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# TENANT SUPPORT SERVICES

More Than Just “Home”



## **Tenant Support Services – More Than Just “Home”**

The Alberta Seniors and Community Housing Association (ASCHA) led consultations with housing providers, community organizations, tenants and staff across the province to better understand the current state of tenant support services in Alberta's community housing sector. This research was funded in part by the Government of Alberta's Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services – Housing Division.

### **The Challenge: Gaps in Tenant Supports**

The consultations revealed that, while housing providers are committed to meeting tenant needs, there are significant gaps in available supports - especially in areas such as mental health, addiction recovery, financial planning, and life skills training. Housing providers, particularly in rural areas, also witness tenants facing challenges accessing external services due to long wait times, limited resources, and geographic isolation. As a result, housing organizations often find themselves attempting to fill gaps in services, which goes beyond their mandate and adds strain to their staff.

## Current State

The current state is under pressure, with housing providers striving to meet tenants needs despite limited resources:

**Direct Supports:** About 44% of community housing providers who responded offer direct supports, including systems navigation to help tenants access programs like Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) and Alberta Works. Some also provide community programming. However, funding and staffing constraints, providers that offer supports must often prioritize tenants with the most urgent needs. This limits their ability to offer consistent support across their portfolios, impacting what they are able to provide to tenants with less immediate demand for supports, and also does not allow them to prevent crises.

Many housing providers report a growing need for expanded support services, especially in mental health, addiction recovery, financial planning, and family support.

**Rural Challenges:** These gaps are more pronounced in rural areas where transportation issues and fewer local services make it harder for tenants to access the support they need. Some tenants, unsure of where to find help, experience feelings of isolation and face greater housing instability.

**Staff Strain:** Housing staff are increasingly tasked with balancing tenancy management duties while providing direct tenant support, often without adequate resources or training. This leads to burnout and hinders their ability to address the

complex needs of tenants effectively.

**Collaboration Gaps:** partnerships with external agencies is essential, but these partnerships are often informal and not fully coordinated. Housing staff also need more training in areas like mental health and conflict resolution to support the work they are taking on to meet the increasing needs of tenants. Tenant needs vary throughout their journey, from application to tenancy to potential eviction.

While housing providers are stepping in to meet these needs, the complexity of tenant challenges calls for a more coordinated and comprehensive approach, including learning from promising practices.

Tenant needs vary throughout their housing journey, from application to tenancy and potential eviction underscoring the need for a more coordinated and comprehensive approach.

## Key Findings of the Research

### Direct Support

Approximately 44% of the housing providers surveyed and consulted offer direct support to tenants, including systems navigation, application assistance for financial programs, and community programming. However, funding and staffing constraints limit their capacity to provide these services consistently.



#### Systems Navigation

Housing providers assist tenants in connecting with external resources and community programs, such as mental health services, healthcare, and legal support.



#### Application Assistance

Providers help tenants apply for financial aid programs like AISH and Alberta Works, ensuring tenants access necessary benefits.

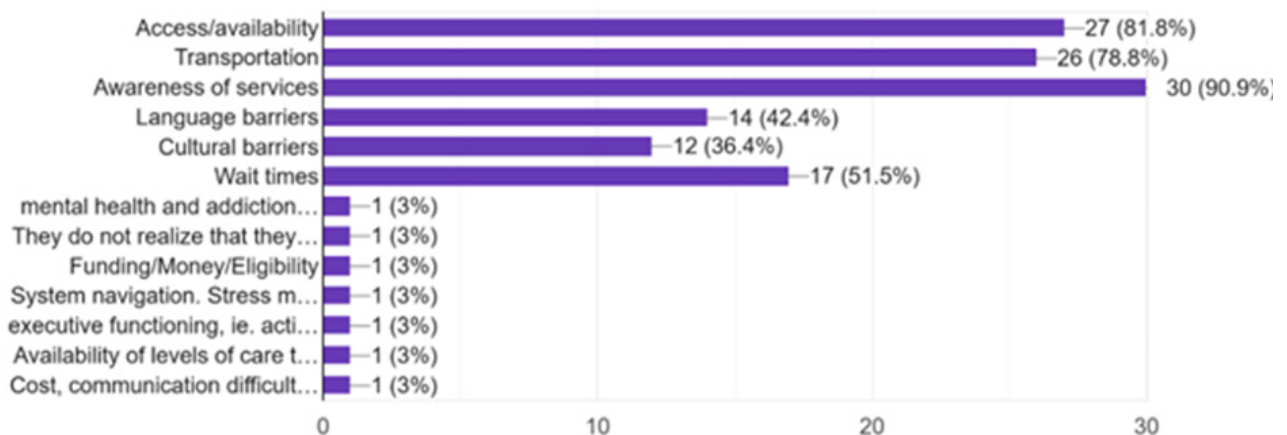


#### Community Programming

Housing organizations also offer tenant engagement activities, such as community gardens, social events, and skill-building workshops, to foster a sense of community and support tenant well-being.

### Referral Services

Around 75% of housing providers surveyed and consulted offer referrals to external community services such as mental health, addiction, food security, and eviction prevention services. However, access to these services is limited, especially in rural areas. It was also highlighted that partnerships were dependent on these organizations being open to making connections.



