

# Housing Concerns of Vulnerable Older Canadians

## What you need to know

A national housing policy does not exist in Canada, which makes an individual's housing his/her sole responsibility. Social housing programs are needed to meet the needs of vulnerable older adults as many of them face challenges that make it difficult to hold onto their home. Some of these challenges include living on a small income, being socially isolated and suffering from ongoing illness that affect their physical and mental well-being. Households spending less than 30% of their gross income are considered to be affordable. They are considered to be suitable if there are enough bedrooms to meet space needs and are considered to be adequate if they do not need major repairs. Households are considered to be in core housing need if they do not meet at least one of the three standards. Almost 17% per cent of senior households are in core housing need in Canada.

## What is this research about?

This research points to the key housing concerns of vulnerable older adults and offers insight into the future housing needs of Canada's growing aging population. The researcher set out to uncover the level of older adults' concern about their housing in terms of the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation's definition of core housing needs - affordability, adequacy and suitability. Housing concerns related to safety, cultural appropriateness, and availability were also looked at.



### KEYWORDS

*housing, elderly, homelessness, minority seniors, Aboriginal seniors*

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### ARTICLE SOURCE

The article *Housing Concerns of Vulnerable Older Canadians* by Weeks, Lori E., LeBlanc, Kristal was published in *Canadian Journal on Aging*, 29(3): 333-347, in 2010.

## What did the researchers do?

The Atlantic Seniors Housing Research Alliance held 10 focus groups with 84 vulnerable older adults living in Atlantic Canada, including Aboriginal seniors, ethnic minority seniors and seniors with disabilities to represent vulnerable older adults. The group meetings lasted two hours, were recorded on tape and in writing, and were held in senior-friendly places such as schools, seniors' centers and resource centers.



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## What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that participants from all three vulnerable groups talked mostly about the high cost of both renting and owning homes (affordability) as being a major problem in their lives. Increasing rent and utility bills, along with small amounts of government assistance were voiced as being their major concerns. While the majority of seniors discussed living in homes that were too small for their needs (suitability), others said that their homes were too big to upkeep and pointed to a lack of re-



sources to repair problems with the home (adequacy). Along with affordability, suitability and adequacy, community acceptance, personal safety and availability of housing to meet their physical needs were found to be housing concerns shared by all participants. The participants also expressed housing concerns specific to their particular group such as Aboriginal seniors remaining involved in their community, family support for minority seniors and access to transportation for disabled seniors.

## HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This research stresses the need for affordable services that are geared toward vulnerable older adults, within or near their homes, to help them remain in their homes. This study suggests that education about services for vulnerable seniors must also be offered such that these seniors know what help is out there for them, and where to find it. This research can be used by agencies to remind them of the diversity of older adults when developing services to meet their needs.

### ABOUT THE RESEARCHER



**Lori E. Weeks** is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Science at the University of Prince Edward Island. Her research interests include the care and support of older adults and their caregivers, and the factors affecting the health of seniors.

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