

Publication Date: August, 2025



Title: Exploring health, well-being, and community support in cooperative housing models in Canada

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Keywords: Cooperative housing; health; well-being; community support; social cohesion; Canada; affordable housing; environmental concerns

Series: Reports

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Publisher: Community Housing Canada

Format: PDF, online only

URL: https://hdl.handle.net/10133/7140

Community Housing Canada Description: Our mandate is to strengthen the community housing sector's sustainability and capacity, so it can better meet the needs of the 1 in 8 Canadian households who need support realizing their right to housing.

Acknowledgements: This report contributes to the work of "Community Housing Canada: Partners in Resilience", an academic-community partnership funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (Grant Number: 1004-2019-0002).

Recommended citation: Alday, C., Schiff, R. & Wilkinson, A. (2025). Exploring health, well-being, and community support in cooperative housing models in Canada. Community Housing Canada. Retrieved from: www.communityhousingcanada.ca/outputs

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of cooperative housing models on health, well-being, and community support among Canadian residents. Cooperative housing, characterized by collective ownership and governance, presents a sustainable alternative to traditional housing structures by fostering social equity and inclusion. Through a cross-sectional survey of 128 cooperative housing members, the research highlights key findings related to demographics, sense of belonging, social networks, financial security, and environmental concerns. Results reveal high levels of community trust, robust social support networks, and a strong sense of belonging among residents, showcasing the transformative potential of cooperative housing for promoting stability and social cohesion. However, challenges such as financial strain, food insecurity, discrimination, and environmental issues underscore the need for systemic interventions and targeted policies. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on equitable housing and public health, offering actionable insights for policymakers, housing cooperatives, and researchers. The study reinforces cooperative housing as a critical component of sustainable living strategies, advocating for its expansion to address current and future housing crises.

Introduction

The relationship between housing structures and their impact on health, well-being, and social cohesion has become a significant focus of research, particularly amidst the global affordable housing crisis (Heath, 2021). Cooperative housing has become a key approach to addressing these challenges, offering a model of shared ownership and management that extends beyond traditional landlord-tenant relationships. Unlike conventional housing, cooperatives are member-owned, collectively governed, and often operate with a non-profit mandate that prioritizes social equity and community well-being over financial gain (White, 2021). This study examines how cooperative housing in Canada impacts residents' health, well-being, and sense of community support, considering cooperative models as sustainable and transformative approaches to affordable housing and social cohesion.

Cooperative housing, rooted in the principles of collective decision-making and mutual support, aims to democratize housing through shared ownership and governance (Keller & Ezquerra, 2020; Crabtree-Hayes et al., 2024). In Canada, the affordability and security offered by co-ops have made them an essential part of the National Housing Strategy (Lubik & Kosatsky, 2019). Despite international recognition of their role in reducing housing costs and promoting social inclusion, empirical studies on the well-being impacts of cooperative housing, remain limited. Current literature underscores cooperatives as potential hubs for social cohesion, but there is a lack of detailed exploration into how these environments impact physical and mental health, particularly within the Canadian context (Merino, 2018).

Key theoretical underpinnings of cooperative housing emphasize the benefits of shared responsibility, collective ownership, and mutual aid. These principles align with a community-centered framework that fosters interdependence and resilience, challenging individualistic and profit-driven models of housing (Saegert & Benítez, 2005; García García et al., 2021). Existing research on cooperative

housing often emphasizes its role as a cost-effective alternative to traditional homeownership or rental models. However, there is limited evidence exploring its broader implications for social health, quality of life, and community cohesion. This gap is particularly notable within the Canadian context, where diverse sociocultural dynamics and regional governance structures may shape residents' experiences and outcomes (Tortosa & Sundström, 2022). Building on themes identified in a scoping review currently under review, this study seeks to address this gap by examining the specific impacts of cooperative housing on residents' health, well-being, and sense of community in Canada.

This study addresses an important gap in knowledge by exploring the specific impacts of cooperative housing on residents' health, well-being, and sense of community in Canada. While much of the existing research highlights cooperative housing as a lower-cost alternative to traditional homeownership or rental models, there is limited evidence documenting its broader effects on social health and quality of life. Given the Canadian Government's recognition of cooperative housing within the National Housing Strategy (White, 2021), this study's findings are especially timely and relevant, offering empirical evidence to support the expansion of cooperative housing policies and investments in Canada.

This research is exploratory and guided by the following questions: 1. What health, well-being, and quality of life impacts are associated with residency in Canadian cooperative housing?, 2. Do cooperative housing environments foster community support and social cohesion among members?, and 3. Do these cooperative settings create internal support mechanisms, or "social safety nets," that contribute to residents' resilience and well-being?