## Need for Expanded Services

A significant need for increased support services was identified by study participants, particularly in mental health, addiction recovery, financial planning, and life skills training. Ways to improve this however rely on the following:



**Increased Funding  
for Expanded  
Supports**



**Collaboration  
with Social  
Service Agencies**



**Staff Retention &  
Recruitment  
Strategies**



**Systemic Alignment,  
Resource Sharing  
and Coordination**

## Collaboration and Training Gaps

In their responses, housing providers expressed a need for stronger collaboration with external service providers, and highlighted gaps in staff training. While staff have increasing amounts of duties with increasing housing needs across the province, there is less time to participate in training and no consistent training practices or recommendations across the sector.

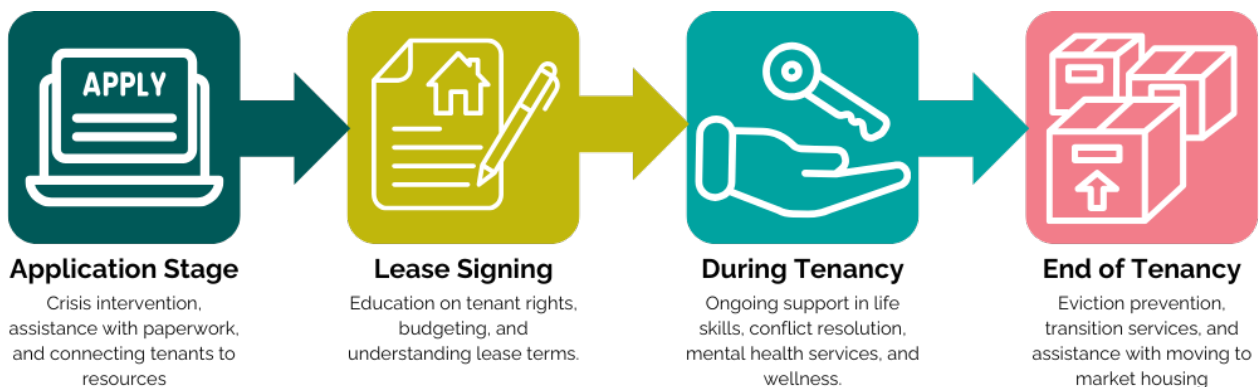
# Developing Sector-Wide Dedicated Tenant Support Roles

Establishing dedicated tenant support roles to address tenant needs could look something like this:

- **Separate Tenant Supports from Tenancy Management:** Tenant support staff should not have the same responsibilities as tenancy managers. While tenancy managers focus on enforcing housing rules, dedicated support roles would be focused on providing guidance, advocacy, and helping tenants navigate external challenges affecting their housing stability.
- **Specialized Training for Tenant Support Workers:** These roles should be filled by professionals with specialized training, such as social workers, mental health counselors, and addiction recovery specialists. Specialized professionals can better assess tenant needs and offer tailored support, helping to prevent issues from escalating.
- **Provide Flexible Service Delivery:** Tenant support roles should allow flexibility to respond to changing tenant needs over time. A more structured, sector-wide approach to providing these services could result in better outcomes for tenants, especially those facing complex issues.

## Lifecycle of Tenancy

Support needs to evolve at different stages of tenancy, requiring specific interventions at i. application; ii. lease-signing, iii. during tenancy; iv. end-of-tenancy.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

01

## **Increasing Tenant Support Services**

Increased and more sustainable funding should be directed towards supporting tenant services, enabling housing providers to hire dedicated support staff, access and informing training programs, and collaboration with external organizations to improve access to mental health, addiction, legal, and financial resources. Most housing providers said they thought this role should be affiliated with the housing provider.

02

## **Strengthen Collaboration with External Service Providers**

Housing providers should explore formalized partnerships with external service agencies, including shared resources, joint case management, and formal agreements to ensure seamless support for tenants across different service providers. This ensures there is not a duplication of services and to better understand tenant issues.

03

## **Develop Dedicated Tenant Support Roles**

Housing providers should consider creating specialized, dedicated tenant support roles to address the social, emotional, and practical needs of tenants. These roles should be separate from tenancy management functions and filled by trained professionals with expertise in areas such as mental health, addiction, and financial planning but who can also facilitate community-building within sites.

04

## **Expand Professional Development and Training for Housing Staff**

Investment in regular and specialized training is essential to equip housing staff with the knowledge and skills necessary to support tenants effectively. Focus areas should include mental health, addiction recovery, conflict resolution, financial planning, and trauma-informed approaches.

05

## **Address Barriers in Rural Areas**

Given the unique challenges faced by rural communities, housing providers could explore mobile support services, leverage technology for remote support, and establish partnerships with local organizations to ensure tenants in rural areas have access to the necessary support.

These recommendations aim to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of tenant support services within community housing in Alberta.. By addressing the current gaps and enhancing collaboration, training, and resources, housing providers can better support tenants, reduce housing instability, and improve overall tenant well-being.

You can view the full report [here](#), or contact us.

