advocating for good policies, we can create homes where everyone has the chance to live well, with dignity, independence, and a sense of community.

4. Main Elements of Inclusive Housing

Inclusive housing means more than just having a place to live. It's about having a home where people feel safe, welcome, and supported. It helps people live a good life, be a part of their community, and have real choices.

Here we highlight 6 main elements of inclusive housing:



Choice & Independence Means:

- **People should have choice over how they live** - Getting to have control over where they live or who they live with
- **Having the same rights and responsibilities as your neighbor** - Having your own key, deciding on visitors, keeping pets, etc.

Accessibility:

- **An inclusive home must be accessible** - Accessible housing increases safety, independence, and opportunities for personal growth and learning.
- **Ramps or wide doors for wheelchairs** - This makes it easier for people to move around.

Accessibility continued:

- **Quiet or sensory-friendly spaces** – Creates comfort for those who need calm environments.
- **Supportive tools like grab bars or smart devices** – Helps people stay safe and independent.
- **Located near essential services** - Like public transportation, grocery stores, and healthcare providers, so that people have access to what they need.

Living Together in the Community, Not Separate, Provides:

- **Opportunities to make friends** – Inclusive communities create opportunities for people to meet, connect, and build relationships.
- **Feeling part of everyday life** – Comes from being included and valued, not separated
- **Opportunities to join in local events and activities** – Helps create connections and a sense of belonging.



Welcoming to Different People:

- **A good, inclusive community welcomes everyone** - People of different backgrounds, abilities, and experiences make neighbourhoods stronger.

Welcoming to Different People continued:

- **Diverse communities create opportunities** - They help people learn from one another, feel valued and grow together.

Affordable Homes Include:

- **Rental subsidies and government programs** – Can help make housing more affordable
- **Co-op or shared housing options** – Offer lower costs, community, and lasting security.



Stable, Long-Term Housing Provides People:

- **A home of their own** – Where they can stay as long as they choose.
- **Flexible supports** – So that people's supports are able to adjust as their needs change.
- **Strong connections** – By building relationships with neighbours and local places.

Conclusion:

Inclusive housing supports choice, accessibility, affordability, and belonging—giving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities the chance to live full, happy lives. Everyone deserves a safe, affordable home, and with intentional community planning, inclusive housing can become a reality.

5. Steps to Building an Inclusive Housing Network



1. Create a Clear Vision and Ask What People Need

Start by listening to people with lived experience, their families, and support staff.

It's important to ask:

- What kind of homes do people want?
- What services and supports are missing?
- What's already working in other places?

For example, L'Arche in Ontario provides housing to a mix people with and without disabilities in shared homes. This helps create opportunities to build friendships and support independence.

2. Work Together Across Sectors

Inclusive housing needs many people to work as a team. Each **stakeholder*** already mentioned brings expertise and knowledge and together they can create better housing by sharing ideas, making joint plans and creating opportunities for partnerships to develop.

3. Find Strong & Lasting Funding

Building inclusive housing takes money. Communities need a mix of funding sources, like:

- Government resources (grants or rent support)
- Donations from charities or foundations
- Community investments (**social finance*** or co-ops)

This helps keep housing affordable and stable for the long term.

4. Support Policies that Include Everyone

This includes laws and rules that can help inclusive housing grow. Good examples include:

- **Inclusionary zoning*** – Requiring new buildings to include some units for people with disabilities
- **Rental subsidies and supports** – Helping people pay for housing
- **Tax credits** – Encouraging builders to include affordable homes

Talking to leaders and decision-makers can help change laws so they support inclusive housing for everyone.



5. Start Small and Grow Over Time

It's best to test ideas first, then grow.

Communities can:

- Try out small housing projects
- Build strong systems to support people in homes
- Check what's working and improve what already exists based on feedback



This makes sure housing works well and lasts a long time.

Conclusion:

Building opportunities for inclusive housing takes time, teamwork, and care, but it's possible. When people, organizations, and governments work together, we can create:



- Homes that people can afford,
- Neighbourhoods that welcome everyone,
- A better life for people with disabilities.

Inclusive housing helps build stronger, kinder communities, where everyone belongs.

