

LIVING TOGETHER 2025: Connecting housing, social health, & resilience

*Summary of learnings, key
questions, & calls to action*



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Living Together 2025: Connecting housing, social health, and resilience

Living Together 2025: Connecting housing, social health, and resilience convened a diverse array of housing professionals, municipal planners, provincial and federal policy makers, public health professionals, architects, planners, non-profits, researchers and students. During this two-day collective action symposium at the SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue in Vancouver, British Columbia, these two hundred community leaders and experts discussed major learnings and vital next steps for creating a future where more of Canada's communities are age-friendly, socially connected, neighbourly, health-promoting and resilient.

This report summarizes the two-day event and the key learnings, questions, and calls to action that emerged.

About Hey Neighbour Collective

Hey Neighbour Collective (HNC) is housed at the Simon Fraser University (SFU) Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue and brings together housing operators, non-profits, researchers, local and regional governments, housing associations, and health authorities. Together with residents of multi-unit housing, these HNC partners take action to alleviate loneliness and social isolation through building social connectedness, resilience, and capacity for neighbourly support and mutual aid.

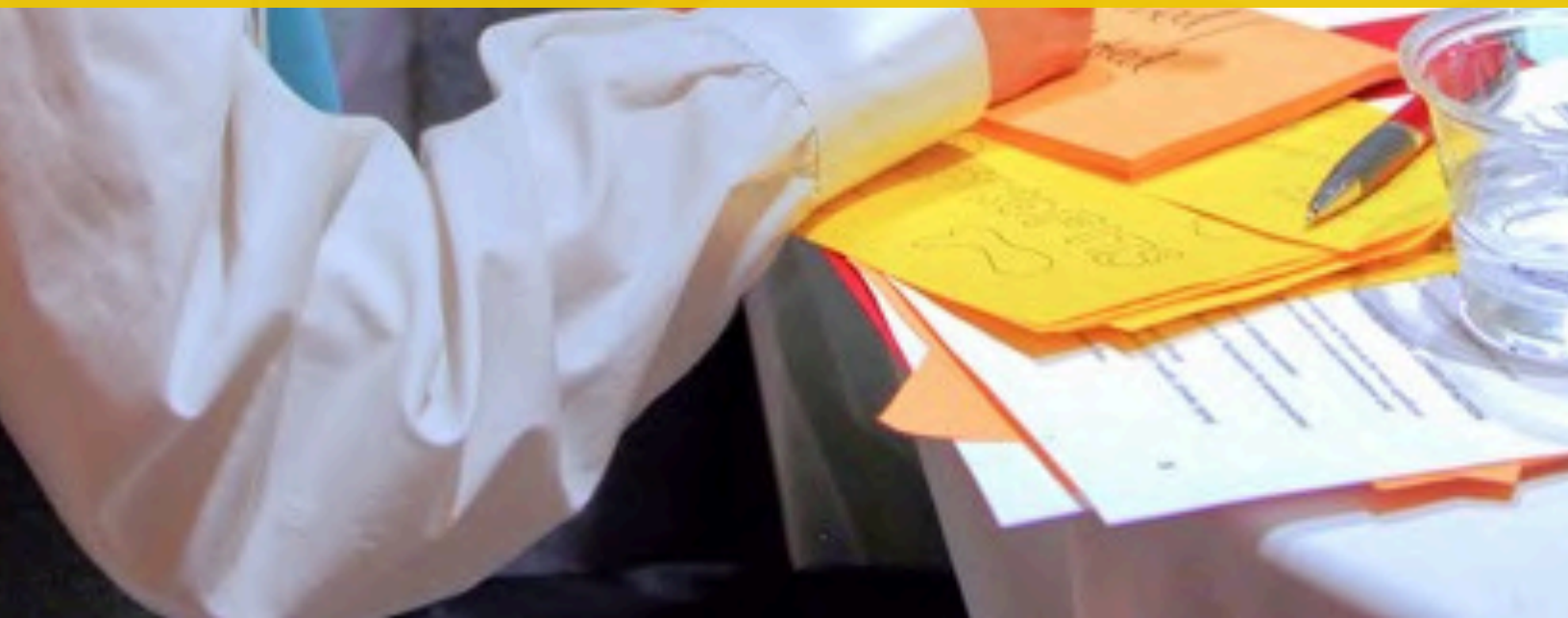
Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge that the Living Together symposium took place on the traditional and unceded territories of the **xʷməθkʷəy̓əm** (Musqueam), **Sḵwxwú7mesh** (Squamish) and **səlilwətał** (TsleilWaututh) Nations. HNC recognizes that colonialism has isolated Indigenous Peoples intentionally and by design through, for example, prohibiting cultural practices, separating communities, and weakening family and language ties. HNC recognizes these historic and ongoing inequities and systemic barriers and strives to be part of movements to correct them.