The purpose of this study is to systematically evaluate the health and social benefits of cooperative housing within Canadian communities. By investigating how these housing structures contribute to residents' quality of life and social integration, this research aims to support both academic understanding and policy initiatives on cooperative housing as an equitable and sustainable model for

housing. Specifically, the study intends to provide measurable outcomes and qualitative insights that highlight the transformative potential of cooperative housing as a public health and social innovation.

Methodology

Design

This research adopts a cross-sectional quantitative design using an online survey to gather data from cooperative housing members across Canada. The study focuses specifically on adult residents of cooperative housing, with an emphasis on understanding how their living arrangements impact health, well-being, and community support. Data collection is geographically restricted to Canada and encompasses a diverse demographic of cooperative members in terms of age, income levels, and cultural backgrounds. By targeting this population, the research aims to explore potential variations in social cohesion and well-being based on regional and cooperative-specific characteristics, as suggested by studies highlighting the impact of cooperative housing models on social inclusion (Lubik & Kosatsky, 2019; Merino, 2018).

The online survey method aligns with the study's objectives by enabling a broad reach across different Canadian regions, while also allowing for anonymous participation, which is crucial to obtaining unbiased self-reported data on health and well-being outcomes. Prior literature underscores the benefits of cooperative housing, but systematic data on its effects within Canadian communities remains limited. Given the study's exploratory nature, an online survey provides a feasible and reliable approach to capturing self-reported data on residents' perceptions of health and social cohesion within cooperatives.

Participants

Participants are adult members of cooperative housing in Canada who meet the following criteria: current residency in a cooperative housing arrangement, aged 18 years or older, basic proficiency in

English, and access to digital devices for survey participation. Potential participants were identified through cooperative housing directories publicly accessible through the Cooperative Housing Federation of Canada (CHFC) and provincial cooperative federations. Cooperative housing managers and boards were contacted via email to facilitate survey distribution, ensuring broad and varied demographic coverage across cooperatives.

Given that cooperative housing members represent a unique population with shared experiences in community living, this sample is well-suited to examine the influence of cooperative housing on well-being. The recruitment process, informed by initial exploratory communication with cooperative managers, will rely on digital outreach to facilitate wide participation while ensuring that individuals have the flexibility to complete the survey at their convenience.

Two respondents were excluded from the dataset as they consistently selected "prefer not to answer" for all questions where this option was available. This decision was made to improve the quality and accuracy of the analysis, as their responses did not provide meaningful data or insights into the research questions. The exclusion of these cases is documented to ensure transparency and to minimize the potential dilution of trends and patterns observed in the responses. While "prefer not to answer" responses can occasionally reflect important contextual factors, in this instance, their systematic nature indicated a lack of engagement with the survey content, justifying their removal. This adjustment reduces the total sample size from 130 to 128 participants for the analysis.

Materials

The survey included 28 questions, with the majority being closed-ended to support structured quantitative analysis. Administered through the SurveyMonkey platform, it has been customized to cover domains identified as central to well-being, following the Canadian Index of Wellbeing's validated framework (Canadian Index of Wellbeing, 2016). These questions were crafted to capture residents'

experiences in areas such as social inclusion, environmental satisfaction, and physical and mental health, with a final open-ended question to capture any additional perspectives.

The survey was designed to respect the autonomy and comfort of participants, allowing them to skip any question they did not wish to answer. As a result, the total number of responses varies across questions, with some items receiving fewer than 128 responses corresponding to the total number of participants. This approach ensured voluntary participation and aimed to create a safe and respectful environment for respondents to share their perspectives.

The survey was open for responses from March to October 2024, providing participants with ample time to engage with and complete the questionnaire. This extended data collection period ensured broad accessibility, allowing for diverse participation across cooperative housing communities in Canada. The timeline also accommodated potential delays in participant recruitment or communication within cooperative networks, enhancing the representativeness and inclusivity of the collected data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. The survey's close-ended questions underwent descriptive statistical analysis to identify frequencies, and distributions. Data were processed using Microsoft Excel. The final open-ended question was analyzed using NVivo, a qualitative analysis software, to identify themes and patterns related to social cohesion and community support mechanisms.

These analyses aim to answer the study's central questions about the impacts of cooperative housing on health and well-being, providing both empirical data and qualitative insights. The descriptive statistics will inform general trends in cooperative housing residents' well-being, while thematic analysis of open-ended responses will add depth, capturing problems and opportunities regarding how cooperative living arrangements can contribute to/diminish community support and individual health.

