

Rooming Houses

Good Practices for Housing Professionals

Rooming Houses are part of the housing solution in every Toronto neighbourhood.

Shared accommodation is the most affordable housing option in the private market, with rooming houses being the only housing choice for some low income single adults. Rooms do not involve wait lists and are part of the housing spectrum.

Strong landlord and housing professional relationships are good for business and keep people housed.

Landlords want low turnover of tenants and housing professionals want housing stability for clients. Both want tenants to maintain housing stability. This guide highlights suggestions for both housing workers and landlords on how to achieve long-term rooming house tenancies.

Working with Landlords in the Rooming House Sector

Outreach: Meet the landlord in person if possible. Give them your contact details and information about local community support organizations. Once there is a positive connection with the landlord, you may be able to increase awareness about low income and vulnerable clients and be a model of tolerance and acceptance.

Clear Communication: Be clear about your role as a housing professional. Explain what you can and cannot do in your work, including acting as a support for housing stabilization.

Liaise: Both tenants and landlords benefit from third-party support. Respond to landlord and tenant calls. The housing help sector recommends maintaining contact for as long as necessary to ensure housing stabilization in the long term.

Handling "Screening": Housing professionals need to be vigilant about tenant human rights in this context while maintaining a mediating role in balancing the needs of the applicants with the needs of landlord and other tenants in the home.

Avoid Labeling: Discourage rooming houses and landlord stereotypes. Research shows that some landlords are themselves former rooming house residents. Rooming house landlords come from all walks of life. Remember that landlords are business owners, maintaining Toronto's affordable housing stock for your clients. Toronto's rooming house owners face their own challenges such as high costs and several regulatory requirements.

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Tips on Housing Stabilization and Eviction Prevention

Housing Stabilization: Ensuring a tenant can keep their housing requires knowledge of all available resources. Lack of tenant support may put them at risk, so ensure that the tenant gets neighbourhood sources of support. Encouraging calls from landlords and tenants about emerging issues will help to prevent bigger problems later on.

Home Visits: Visiting the tenant at their rooming house can help stabilize the tenancy. Some tenants need assistance with adjusting to the new routines that come with shared living. Supporting positive relations with other tenants is crucial, since “problem with other tenants” is a frequently cited reason why tenants move.

Intensive Support: For some, support means intensive case management to cope with complex health, mental health, addictions or personal issues. If needed, set up intensive case management or support as close to move-in as possible.

Eviction Prevention: When an eviction is pending, problem-solve, negotiate and mediate with the landlord and tenant as best you can. Listen and look for common ground between a landlord and tenant. Take a problem solving approach, but be prepared to have the local legal clinic involved if it looks as if eviction proceedings are likely.

Moving On: If problems become insurmountable and all eviction prevention strategies have been unsuccessful, negotiate with the landlord for time to initiate a new housing search. Assist with relocation.

Finding an Appropriate Rooming House and Moving In

Know Legislation: Instruct clients on the legislation:

- Toronto’s Municipal Code , Chapter 285 pertains to rooming houses and is found at: <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/8fab-Rooming-Houses-Chapter285.pdf>
- Ontario’s Human Rights Code (OHRC) information can be found at www.ohrc.on.ca
- The Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) applies once a tenant moves in: www.cleo.on.ca/en/publications/tenantsaccess

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Search: Start with the Landlord Connect Affordable Housing List which contains listings that can assist with affordable market rent searches. If possible, go with your client to view units, screening for safety and suitability. Help to manage clients' expectations, keeping in mind the gap between what tenants can pay and what rentals cost. Help negotiate pay direct and maximize income support for those on social assistance, including the Housing Stabilization Fund and the Rent Bank.

Explain: In Toronto, rooming houses are legal and licensed only in specific areas. If your client is moving to an unlicensed house, explain what this will mean for them. Unlicensed rooms are more affordable, but are not regularly inspected. If a tenant wishes to take a complaint to Municipal Licensing and Standards (ML&S), the City may be obligated to close down the building rather than order repairs because it is unlicensed.

Document: Information documentation is critical for later follow-up. Keep records of phone numbers and addresses of units your client plans to view, which unit your client chooses to move to and the landlord's full contact information.

Communicate: Ongoing contact supports housing stabilization. Promote regular communication with the landlord and the tenant, as well as the tenant's sources of support.

Support with Moving in: Moving can be stressful. Housing professionals can help by completing furniture bank referrals and accessing low cost moving assistance.

Connecting with local services: Community mapping of nearby services such as drop-in centres helps tenants become more familiar with their new surroundings.

Sources

East York East Toronto Family Resources. "Shared Accommodation in Toronto: Successful Practices and Opportunities for Change in the Rooming House Sector." (2008, June 3).