We also acknowledge with immense gratitude the many people and organizations who made the symposium possible. We are deeply grateful to our funders, sponsors, and co-hosts for their generous support. Thank you, also, to our partners, collaborators, friends, and allies whose ongoing commitment continues to inspire this work.



Overview



Our shared “why”

Participants in the symposium were drawn together by a shared awareness that, locally, nationally, and internationally, social isolation and loneliness are mounting concerns.

In 2023, then U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy released the advisory “Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation,” and in 2025, the World Health Organization published “From loneliness to social connection: Charting a path to healthier societies.” Both reports called for significant efforts to strengthen social connections. As one leading expert emphasized: **“We need to prioritize our social relationships like our life depends on it—because it does.”** It’s also become clear that social isolation often plays a central role in a broader “polycrisis” confronting our society that includes housing unaffordability, income insecurity, climate change and extreme weather events, a lack of support for an aging population, and other challenges.

In this context, social connectedness can be a multi-solver; our neighbours are one of our most important potential resources to help reduce isolation, prepare for and recover from crises and emergencies, support better conditions for aging in place, and more. So, many local and regional organizations, including Hey Neighbour Collective’s partners, have been actively piloting and scaling programs that build social connections and resilience in multi-unit housing.

The symposium brought these community leaders together to reflect on what they’d achieved so far, and where to go next.

Specifically, the goals for Living Together 2025 were:

- Learn about what’s working and what the barriers are to fostering socially connected, neighbourly, health-promoting, and resilient multi-unit housing.
- Strengthen connections and shared understanding across diverse actors, sectors and roles.
- Explore opportunities for “joined up” efforts that will align health, housing, and other sectors to move more deliberately towards systems and policy change.
- Co-create calls to action for our next steps as a collective action movement.

Living Together 2025 built on the discussion of Living Together 2022, expanding the conversation across sectors and topics.

To find all the information about the 2022 & 2025 symposia, visit <https://www.heyneighbourcollective.ca/topic/living-together-symposium/>



This is the best conference I've been to in years! Amazing job!



Who was engaged

A total of 204 participants representing 77 organizations related to housing and health attended the symposium.



Municipal, Regional, Provincial, Federal, and Indigenous Government

City of Burnaby, City of Coquitlam, City of Delta, City of New Westminster, City of North Vancouver, City of Port Moody, City of Surrey, City of Vancouver, City of Victoria, BC Housing, BC Housing Research Centre, BC Ministry of Health, BC Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs, BC Seniors Advocate, Office of the Provincial Health Officer, Metro Vancouver, Translink, Tsawwassen First Nation

Housing

Affordable Housing Societies, Brightside Community Homes Foundation, Broadway Group, Capital Regional Housing Corporation, Concert Properties, Entre Nous Femmes Housing Society, False Creek South Community Housing Trust/RePlan, Hi'yám Housing Society, Hogan's Alley Society, Kekinow Native Housing Society, New Chelsea Society, Peterson, QuadReal, Rain City Rents, Squamish Community Housing Society, UNITI

Health

BC Centre for Disease Control, First Nations Health Authority, Fraser Health, National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health, Public Health Association of BC, Vancouver Coastal Health

Academic Institution

Simon Fraser University (Action on Climate Team, Gerontology, Health Sciences, Public Policy, Renewable Cities, Urban Studies), University of British Columbia (Balanced Supply of Housing, Forestry, Geography, Housing Assessment Resource Tools)

NGOs, Philanthropy, and Social Purpose Companies

411 Seniors Centre, Building Resilient Neighbourhoods, Collingwood Neighbourhood House, Good Neighbour Kitsilano, Little Mountain Neighbourhood House Society, Minivillage Group Inc, S.U.C.C.E.S.S, Sitka Foundation, South Vancouver Neighbourhood House, The Waltons Trust, Toboggan Flats, United Way BC, Urban Climate Leadership, West End Seniors' Network, Westside Seniors Hub, Whole Way House Society

Housing or Real Estate Industry Association

Aboriginal Housing Management Association, BC Non-Profit Housing Association, Co-operative Housing Federation of BC, Landlord BC, Urban Land Institute BC

Architecture and Design

FLUID Architecture, Happy Cities, Human Studio, Keltie Craig Consulting, Lateral Agency, Local Practice Architecture + Design, Maura Chestnutt, MODUS, Pinna Consulting, SvN Architects + Planners, Terra Social Purpose Real Estate, ZALE Design, Zena Simces & Associates, ZGF Architects

How we engaged

Not your average symposium

Our commitment to social connectedness meant leading by example. We were intentional in designing each aspect of the symposium to create opportunities for people to truly connect, feel welcomed and engaged, and leave with a lasting sense of belonging, inspiration and possibility.

Free to attend: Thanks to our sponsors and funders, the event was free of financial barriers.