Together, these methods will offer a comprehensive profile of cooperative housing's effects on community and personal well-being in Canada.

Results

The following section presents an analysis of the survey responses, highlighting key findings related to participants' experiences, perspectives, and areas of concern within their cooperative housing communities and broader societal contexts.

Demographics and Duration in Cooperative Housing

The survey received 128 responses. Table 1 summarizes the gender distribution of participants, highlighting the diversity within the cooperative housing population.

Table 1
Gender distribution of participants

Gender	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)
Female	59.4	76
Male	34.4	44
Non-binary	2.3	3
Genderqueer	0.8	1
Genderfluid	0.8	1
Transgender	0.8	1
Prefer not to say	1.6	2

Participants' ages spanned a wide range, with 122 valid responses recorded. One additional participant identified as "senior" without specifying their exact age. Table 2 presents the age distribution of participants.

Table 2
Age Distribution

Metric	Value
Mean (µ)	52.06
Median (Me)	49
Variance (σ^2)	214.76
Standard Deviation (s)	14.72

Table 3 outlines the educational attainment of the 128 respondents, emphasizing the high levels of education among participants.

Table 3
Educational Attainment

Education Level	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)
Elementary school	1.6	2
High school	11.7	15
Post-secondary certificate	11.7	15
College diploma	15.6	20
University degree	30.5	39
Graduate degree	28.1	36
Prefer not to say	0.8	1

Table 4 shows the range of annual household incomes reported by the 128 participants, reflecting economic diversity within the sample.

Table 4
Annual Household Income (Pre-Tax)

Income Range (\$CAD)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)
\$0-\$24,999	15.6	20
\$25,000-\$34,999	2.3	3
\$35,000-\$39,999	5.5	7
\$40,000-\$59,999	14.1	18
\$60,000 or more	54.7	70
Prefer not to say	7.0	9
Unsure	2.3	3

Table 5 details the length of residence in cooperative housing, with nearly half of participants living in their homes for over 10 years.

Table 5
Length of Residence in Cooperative Housing

	1	0
Length of Residence	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)
1 to 2 years	3.9	5
2 to 5 years	18.0	23
5 to 10 years	25.8	33
Over 10 years	47.7	61

Geographically, the majority of respondents (71.1%, n = 91) resided in cooperative housing in British Columbia. Alberta accounted for 22.7% (n = 29) of respondents, while 6.3% (n = 8) lived in Ontario. This distribution reflects British Columbia's prominence in promoting and supporting cooperative housing models.

Of the 125 participants who answered the question about their birthplace, 72.0% (n = 90) were born in Canada, while 28.0% (n = 35) were born elsewhere. Among the 35 participants who shared their year of arrival, responses ranged from 1951 to 2018, with a mean year of arrival of 1993 and a median of 1997. The most frequently reported year was 1990. The data showed a variance of 349.77, with a standard deviation of 18.98, indicating moderate variability in participants' immigration timelines.

Interestingly, while 35 participants reported being born outside Canada, 40 answered the question regarding their current immigration status. This discrepancy suggests potential misinterpretations of the questions about birthplace or immigration status. Of the 40 respondents, the majority (80.0%, n = 32) reported being Canadian citizens, followed by 15.0% (n = 6) identifying as permanent residents. One respondent (2.5%) held a temporary resident status, and another (2.5%) preferred not to disclose their status.

Racial and ethnic diversity was evident among participants. Overall, 98 participants selected predefined categories, while 20 participants provided open-text responses describing mixed or unique heritages, such as combinations of European, Indigenous, and other ancestries. Table 6 summarizes the

racial and ethnic diversity of participants, highlighting the broad range of backgrounds represented in the survey.

Table 6
Racial and Ethnic Diversity of Participants

Category	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)
British and Irish	42.9	42
French and German	17.3	17
Eastern European	8.2	8
Southern European	3.1	3
Scandinavian	3.1	3
Latin American	3.1	3
East Asian	3.1	3
Métis	2.0	2
Ashkenazi Jewish	2.0	2
African origins	4.1	4
Mixed or unique heritages	16.95	20

 $Finally, survey\ participants'\ household\ compositions\ revealed\ diverse\ living\ arrangements.$

Unique cases included one respondent describing a collective living arrangement and another caring for an elderly parent. Table 7 presents the household compositions reported by participants, showcasing a variety of traditional and non-traditional living arrangements within cooperative housing.

Table 7 Household Composition

Household Type	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)
Couples with children	28.9	37
Adults living alone	21.9	28
"Empty nesters"	15.6	20
Adults with children	11.7	15
Couples without children	8.6	11
Adults sharing accommodation	6.3	8
Adults with adult children (owners/renters)	3.9	5
Unique cases	1.56	2

These findings provide a foundation for understanding how cooperative housing may influence residents' sense of belonging and trust within their communities, as explored in the following section.

