



Canadian Association
for Community Living

Association canadienne pour
l'intégration communautaire

Diversity includes. On se ressemble.

Canadian Association for Community Living Position Statement on Housing June 2010

Position Statement

Adults with intellectual disabilities must be afforded the opportunity to live in typical houses and communities where they can exercise their full rights and responsibilities as citizens. Living in the community is a right of all Canadian citizens and thus public policy in Canada must facilitate, accommodate and enable the free and full exercise of this right.

Policy Context

In Canada today, a significant gap exists between the housing needed and the housing available. Even in situations where affordable and accessible housing is available, people with intellectual disabilities are unable to acquire these units due to a lack of needed supports. Adults with intellectual disabilities are all too often housed in facilities that are clearly not best suited to their needs. Despite research that unequivocally demonstrates that institutional placements are not in the best interests of people with intellectual disabilities, in provinces and territories throughout Canada, people with intellectual disabilities are routinely placed in large institutions for persons with intellectual disabilities, nursing and seniors homes, special care and personal care homes, rehabilitation centers and other institutional environments. Nova Scotia, for example, states that institutions are an acceptable part of its residential continuum for people with disabilities and in recent years has actually increased its institutional capacity.

Discussion

People with intellectual disabilities generally want the same kinds of housing that other citizens want: independent, affordable apartments or houses, with access to needed support. People want live independently. They want to make their own decisions regarding whom to live with, where to live, and what to do with their time. In Canada today, however, many individuals (and their families) continue to be presented with options that do not support lifestyles of choice but rather assume that people with intellectual disabilities will stay indefinitely in the family home, or move into group home programs or other more institutional environments.

In many communities there is a lack of accessible, affordable housing. High rates of poverty and lack of supports make a home in community unobtainable for many. A majority of people are unable to obtain needed independent, person centred planning. The service system still advances congregate options, current funding practices do not encourage innovation or individuality, and ultimately has not yet acknowledged the need to separate accommodation from supports. Housing choices for adults (outside the family home) are currently provided in a manner more geared to meeting the needs of the system rather than of the individual it is meant to serve. Often, individuals are housed where space is available, rather than in a home suited to their specific needs. People with intellectual disabilities also face attitudes by families and support organizations that fear for their safety or question their ability to live on their own.

People with intellectual disabilities want 'supported living' not 'residential options' or 'specialized residential facilities'. They want a safe and decent home of their own, where they can exercise choice and control in day to day decisions, have tenure as tenants or as

homeowners, have access to personalized assistance/support and support from others who care about and respect them. Basic housing standards that apply for other Canadians equally apply for people with intellectual disabilities: adequate, suitable and affordable. Housing should be accessible and enable full inclusion in the community. Individuals must be directly involved in planning and choosing their housing and support services, and necessary funding must be portable and linked to and controlled by the individual rather than an agency or facility. While still a predominant response, traditional housing models such as block funded group homes typically fall short on dimensions of individual control, choice and decision making. All too often, individuals with intellectual disabilities are 'placed' in these homes rather than choosing to live there. Group homes should no longer be accepted as the primary or preferred residential response for people with intellectual disabilities.

Institutions deny people basic rights of citizenship, personal control, decision making, and independence. People who have lived in these facilities tell of the abuse, isolation and suffering that occurs. An institution represents an approach that denies choice, denies opportunity; congregates, segregates and isolates people. An institution can never be a "home". If people with intellectual disabilities are to secure and affirm their right to live in community, then these types of institutional placements must cease.

CACL's Call to Action

The Canadian Association for Community Living recommends action in the following areas:

1. **Affordable and accessible Housing** – Investments in creating necessary housing stock adequate to meet the current and future needs of persons with intellectual disabilities.
2. **Disability Related Supports** – Public policy must be revised to ensure a separation of housing from disability related supports.
3. **Admissions** - Halt admissions of persons with intellectual disabilities (for residential reasons) into institutional facilities of all types.
4. **Transitional Funding** – A federal fund that can be made available to provinces and territories to assist in defraying additional (transitional) costs associated with institutional closures.
5. **Institutional Closures** – By 2015, the closures of the last three large provincially operated institutions for persons with intellectual disabilities in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.
6. **Deinstitutionalization** – In all provinces and territories (with federal government assistance as needed) assist persons with intellectual disabilities currently living in inappropriate institutional environments to move back to community.
7. **Reinvestment** - Redirect savings from institutional closures to the development and expansion of community supports and services, including affordable, accessible housing.
8. **Investment Principles** – Federal and Provincial/Territorial Social Housing Programs, e.g. the National Homelessness Initiative, should be used only to invest in housing options that meet principles of community living and inclusion.
9. **Core Housing Need** – Disability should be incorporated into assessment of Core Housing Need by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

For more information please contact the Canadian Association for Community Living 416-661-9611 ext 204 or amacquarrie@cacl.ca. Additional information can be found at www.cacl.ca.