Note-taking templates and prompts: Each session had dedicated prompts to guide the discussion and note-taking templates to organize the key takeaways.

Assigned table seating: Each participant was assigned a table for plenary and panel sessions. Each table also had assigned facilitators and note-takers to guide and capture discussions.

Table handouts: Each table had a printed copy of key resources, including HNC's theory of change, practice guides, sociable design toolkit, knowledge synthesis report, and the highlights from the first five years.

Harvest team: A dedicated cross-sectoral team was assigned to track and articulate key themes that were coming out of the various facilitated discussions on day one. Those key themes then helped organize the conversations on day two, guiding participants towards articulation of concrete calls to action.



See what attendees had to say about the symposium:

<https://www.heyneighbourcollective.ca/2025/09/living-together-2025-in-action/?key=guest>

Two days of back-to-back learning and discussions, while engaging, can be a lot to take in. That's why we built in moments of lightness and fun to balance things out. With small giveaways, live music, and friendly competitions, we aimed to create joyful pauses throughout the symposium to keep the energy up and spirits high.

Videography Booth: Debrief Communications helped capture attendees' stories, inviting them to share their reflections on the symposium and their aspirations for the work ahead.

Bingo + Red Cat Records Gift Cards: Breaking the ice in professional settings isn't always easy, so we introduced a symposium bingo (with gift card prizes) as a lighthearted way to spark conversations and connections.

Live Music: At the beginning of each day and in between each break, we invited local artists to perform. The oud and cello during breaks were an opportunity for participants to relax and unwind.

Pipe Cleaner Art Competition: It was amazing to see the teamwork and creativity that participants brought to this goofy – but also focus-enhancing – challenge.

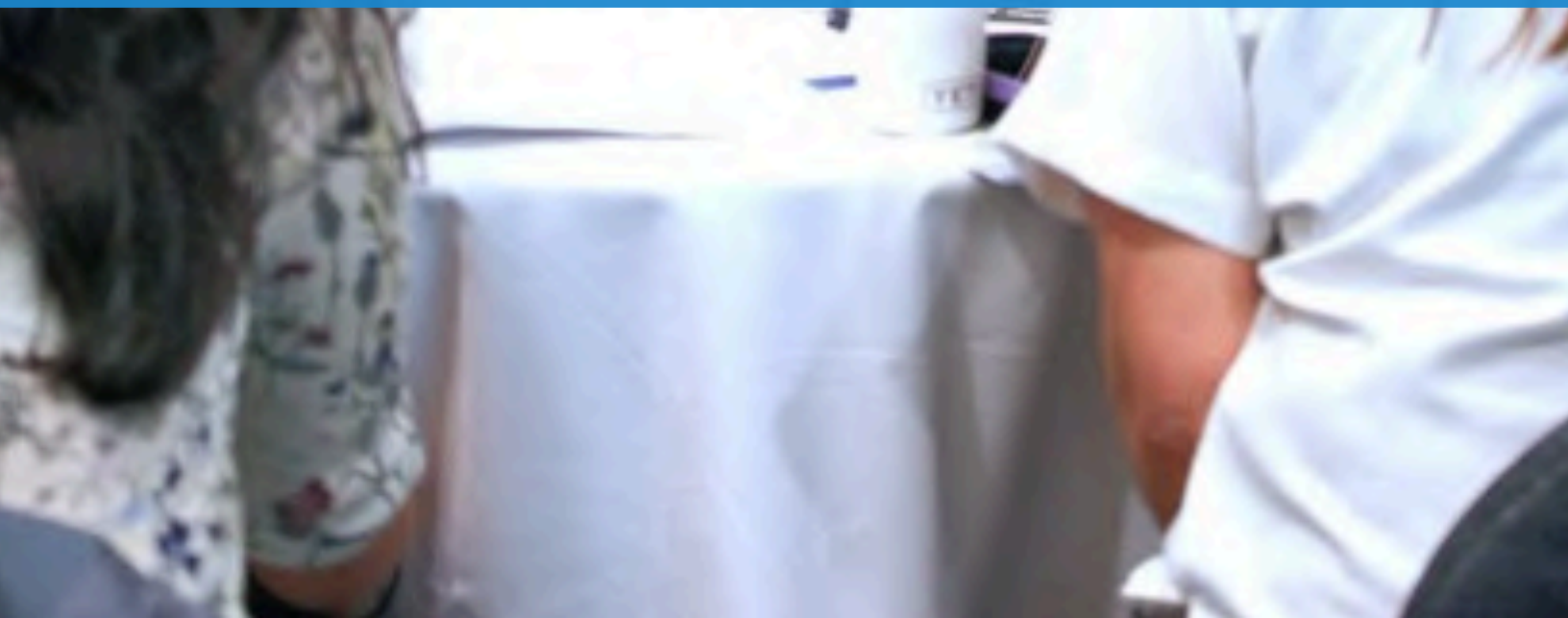
Pub Social: To keep the conversations and connections going, we ended the first day with an optional pub social.