Sense of Belonging and Community Trust

Respondents reported varying levels of connection to their community, with 127 valid responses recorded. Among these, 3.94% described their sense of belonging as very weak, while 12.60% reported it as somewhat weak. In contrast, a significant majority felt a strong connection to their community, with 40.94% selecting somewhat strong and 42.52% reporting a very strong sense of belonging. These results highlight the overall positive perceptions of community ties among participants.

Similarly, when asked about trust, 127 respondents provided valid answers. A notable 70.08% expressed that most people can be trusted, whereas 25.98% felt cautious, stating that one cannot be too careful in dealing with others. A small group (3.94%) reported uncertainty, selecting "do not know." Together, these findings suggest that participants generally view their communities as trustworthy environments. The sense of belonging and trust observed here may reflect the social dynamics fostered by cooperative housing, where shared responsibilities and collective decision-making can enhance community cohesion and mutual trust.

Building on this foundation of community cohesion, the following section explores the participants' social networks and the types of social support available within their communities, offering further insights into how cooperative living influences interpersonal relationships and mutual aid.

Social Network and Social Support

The survey revealed diverse patterns of social connections among respondents, encompassing both familial and friendship networks. Among the 116 participants who provided valid responses about the number of close relatives they feel connected to, a notable range of responses was observed. A small

portion (9.5%) reported having no relatives they felt close to, while 11.2% indicated they had one. The most frequently reported numbers were two (18.1%) and four (17.2%). Other responses showed a decreasing frequency as the number of close relatives increased, with 12.9% reporting three, 6.9% each for five and six, and 5.2% for seven. Fewer respondents reported eight (2.6%) or ten (5.2%) close relatives, and higher numbers such as 12, 14, 20, and 30 each accounted for less than 1%. One respondent provided a text response indicating variability in their familial connections. These results highlight the diversity in familial relationships, underscoring the varied social networks present within the cooperative housing communities.

Similarly, responses about the number of close friends among 117 participants indicated significant variability in social networks. A small proportion (2.6%) reported having no close friends, while 6.0% indicated they had one. The most common responses included having five (16.2%) or six (13.7%) close friends, followed by four (12.8%), two (10.3%), and three (10.3%). A smaller percentage of respondents reported having seven or eight close friends (4.3% each). Notably, 13.7% reported having ten close friends, and 5.1% reported having twenty. One respondent provided a text response, suggesting variability in their close friendships. These findings demonstrate the range and strength of social networks among participants, which are essential to fostering a supportive community environment.

Participants demonstrated a strong commitment to cooperative housing principles through high levels of volunteer engagement. Among the 127 valid responses regarding formal volunteering, 74.8% reported participating in organized volunteer activities within the past year, while 25.2% indicated they had not. This high level of formal volunteering reflects the respondents' strong commitment to cooperative housing principles, such as reciprocity and shared responsibility.

Informal volunteering, such as assisting neighbors with daily tasks, was even more prevalent. Of the 128 total responses, 93.8% reported engaging in informal volunteer activities, whereas only 5.5%

stated they had not. One respondent (0.8%) chose not to disclose their participation. These findings highlight the robust culture of mutual support and active community involvement within the cooperative housing model.

The following section delves into respondents' perceptions of discrimination based on various aspects of their identity, shedding light on potential challenges to fostering inclusivity and equity in these environments.

Perception of Discrimination

The survey explored participants' perceptions of discomfort within their community across a range of identity and personal factors, revealing both widespread feelings of acceptance and areas of concern. Regarding religious identity, the majority of respondents (73.0%) reported never feeling uncomfortable, with smaller proportions indicating rare or occasional discomfort. Similarly, cultural identity appeared to be a minor source of discomfort, with 66.9% never feeling out of place and less than 5% reporting frequent or always feeling uncomfortable. These results suggest that religious and cultural factors generally do not hinder community belonging for most participants.

Ethnicity and skin color also yielded high levels of reported comfort, with 69.6% and 76.8% of respondents, respectively, never experiencing discomfort. However, small but significant minorities, particularly those reporting rare or occasional discomfort, highlight the need to remain attentive to issues of equity and inclusivity.

Sexual orientation emerged as an area with slightly higher levels of discomfort, with 73.2% of respondents reporting never feeling uncomfortable but a notable 9.4% sometimes feeling out of place. Similarly, perceptions of physical appearance revealed a broader spread, with 59.1% of respondents never feeling uncomfortable but 11.0% reporting occasional discomfort and smaller percentages experiencing frequent or very frequent discomfort.

