

# Canada HomeShare: The Canadian Intergenerational Housing Program

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## OVERVIEW

Canada HomeShare is a national intergenerational housing program in Canada ("About," 2022). Within the program, older over-housed adults are paired with under-housed post-secondary students, which supports aging-in-place for older Canadians while providing students with safe and affordable housing ("About," 2022; National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly (NICE), n.d.). This program has successfully enhanced the well-being and social cohesion of participants; as such, Canada HomeShare has improved public health outcomes for vulnerable populations, and has proven to be feasible and sustainable as an expanding national program (Mirza, n.d.; NICE, n.d.).

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## INTRODUCTION

"Aging-in-place," or continuing to live at home independently throughout older age, is often desired by older adults (Martinez et al., 2020). However, ensuring older persons are not sacrificing their social well-being, financial stability, and safety by remaining at home is essential (Martinez et al., 2020; NICE, n.d.). Age-related issues, including accessibility barriers from declining mobility and health, socioeconomic challenges, and social isolation, can exacerbate the limited access to support available at home (Martinez et al., 2020). Limited access to appropriate services may result in unwanted and unnecessary institutionalization, often resulting in depression and loneliness for those impacted (Martinez et al., 2020; Runcan, 2012). Given the importance of aging-in-place to older persons, ensuring their safety, autonomy, and social involvement in this experience is fundamental (Martinez et al., 2020). Intergenerational housing

programs, including Canada HomeShare, address challenges associated with aging-in-place while supporting the preferences of older persons.

## MAIN TEXT

### PROGRAM PURPOSE AND GOALS

Canada HomeShare strives to reverse social isolation and support aging-in-place by connecting older adults aged 55+ with post-secondary students (*Back-to-School with Canada HomeShare: Intergenerational Living Embraced by Students and Older Adults*, 2021). Older adults choosing to age in place are often over-housed, leaving millions of bedrooms empty throughout Canada. Meanwhile, students are frequently under-housed due to unsafe and unaffordable student accommodations (Canada HomeShare, 2021). Home-sharing bridges these populations together, enabling students to obtain safe housing with subsidized rent in homes of older adults, who benefit from

supplemental income and assistance while being able to remain independent (*Back-to-School with Canada HomeShare: Intergenerational Living Embraced by Students and Older Adults*, 2021). Canada HomeShare goes beyond a rent transaction; students support older adults by completing agreed-upon household tasks (NICE, n.d.). Additionally, the interaction between generations increases social engagement, fostering supportive networks that reduce the risk of social isolation among both students and older adults (*Back-to-School with Canada HomeShare: Intergenerational Living Embraced by Students and Older Adults*, 2021).

## PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Canada HomeShare began as the Toronto HomeShare pilot project in May 2018 (NICE, n.d.). With the National Initiative for Care of the Elderly (NICE), the City of Toronto initiated this project with 12 older adult and student pairs (NICE, n.d.). In March 2019, the city expanded the project, and within two months, launched as a program with over 200 older adults (NICE, n.d.). By the fall of 2019, the Toronto HomeShare program had further expanded by collaborating with the City of Barrie and Georgian College to launch Barrie HomeShare (NICE, n.d.). By 2021, Toronto HomeShare had evolved into a national program known as Canada HomeShare (NICE, n.d.). This program now has over 12 sites throughout Canada, including Toronto, Barrie, Metro Vancouver, Kingston, Peel Region, Peterborough, Oshawa, Ottawa, Calgary, Winnipeg, Montreal, and Halifax (NICE, n.d.). Canada HomeShare is organized by social workers, who are responsible for matching older adults with students based on multiple factors (NICE, n.d.). Vulnerable sector screening is also conducted to guarantee that both parties can support one another and to facilitate conflict mediation (NICE, n.d.).

## PROGRAM EVALUATION

Evaluation of the Toronto HomeShare pilot (n = 12 pairs) demonstrated that intergenerational home-sharing had economic and social benefits for older adults and students (Easton, 2020). According to survey results from 22 participants, 94% indicated the pilot project delayed their relocation out of the community (Mirza, Tanner, et al., 2021). 88% revealed the program improved their well-being and financial stability (Mirza,

Tanner, et al., 2021). In-depth interviews with 18 participants demonstrated that everyone experienced decreased social isolation and loneliness, strengthened intergenerational connections, improved financial stability and home aid, enhanced overall well-being, and enriched companionship and safety (Mirza, Macri, et al., 2021).

Despite the positive impacts, some factors prevent participation in the program. For instance, participants expressed concerns over lack of privacy, unclear home protections and rent earnings, and affordability in the Toronto HomeShare pilot (Mirza, n.d.). While these issues have not yet been resolved, a partnership with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and other organizations may lead to potential improvements (NICE, n.d.). Strategies for improvement may also emerge from the evaluation of the Toronto HomeShare pilot, as well as of the larger Canada HomeShare program, which has yet to be conducted (Mirza, Tanner, et al., 2021).

## PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

To adequately advise program sites, a Local Advisory Committee exists within each site (NICE, n.d.). An organized committee of local stakeholders informs program sites, ensuring program delivery reflects the values of its surrounding communities (NICE, n.d.). Pilot Site Coordinators ensure the program runs efficiently and align with program objectives (NICE, n.d.). Each site also receives funding of \$22,500 per year from the NICE (NICE, n.d.). If a pilot site wishes to expend added funds, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) will be arranged in preparation (NICE, n.d.). Despite these findings, plans to financially support the program's work have yet to be developed, especially considering the need to recover from the economic impacts the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the program has not indicated any goals regarding its sustainability or expansion.

## PROGRAM IMPACT ON PUBLIC HEALTH

Canada HomeShare reduces the risk of social isolation among older Canadians by addressing the risk factor of living alone. Social isolation can increase the risk of cognitive decline, anxiety,

depression, suicide, heart disease, stroke and premature death (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020). Preventing older folks from living alone and ensuring they remain connected to various networks reduces the health implications of social isolation (NICE, n.d.). Furthermore, additional support from students alleviates caregiver burnout. With the growing senior population and loneliness being reported in about 50% of people above 80 years old, addressing social isolation is a public health priority, benefitting both older folks and the rest of the population (Government of Canada, 2014).

## CONCLUSION

Canada HomeShare facilitates aging-in-place for older Canadians while providing safe and affordable housing for students. The program is sustainable enough for national expansion, with comprehensive organization and funding. Overall, Canada HomeShare successfully alleviates the public health burden of adverse health outcomes among vulnerable populations.

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