Leave Them Munching: At the end of day one, as a token of thanks, we gave away Wild Tusker's Coconut Fun Bites to all our participants!





Day One





Loved the positive energy and momentum for action. Excellent speakers and info.



On Day 1, we shared experiences and learnings from a wide array of social connectedness projects, practices, and research.

Opening plenary:

Elder Syexwaliya of the Squamish Nation welcomed participants and formally opened the symposium.

Michelle Hoar, Project Director of Hey Neighbour Collective (HNC) gave an introduction to HNC and an overview of its first five years of work.

Dr. Meg Holden from SFU Urban Studies summarized research showing the many factors that contribute to shaping the social quality of life in high-density environments.

Stacy Barter, HNC's Director of Learning and Evaluation, shared insights about the collective impacts achieved through HNC's demonstration programs, cross-sector partnerships, and policy and systems change efforts.

Take a look at the plenary presentation slides and related resources here:

<https://www.heyneighbourcollective.ca/2025/05/symposium-recap-living-together-2025/>

Read HNC's 5-year evaluation report: <https://www.heyneighbourcollective.ca/2025/07/hnc-evaluation-report-impacts-learnings-first-five-years/>



Poster presentations:

Poster presentations by SFU student interns highlighted a number of research findings.

Creating multi-unit housing environments that are age friendly, socially connected, resilient, affordable, and inclusive

1

Presented by: Kishore Seetharaman and Tara Fernando

The presentation showcased early-stage policy and program recommendations that can be taken to ensure multi-housing units are age-friendly, socially connected, resilient, affordable, and inclusive. Some key recommendations include standardized evaluation criteria for social programming and adapting social programs to the diverse needs of the residents.



It was good to hear people confirm and resonate with the emerging recommendations included in the poster, particularly the importance of dedicated funding for community development in multi-unit housing sites.

–Kishore Seetharaman



Building Connections in Multi-Unit Housing: Scoping Review of Factors Influencing Social Interaction that Foster Aging in the Right Place

2

Presented by: Jean Paul Ramírez Echavarría

This presentation compiles evidence from a scoping review on factors influencing social interactions in multi-unit housing. A key finding is that open, accessible building layouts with mobility-friendly features promote informal interactions and independence. Additionally, findings reveal that culturally inclusive programs and resident-led initiatives enhance engagement, despite persistent funding challenges.

See what HNC's emerging scholars had to say about the symposium here:
<https://www.heyneighbourcollective.ca/2025/06/emerging-sfu-scholars-reflect-living-together-2025/>

Sociability and Pro-Neighbouring Behaviours in Community Housing: Findings from the 2023–2024 Resident Well-being Survey

3

Presented by: Olivia Tomlinson

Based on the 2023 annual resident wellbeing survey with residents of Brightside and New Chelsea buildings, the study explores individual and household factors that relate to the quantity and quality of neighbouring within community housing residents. A pro neighbouring index of three components (number of close friends, frequency of conversations with neighbours, and attendance at community meetings) was developed to estimate the behaviours that together constitute a lifestyle choice that favours neighbourly social connections.



All the conversations I had about this work felt insightful and meaningful. Several of them underlined that this research is hitting on points that others in this field are curious about.

– Olivia Tomlinson



Take a look at each poster presentation here:

<https://www.heyneighbourcollective.ca/2025/05/symposium-recap-living-together-2025/>



“The small breakout sessions were the best part. I got to hear from a wide range of people and heard their perspectives.”



Breakout sessions

1

The role of housing operators as ‘enabling hosts’ and partners

Session host: Keltie Craig (*Keltie Craig Consulting*)

Speakers: Sherri Crane (*Brightside Community Homes Foundation*), Francesca Leonzio (*Entre Nous Femmes Society*), and Scott Stewart (*New Chelsea Society*)

Three non-market rental housing operators outlined how they act as “enabling hosts” of engagement programs and community partnerships that foster neighbourly social connections and resilience in multi-unit housing. Discussions emphasized how better-connected residents feel supported and have a stronger sense of belonging and engagement as they move through different life stages and phases.

2

Age-friendly approaches to building social connections

Session host: Anthony Kupferschmidt (*City of Vancouver*)

Speakers: Dr. Atiya Mahmood (*SFU Gerontology*), Madeleine Hebert (*Happy Cities*), Meeka Marsolais (*West End Seniors’ Network*), and Jenny Konkin (*Whole Way House*)

The session explored different approaches to strengthening neighbourly social connections and improving conditions for aging – and thriving – in place. Speakers discussed how age-friendly, sociable building design and resident-engaged programming can help to build informal supports between neighbours and connections to community and health system services. Embedding social programming as a core mandate into funding and service delivery was a recurring need identified.

