

Improving Health & Housing in Ottawa:

An Update on Rooming Houses in West-Central Ottawa

Safe and affordable housing is a basic determinant of health – everyone deserves it. In Ottawa, rooming houses are an important affordable housing option. Research shows, however, that rooming houses in Ottawa often fail to meet minimum standards for safety, affordability and maintenance. Tenants report experiencing rodent and pest infestations, mould, exposed pipes and electrical, and no heating for long periods in the winter. These findings highlight the critical need for improvement in rooming house living conditions.



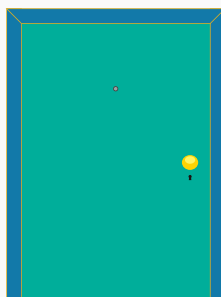
WHAT'S A ROOMING HOUSE?

CONTAINS MINIMUM
4 ROOMS*
WITH SHARED
BATHROOM
&/or kitchen



WHY ARE ROOMING HOUSES IMPORTANT?

Rooming houses play an important, but often overlooked role in providing affordable housing in our communities. Since many people cannot afford most options in the housing market due to the high cost, rooming houses meet the desperate need for low-income housing options for many who would otherwise live on the streets or in overburdened City shelters.




1333
LICENSED
ROOMS IN
OTTAWA

69.5% in West-Central Ottawa



* Based on City data, rooming houses in West-Central Ottawa have a range of 4-55 rooms in a single rooming house.

At SWCHC & CCHC, we believe that safe, secure, and affordable housing is essential for the health and well-being of all Ottawa residents. We will continue to advocate for improved conditions in rooming houses as part of a safe and healthy community where everyone matters. We thank Carleton's Master of Social Work students for their contribution.

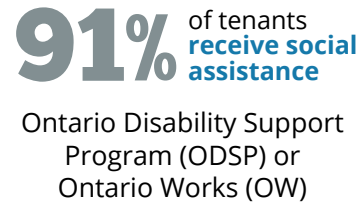
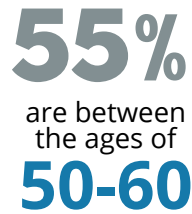
WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

IN 2016, TENANTS REPORTED:

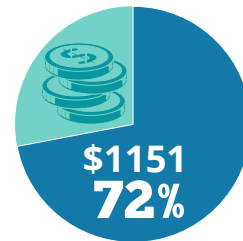
- Issues related to maintenance and physical structure, including rodent and pest infestations, no hot water, and no garbage removal
- Aggression towards tenants (including intimidation, harassment and illegal evictions) by landlords
- Challenges with other tenants, including noise due to intoxication, drug dealing, unknown visitors, and mental illness
- Personal alcohol and drug use to cope with challenges of living in rooming houses, with eight out of ten participants reporting substance-abuse problems



IN 2017, WE LEARNED MORE ABOUT WHO LIVES IN ROOMING HOUSES. WE FOUND:



46% of ODSP income towards housing



72% of OW income towards housing

We also learned that it costs anywhere from **\$362** to **\$710** per month to rent a room in a rooming house.

*Government of Ontario indicates "affordable" housing as **30% of gross annual household income**

Many tenants have experienced personal trauma, including homelessness, eviction, and physical and mental illness



CALL FOR ACTION

LANDLORDS:

- ✓ Ensure property meets fire code and basic property standards
- ✓ Provide easily accessible landlord or property manager to monitor maintenance and property issues



- ✓ Invest in a dedicated bylaw officer to ensure monitoring & enforcement of all property standards and fire code as required by annual licensing agreements
- ✓ Develop a publicly accessible complaint system that supports tenants to lodge a complaint, or by approved third parties on the tenant's behalf if they do not have a phone, and get appropriate & timely response
- ✓ Provide resources to address pest & rodent infestations in rooming houses

By-law & Regulatory Services is currently undergoing a review of the Licensing By-law, specifically relating to rooming houses and private home conversions. A report with recommendations will be presented to the Community and Protective Services Committee and Council in early 2018.



- ✓ Implement rent control for rooming houses
- ✓ Provide rent-supplement programs to close the gap between Ontario Works rates and the cost of rental housing

The Facts on Rooming Houses, November 2016, <http://swchc.on.ca/sites/default/files/RH-EN.pdf>

