



DIGNITY HOUSE

AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR
LGBT SENIORS AND ALLIES

LGBT Seniors Housing Market Study Summary

The need and demand study conducted by Lumina Services and Terra Housing Consultants for the Dignity House Advisory Committee identifies that the LGBT communities in Vancouver's Lower Mainland have sufficient demographic and income strength to support a variety of seniors' housing options.

The genesis of the Dignity House project stemmed from a discussion paper authored by Mr. Alex Sangha, and other academic sources, which indicated that LGBT seniors face considerable stigmatism in typical heteronormative seniors' housing projects. In these projects LGBT seniors face increased discrimination by both other residents and staff because of the continued prevalence of homophobia and transphobia, and because staff typically have not been trained to deal with issues specific to LGBT individuals. This results in LGBT seniors having worse health outcomes than the general resident population, or having to "re-closet" to hide their gender or sexual identity to avoid discrimination.

Based on assumptions elaborated in the report it is estimated that in the City of Vancouver, where there were 156,795 people over the age of 55 in the 2011 census, that:

- 19,599 would identify as LGBT. Similarly in the Vancouver CMA there are an estimated 36,494 people over 55 who identify as LGBT.
- There are 59,085 individuals over the age of 70 in the City of Vancouver, and approximately 7,386 identify as LGBT.
- Up to 30% of the population of the West End would identify as LGBT, which would mean there are up to 3,390 people over 55 identifying as LGBT living in the West End.
- The report estimates that 0.6% of residents of the City of Vancouver identify as Trans*. This would mean that there are between 940 and 1,400 Trans* identified individuals, over 55, and 355 over 70, living in Vancouver.

There were 600 responses to a survey conducted by Lumina Services, both online, at focus groups, and other public meetings which the LGBT community was invited to participate in. Survey responses were by no means uniform, and there was a diverse set of opinions and views on what form an LGBT seniors housing project in Vancouver should take.

The primary take away from the survey responses is that people who make up LGBT communities in Vancouver are aware that they need a safe, inclusive, and welcoming space to retire, and age comfortably and with dignity in. The average age of respondents was quite low at 53.8 years.

Other key findings included:

- Respondents were overwhelmingly located in the City of Vancouver, primarily from the West End (30%) and East Vancouver (21.6%)
- The majority of respondents identified their gender as 'male' (67.8%), Trans* responses made up 6.9%
- The majority of respondents identified as either 'Gay' or 'Lesbian', 61.9% and 16.5% respectively.
- The majority of respondents lived in a condo or apartment (64.9%) and 51.7% were renters, while 45.7% were owners.
- The majority of respondents indicated a preference for a housing option which was LGBT focused, but which was open to friends, family and allies as well (77.9%)
- The overwhelming preference for a location for a project was the West End, though Commercial Drive or Mount Pleasant would be acceptable locations as well.
- There was a range of incomes indicated by the respondents, with the median household income of respondents being close to \$47,000 per year.

Obviously, as with all seniors, there is need for subsidized units, offered at below market rents. However, there is also significant interest, and sufficient income strength among those not in this "core need" group, that a mixed project where larger and more expensive units are either sold or rented to help support seniors who cannot afford rents higher than SAFER levels, would work.

If the assumed age for an LGBT individual wanting to move into a service-enriched project is 70, we estimate that in the City of Vancouver there would be theoretical demand for about 380 units. Based on the proportion of questionnaire respondents who have incomes under \$30,000 at least 114 of those units would require financial subsidies.

The income and homeownership data demonstrated in the survey mean that DHAC could pursue a variety of housing options for LGBT seniors. A high number of participants indicated they were interested in some services (though given the young age of respondents this is likely not an immediate need). Providing a project that will allow people to acquire services as they need them in the future may be attractive to a segment of older (but not too old) individuals.

The study also identifies several locations within Vancouver that would be acceptable for a project to be located, namely the West End, Mount Pleasant or Commercial Drive, areas of Vancouver. The area with the strongest chance of success is the West End, but this area also presents the most obstacles to development, including costs, availability of land, and a difficult rezoning and permitting process.

Overall the report does not support a single conclusive direction for the Dignity House Advisory Committee to pursue in terms of a housing project for LGBT seniors. There is substantial diversity within the LGBT communities in terms of incomes, tenure, and interest in housing options. To meet the needs identified in the survey, next steps for the DHAC will be to engage collaboratively with community to understand the landscape of partnership opportunities for housing projects and systemic change to existing residential care models. This will help give direction to the Committee, which will be reported back to public stakeholders.