3

Building momentum for policy change through partnerships and collaboration

Session host: Michelle Hoar (Hey Neighbour Collective)

Speakers: Jenny Konkin (Whole Way House) and William Azaroff (Brightside); Madeleine Hebert (Happy Cities), and Renee de St. Croix (City of Coquitlam)

The focus of this session was on two different collaborations that are building momentum for policy change: 1) CEOs of non-market housing collaborating with community organizations and researchers to build a new model for ‘independent seniors housing plus,’ and 2) local governments co-creating sociable design policy for new multi-unit housing. Discussions highlighted the power of multi-sector partnerships and collaboration to shift systems.

4

Protective social infrastructure: the role of neighbourly social connections and mutual support for health and climate resilience

Session host: Ame-Lia Tamburrini and Ana Mendez (Building Resilient Neighbourhoods)

Speakers: Magda Szpala (BC Housing), Sarah Hunn (City of Vancouver), Ksenia Stepkina (Good Neighbour Kitsilano), and Stacy Barter (Building Resilient Neighbourhoods/Hey Neighbour Collective)

Speakers described how four different initiatives in Vancouver and Victoria are intentionally encouraging and fostering neighbourly connections and communities of mutual support in multi-unit residential buildings. Discussions highlighted how rapid, nearby support from neighbours helps people feel safer in their homes as they age, when experiencing health challenges, and during climate-related extreme weather events.

Browse the session slides here:

<https://www.heyneighbourcollective.ca/2025/05/symposium-recap-living-together-2025/>

5

From Green Spaces To Connected Places: Pathways to more resilient multi-unit homes

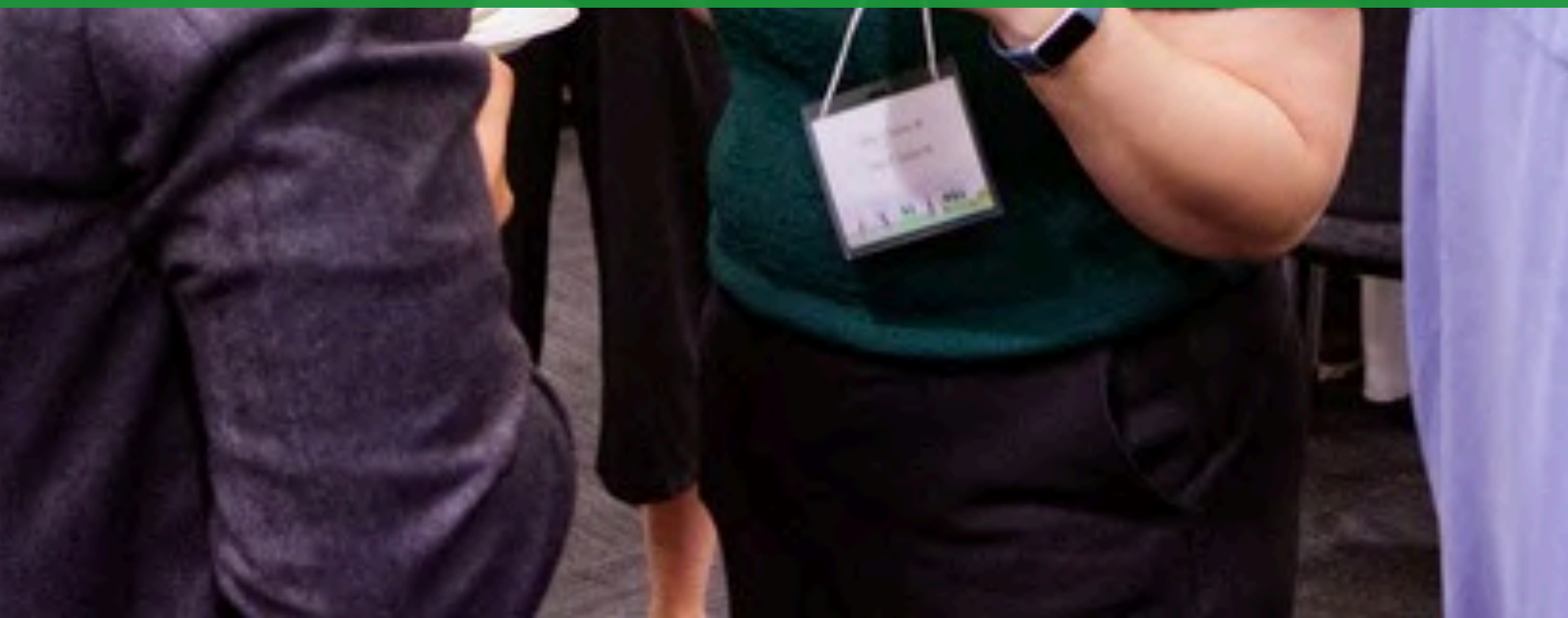
Session host: Leanne Sawatzky (Renewable Cities)

Speaker: Michelle Sawka (ACT – Action on Climate Team)

Exploring the intersections of nature and community, this session detailed how engaging people in “nature-based solutions” (NbS) can strengthen neighbourhood resilience, foster social connections and enhance community and building livability. Discussion honed in on issues of “adoption” of private land, integration of NbS with infrastructure projects, and practical pathways forward through retrofits, new builds, and redevelopments.