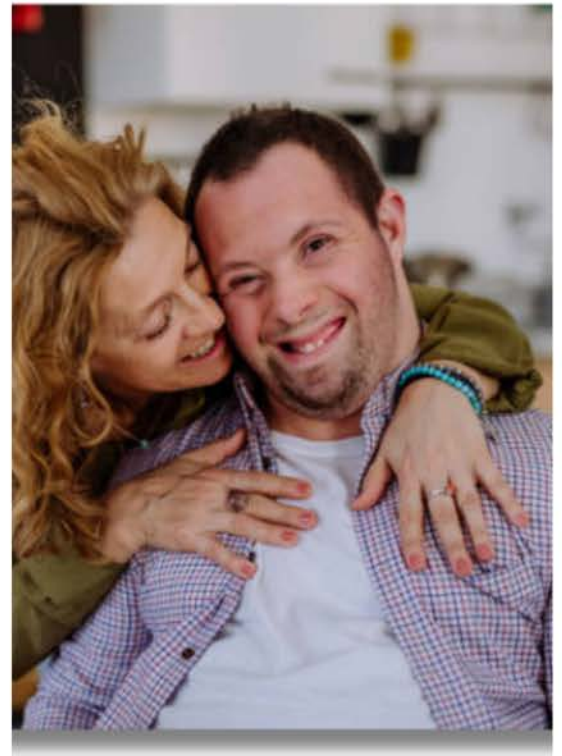
6. How to Ensure Success

Creating inclusive housing for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) takes teamwork. Everyone involved has an important role to play and success should be measured with clear tools that look at housing stability, affordability, community inclusion, and long-term support.

Individuals with IDD and their Families:

For people with IDD and their families, success means having choice, stability, and being part of the community.

Tools like the [Inclusive Housing Index](#) help measure how well people feel at home and if they feel connected. We can also track things like jobs, friendships, and use of local services to see how well inclusion is working.



Housing Developers & Providers:

Builders and housing providers help create more inclusive housing by:

- Adding accessible units in mixed-income buildings,
- Following universal design,
- Keeping housing affordable over time.

Success can be tracked by:

- ✓ **How many inclusive homes are built**
- ✓ **How many people with IDD live there**
- ✓ **If homes meet accessibility standards**
- ✓ **How happy and stable tenants are**

This [Inclusive Housing Scorecard](#) can help assess progress and guide improvements.



Community Service Organizations:

Support agencies help people with IDD live independently.

Their work can be measured by:

- ✓ **How long people stay housed**
- ✓ **How involved they are in the community**
- ✓ **Fewer emergency situations (like hospital stays or crises)**



Using quality-of-life surveys alongside monitoring peoples use of services helps determine whether the supports are effective.

Government & Policy Makers:

Governments help by making laws, funding housing, and setting accessibility rules.

Their success can be seen in:

- ✓ **Fewer people in institutions**
- ✓ **More people using housing support programs**
- ✓ **Public housing that meets accessibility rules**
- ✓ **A reduction in the reliance on homelessness services**



Governments should set clear goals, publish progress reports, and include inclusion measures in housing plans.

Advocacy Groups & Community Allies

Advocates and community allies speak up for inclusive housing.

Their success can be seen in:

- ✓ **New or improved laws and policies**
- ✓ **Community support and involvement**
- ✓ **Media attention and public education**

Housing Needs Report Cards and community surveys help show what's working and what's still needed.

Conclusion:

Inclusive housing works best when everyone is involved—and when we measure what matters. Tracking progress helps us make better decisions and build homes where people with IDD can live with dignity, independence, and belonging. With clear goals and teamwork, we can create communities where everyone has a place to call home

7. Being an Advocate

Advocacy and **public awareness*** are key to creating real change.

Being an advocate means speaking up for yourself or for others to create a change for the better. When we talk about housing, advocacy can help communities understand what people need to feel safe, included, and supported. By sharing voices and raising awareness, we can help create opportunities for housing that meets people's needs.



You can find information about advocacy happening across Ontario in the full-length version of the [Inclusive Housing Network Guide](#).

How Partners in Housing can be Advocates:

Housing partners play an important role in creating change.

These are some ways that housing partners can be advocates:

- Collecting data to find gaps,
- Training providers on equity and inclusion,
- Designing housing **policies that reflect diverse needs***,
- Working with all levels of government through meetings, forums, and campaigns.

Including Lived Experience is Key:

Advocacy is strongest when people with lived experience are included. Their stories, knowledge and expertise give a real idea of the challenges that come with finding safe and secure housing and what solutions are needed.

