



Seniors Health and Wellness Initiative:

Tenant voices improving quality of life

August 2022

In Spring 2022, Health Commons Solutions Lab* talked to senior tenants living across Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation buildings about their health and wellness today, and what should be done to improve quality of life and aging well at home.

Health Commons asked: “What services and supports do seniors need and prefer, and what is the best way to offer those services and supports?”

Health Commons heard about the need for a variety of urgent and ongoing services. Health Commons also heard that services alone are not the answer—**senior tenants want an active role in designing, delivering and evaluating activities in their buildings, and this is good for their health and wellness.**



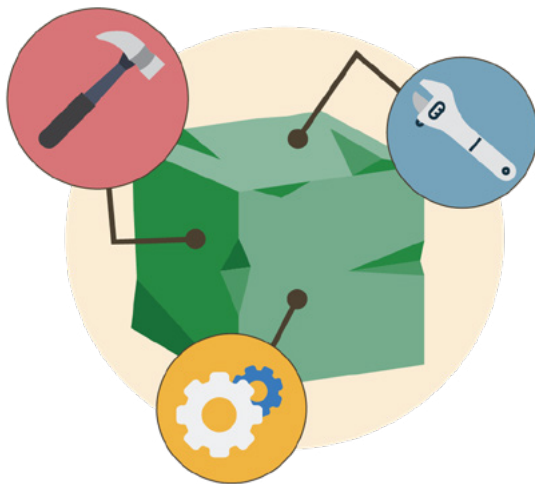
“I’m here because I advocate for people.”

The tenants Health Commons spoke to identified many ideas for improving:

- **Culture** by fostering trust, respect, and mutual support
- **Services** with specific advice around priorities and improvements
- **Living Spaces** and what makes “housing” a safe and connected home

Some areas for improvement were identified as ‘Urgent Issues’ while others were identified as ‘Game changers’

Urgent Issues



Critical needs: Fix what’s not working

- Tenant complaints process
- Pest control
- Mediation for tenant-tenant issues
- Translation and interpretation services
- Proposal and funding process for tenant-led activities
- Maintenance issues



Tenant-centered prioritization: Understand each building

- Tenant reps and roles
- Service needs and preferences
- Mediation for tenant-tenant issues
- Map providers and broker based on tenant input
- Security assessment
- Space and equipment review
- Tenant decision-making

Game Changers

There are steps that can be taken to structurally embed the tenant voice and wellbeing into housing operations, but they require an investment of resources and support.

“They want tenant voices to drive this – you have to put fuel in the car”



Predictable Funding

Design and implement systems of resources and supports for tenant engagement and participation



Knowledge Sharing

Enable tenant-led activities and support tenants sharing their time, interests, knowledge and talents with each other



Local Tenant Councils

Provide the infrastructure for leader-to-leader support across groups of tenant representatives at the sub-regional or regional level



Tenant Networks

Explore and co-design tenant activation systems in a variety of ways (systems for tenant-to-tenant supports such as translation, pet care, etc.)



“The other point is that we always think that seniors need help, which isn’t true. Seniors can also help, if they are involved. If they improve the communication, then the seniors are involved and all of them can be a volunteer to help each other. Everybody has skills that are needed.”

The tenants Health Commons spoke to also talked about the importance of matching supports in the right location and at the right time in their lives. Here are just some examples of supports that senior tenants identified:



In My Unit

- Light housekeeping
- Door-to-door check-ins
- Personal care services
- Free WIFI



In My Neighbourhood

- Intergenerational activities
- Building pairings for social activities
- Group grocery shopping trips
- Medical escorts with translation support



In My Building

- ‘Welcome Wagon’ Committee
- Community safety watch
- Cultural celebrations with language support
- Low-cost food market

It is a promising moment for system transformation in social housing for seniors.

The findings and recommendations in this report are aimed at advancing this transformation and have been derived from the ideas, experiences, and challenges of the tenants Health Commons engaged.

To access the full report online: <https://www.healthcommons.ca/project/seniors-health-and-wellness>

To review a printed copy of the report: Talk to your Seniors Services Coordinator

* This project was designed and implemented by Health Commons Solutions Lab with advice from members of the Senior Tenants Advisory Committee. All quotes are in the voice of senior tenants expert.