Day Two





Thank you for pulling together folks from all agencies - keeping this going is critical.



Panel discussions

Opportunities for collective impact and action

Panel 1 Speakers:

- Trevor Norris (Aboriginal Housing Management Association)
- Opreet Kang (Urban Land Institute of BC)
- Dr. Meg Holden (Simon Fraser University)

This panel examined the critical role of active, directed “social programming” in multi-unit housing to bring people together and create conditions for mutual support.

Panel 2 Speakers:

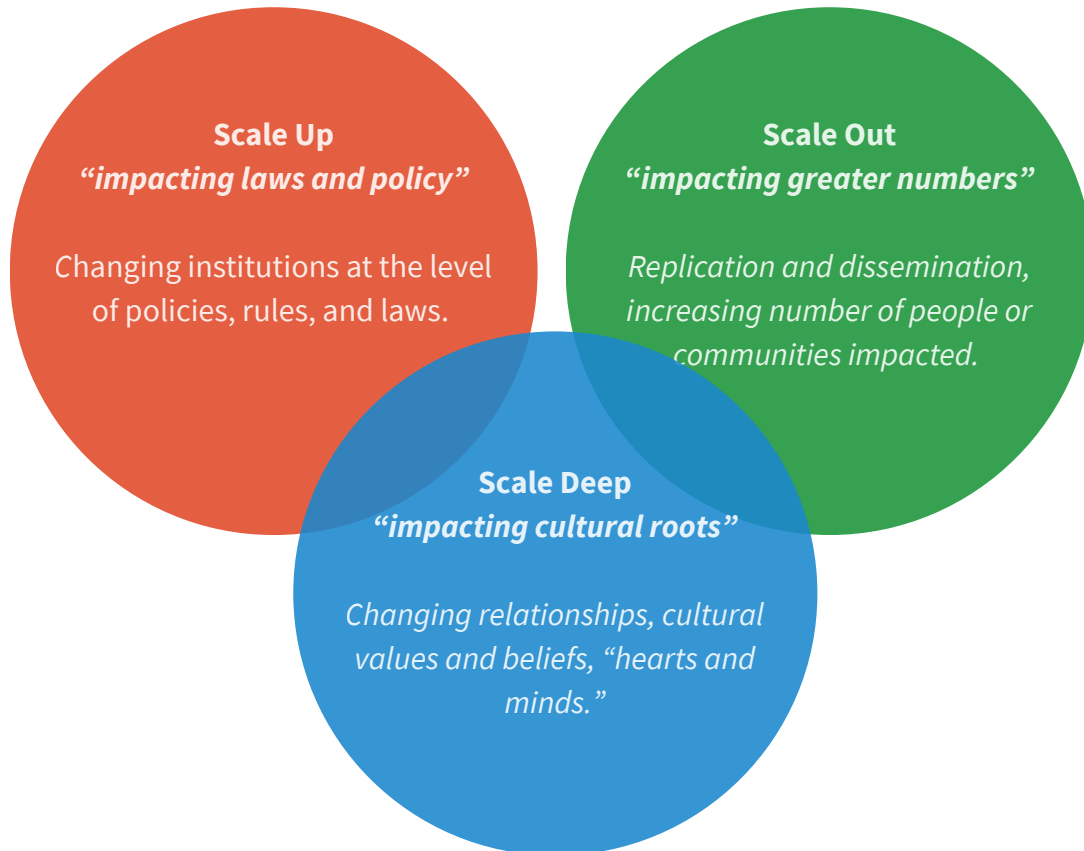
- Michelle Cooper-Iversen (Co-operative Housing Federation of BC)
- Dr. Rebecca Hasdell (BC Centre for Disease Control)
- Claudine Matlo (West End Seniors’ Network)

This panel reviewed the intersections of housing and health, and highlighted the need for stronger evaluation practices, community-informed services, and co-location of housing and supportive social spaces.

Now what?

Questions We're Collectively Holding

On day two, we transitioned from exploring what we are seeing and learning together about these issues, into a discussion on opportunities for collective action moving forward. Small group conversations were facilitated and framed around the key questions that were identified at the end of day one. We organized these according to the concept of 'scaling up, out and deep.'



**This graphic is adapted from Darcy Riddell and Michele-Lee Moor, [McConnell Foundation](#)*



Really liked the format and the mix of delivery - panels, presentations, small groups etc.