Some ways you can intentionally include people with IDD is by:

- Set up advisory councils with people who have lived experience,
- Make meetings accessible (sign language, virtual options, childcare),
- Seek out and participate in opportunities to learn more about the lived experiences of people with IDD - like Ontario's Inclusive Housing Forum hosted by the Intentional Community Consortium (ICC).



Share Stories & Build Support:

Real-life stories help people understand why inclusive housing matters. They bring awareness and inspire others to take action.

Share your story by:

- Sharing videos, blogs, and social media content,
- Hosting accessible public events like open houses or storytelling nights.



Conclusion:

Advocacy is a powerful way to move inclusive housing forward. When people, families, and housing partners speak up, they shine a light on the barriers that exist and the solutions that are possible.

Sharing stories, raising awareness, and working with government and community leaders helps make sure housing plans reflect the needs of many different people.

Every voice matters, and when those voices come together, they can create real change.

Moving Forward

Inclusive housing means making sure **everyone**, no matter their ability, background, or identity, can find safe, affordable, and supportive places to live.

This guide has looked at what inclusive housing really means, the challenges people with IDD face, and practical ways to build housing that is fair, accessible, and welcoming to all. It's important to understand that some groups, like racialized communities, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ+ individuals, and newcomers, often face extra challenges when finding housing. Inclusive housing must address not only disability needs but also these wider social and cultural barriers.

Making inclusive housing a reality takes collaboration and ongoing effort:



People with IDD and their families should have a strong voice in shaping the housing that they need



Government leaders and decision makers can create fair laws and fund community solutions



Housing developers should design affordable, accessible homes that bring people together



Community groups should provide the right supports to help people live independently



Advocates can raise awareness and push for change

Together, by listening, learning, and acting, we can break down barriers and create communities where everyone belongs.

Ideas to get started today



- ✓ Creating a housing support plan
- ✓ Connect with your local DSO Housing Navigator
- ✓ Joining a family network or advocacy group
- ✓ Connecting with local service providers i.e. Developmental Service Agencies, housing providers
- ✓ Learn more about what housing is available in your community
- ✓ Review the resources in the guide and speaking with family, friends, neighbours and community members about inclusive housing and what it looks like to them
- ✓ Finding opportunities to learn more and participate in housing forums, events and educational webinars or in-person events
- ✓ Connect with you local city counselor to talk about the need for more housing for people with IDD in your community

Notes

Resources

In the full version of the [Inclusive Housing Network Guide](#), you will find helpful links and tools to support your planning.



These resources can help you:

- **Create a clear vision and understand local housing needs** - Find easy-to-use materials, planning tools, and guides to help with community needs assessments and measure inclusive housing using **indexes and indicators***.
- **Connect with advocacy groups and support networks** - Learn about organizations that support adults with IDD, their families, housing developers, and community builders. These groups show how different people play important roles and take action in building inclusive housing.
- **Explore funding options and financial tools** - Access information about government grants, community programs, and funding from charities. Learn how to plan for long-term, stable funding for inclusive housing.
- **Find social finance and community investment opportunities*** - Discover new ways to fund housing projects that benefit people and communities.
- **Understand housing policies and support programs** - Learn about laws and programs like rental assistance that help make housing more affordable and inclusive.

Conclusion:

Inclusive housing is built through teamwork, strong funding, and clear policies. These resources can guide you in creating safe, affordable, and welcoming homes in the community. By working together, we can make sure everyone has a place to live and belong.



Glossary of Terms for The Inclusive Housing Network Guide

Advocacy and public awareness - Speaking up and sharing information so more people understand a problem and can help find solutions.

Community investment opportunities - Ways for local people, businesses, or groups to put money into housing projects that benefit the community.

Resources or supports that reflect culture or identity - Supports or services that respect a person's culture, language, or traditions.

Inclusionary zoning - Rules that say new buildings must include some affordable homes.

Intentional collaboration - Working together on purpose, with a clear plan.

Indexes and indicators (for measuring inclusion) - Tools or checklists used to measure how well housing supports people's needs and if it is truly inclusive.

Lived experience - The real-life knowledge and stories people have from going through something themselves.

Overlapping Barriers - Extra challenges people face when they belong to more than one group that experiences discrimination (for example, being both a newcomer and having a disability).

Policies that reflect diverse needs - Rules that consider the different needs of people from many backgrounds and experiences.

Social finance - Money raised in creative ways (like community loans or investments) to support housing projects that help people.

Stakeholder- is anyone who is affected by or has an interest in something.

Systemic barriers - Rules or systems that make things unfair for some people.

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