SCALING UP (Building support for systems and policy change)

- What are our shared priorities for policy and systems change?
- How can we engage our larger collective ecosystem of partners in a shared policy/systems change agenda?
- How can we elevate the multi-solving potential of social connectedness to build more buy-in and investment in this work? What issues, departments, ministries, and sectors can we align with?

SCALING OUT (Spreading demonstration programs to more people, buildings and communities)

- How do we ensure community-based partners have sustainable resources to deliver and scale their programs?
 - Who pays? What would a sustainable business/funding model look like for this work? Who needs to be involved?
- How can we continue to build on and grow the sociable design and policy work we have been working on? How can we leverage retrofit opportunities to influence the design of existing buildings in addition to new buildings?
- What are the key “measurables” of social programming that will best “speak” to the public, policy makers, funders, etc.?

SCALING DEEP (Shifting mindsets and culture)

- How can we expand the pool of housing operators committed to building neighbourly social connections and resident resilience through becoming “enabling hosts”?
- How can we better measure, articulate and raise awareness of the benefits to housing operators?
- How do we shift mindsets to focus on proactive prevention and health promotion?



Really appreciated the thought that went into planning tables and creating connections.



Calls to action

In the final three hours of the symposium, we challenged participants to consolidate their thinking into calls to action. Giving them the top themes that arose from day one small group conversations, people self-organized into groups of 5- 10 people by the theme of greatest interest to them.

The instructions were:

1

Round 1: Discuss (20 mins)

For this priority theme area, what are the opportunities for joined-up action that will help move the needle? What are the most pressing barriers preventing progress here?

2

Round 2: Prioritize and Action Plan (25 mins)

Given everything that has been discussed, select a priority opportunity. What is the most significant thing we can do now, in this area, that will have the biggest possible impact?
Create an action plan.

3

Round 3: Create a “Call to Action: (10 mins)

Summarize in 1 sentence for sharing back (like a ‘tweet’)

Below are the 18 calls to action that emerged, grouped into 6 interrelated higher-level themes.

Making a Business Case for Scaling Solutions:



Finance opportunity

Call to action: Convene finance innovation experts around levers and opportunities for sociable age-friendly design and programming in multi-unit housing.



Business case

Call to action: Develop a business case for intersectoral audiences to identify and communicate the many benefits of investing in programs and infrastructure for social connectivity.



Scale to market housing

Call to action: Happy tenants make happy landlords – connected communities are great for your business!

Indigenous Leadership:



Indigenous leadership in housing & health solutions & decolonization

Call to action: Prioritize and commit to creating a culturally safe environment for Indigenous leadership.



Creating Conditions for Healthy Aging in Place:



Independent Living Plus

Call to action: Mobilize leadership and secure funding to provide thriving communities that take care of their older adults.



Partnerships between housing operators and seniors organizations

Call to action: Leverage and scale promising models into vertical communities serving seniors (example OASIS, WESN, City non-market housing, United Way programs).



I connected with so many like-minded people! The day 2 activity was great fun and was inspiring!



Resident Engagement & Capacity Building:



Resident engagement & leadership

Call to action: Resident engagement – you have the power to redefine your community #showup #yourvoicematters.



Grassroots learning 101

Call to action: A vision of community training whereby, one step at a time, starting small, people and organizations will learn how to learn to build community and pay it forward.

Policy & Systems Change:



Policy

Call to action: Scale social infrastructure with housing need: schools, childcare, parks/open space, recreation space, libraries etc.



Climate and multi solving

Call to action: Create bold plans with coordinated efforts between municipal and provincial governments. Solutions must be community-informed and involve grassroots and community-based organizations.



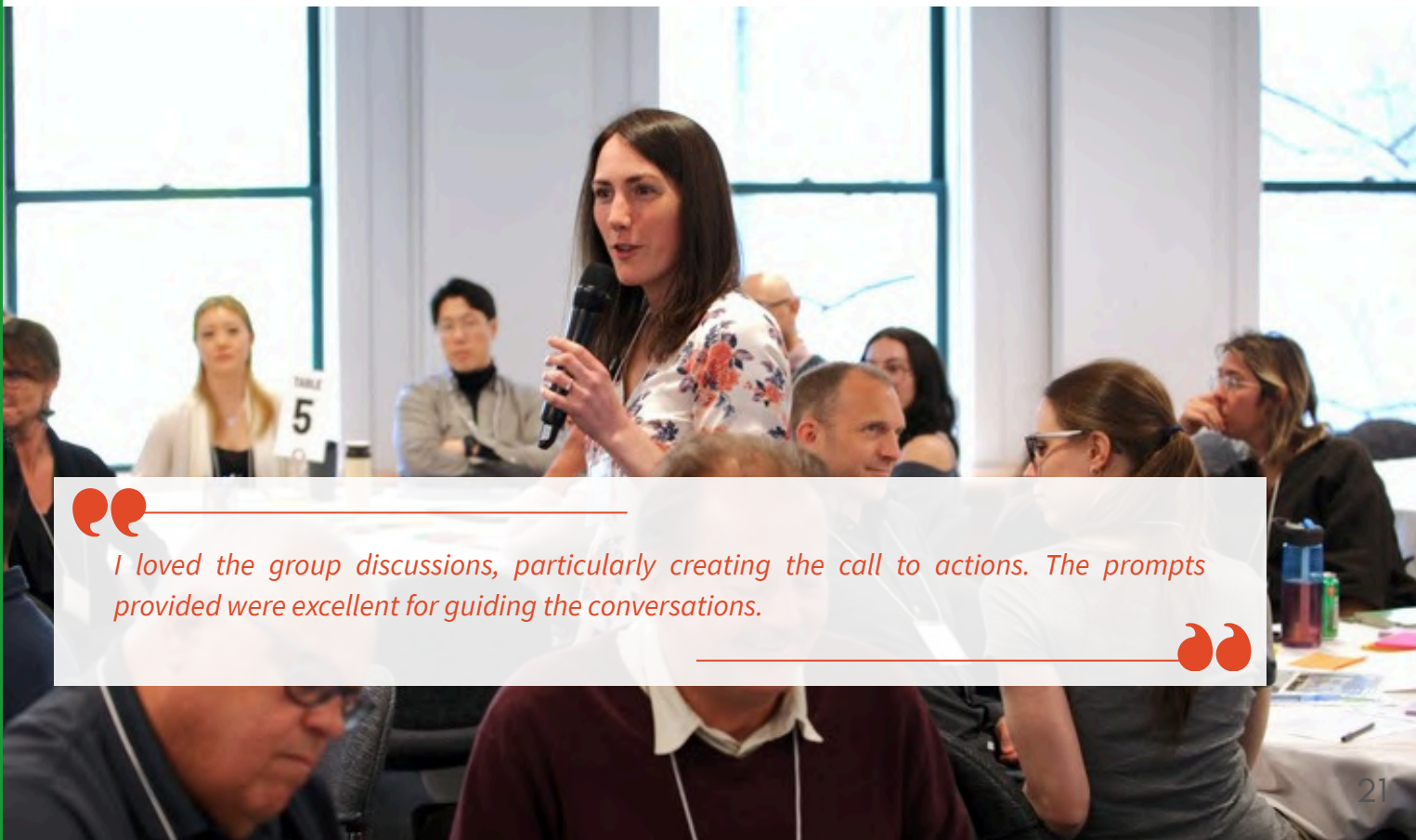
Data & research systems

Call to action: Develop policy-relevant research questions and indicators which can be tracked over time to drive change, tell stories, and socialize the idea that housing determines health.



Evaluation

Call to action: Bring together provincial leadership to co-develop an evaluation framework for community-level impacts of pro-social housing and health interventions.



I loved the group discussions, particularly creating the call to actions. The prompts provided were excellent for guiding the conversations.





The small group discussions were so energizing and useful in creating actions that I can take towards making communities more connected



Public Awareness, Information Sharing & Advocacy:



Knowledge mobilization & education

Call to action: Create an industry hub to facilitate cross-organization education and knowledge mobilization.



Public awareness

Call to action: Loneliness is a killer. Housing knows it. Health sees it. Time to stop the silo shuffle - create a council of connection and make them work together.



Information sharing

Call to action: Create a national social connectedness coalition - a space to share data, resources, connect with potential partners across disciplines. Leverage knowledge sharing, modern technology and relationships to create a singular access to connections between data and people.



Develop key messages and evidence for awareness & education

Call to action: Develop a coalition to build healthy community connections by eliminating social isolation, leading to increased awareness and funding in the future. Raise awareness about the impacts of social connectedness on health, housing and community.



Community asset & resource mapping

Call to action: There is a need for a community-led, provincially-maintained, open-source, time-stamped directory to connect everybody to local, community based resources to overall increase community resilience.



Intersectoral housing strategy

Call to action: Convene diverse sectors to collectively advocate for social connectedness as our way of doing business #housingtogetherness!



Overall, it's an incredible event whereby the focus is to leave with actionable items. There's been too many conferences where we focus too much on identifying issues. This is a breath of fresh air.



The end. And the next phase...

After participants presented their small group calls to action, we wrapped up the symposium with an individual exercise: committing to specific transformative actions in the next 24 hours, 24 days and 24 weeks.

Since then, a number of “working groups” have formed to activate some of the calls to action. If you’re not yet a part of a working group, get in touch and we’ll connect you up!

Thank you to everyone who participated in Living Together 2025!

Access this report and all additional materials on our website:

<https://www.heyneighbourcollective.ca/2025/09/living-together-2025-symposium-report/>

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Symposium Co-hosts





HEY 
NEIGHBOUR! Collective