Disability and mental health presented more pronounced disparities. While 76.6% of respondents felt no discomfort related to disability, notable subsets reported rare to frequent discomfort (19.3%). Mental health responses were more polarized, with 62.2% reporting no discomfort but 13.4% feeling sometimes uncomfortable and a combined 7.9% experiencing frequent discomfort.

Finally, other health conditions mirrored trends seen in disability, with 76.6% of respondents feeling no discomfort but a minority of 13.9% reporting occasional to frequent discomfort. These findings underscore the need for targeted efforts to support those experiencing health-related challenges.

The following section shifts focus to examine how respondents allocate their time to leisure and physical activities, offering insights into their daily routines and well-being.

Time Spent on Leisure and Physical Activities

Among the 128 respondents, the majority (50.8%) reported spending between 1 to 5 hours daily on social leisure activities, such as visiting with friends or talking on the phone. A substantial proportion (48.4%) indicated engaging in these activities for less than 1 hour per day, while a very small percentage (0.8%) reported dedicating 6 to 10 hours daily to social interactions. Notably, no respondents selected "prefer not to answer," ensuring complete data representation for this question. These results highlight a relatively balanced distribution between moderate and minimal engagement in social leisure activities, with very few respondents reporting extensive daily involvement.

When asked about their weekly time spent on physical leisure activities, such as walking, gardening, or exercising, respondents demonstrated a diverse range of engagement levels. Nearly half (49.2%) reported spending 1 to 5 hours per week on such activities, while 28.1% engaged for 6 to 10 hours weekly. A smaller proportion (10.2%) indicated participating for more than 10 hours per week, and 12.5% reported dedicating less than 1 hour weekly to physical leisure activities. No respondents selected

"prefer not to answer," ensuring full data representation. These findings suggest that most participants incorporate a moderate level of physical activity into their routines, with fewer dedicating extensive or minimal time.

Responses regarding having enough time during the day to complete desired or necessary tasks varied considerably among the 128 participants. A notable 21.9% reported that they "sometimes" had enough time, while 18.8% stated "frequently," and 7.0% indicated "very frequently" having sufficient time. An additional 7.8% reported "almost always" feeling they had enough time. Conversely, a significant proportion faced time constraints, with 14.1% stating they "almost never" had enough time, 20.3% indicating "very rarely," and 14.1% reporting "rarely." These findings reflect the varying levels of time management and availability among respondents, suggesting a balance between those who feel adequately equipped to manage their time and those who struggle with limitations.

These data provide valuable context for understanding respondents' well-being and set the stage for the next section, which delves into financial and food security—key factors that may also influence participants' time and activity patterns.

Financial and Food Security

When asked about financial challenges in making ends meet over the past year, a significant majority of respondents (58.6%, n = 75) reported "never" experiencing such difficulties. However, a considerable subset of participants encountered financial strain at varying frequencies. Among these, 3.1% (n = 4) reported facing such challenges "at least once a week," 7.8% (n = 10) "at least once a month," and 8.6% (n = 11) "at least once every 3 months." Additionally, 5.5% (n = 7) experienced financial difficulties "at least once every 6 months," and 14.8% (n = 19) noted this occurred "once in the past year." Two respondents (1.6%) selected "prefer not to answer," leaving a total of 128 valid responses. While most participants reported financial stability, the data highlights a meaningful proportion experiencing

economic challenges, pointing to the importance of targeted financial interventions within cooperative housing communities.

Food insecurity was another area of concern highlighted by the survey. While the majority (71.1%, n = 91) of respondents reported "never" having eaten less due to a lack of food or money in the past year, a significant portion experienced varying levels of food insecurity. Specifically, 8.6% (n = 11) indicated this occurred "at least once a week," and 6.3% (n = 8) reported it happening "at least once a month." Smaller proportions faced food insecurity "at least once every 3 months" (0.8%, n = 1), "at least once every 6 months" (3.1%, n = 4), or "once in the past year" (8.6%, n = 11). Two respondents (1.6%) selected "prefer not to answer," resulting in 128 valid responses. These findings underscore the prevalence of food insecurity among a notable subset of the community, highlighting an urgent need for increased access to affordable food resources and community support systems.

Building on these insights, the next section explores participants' perceptions of their general health and the environmental issues affecting their communities, shedding light on broader factors that influence well-being.

General Health and Environmental Concerns

Participants were asked to assess their general health, both physical and mental. Regarding physical health, the majority described their condition as "good" (33.6%, n = 43) or "very good" (28.1%, n = 36). A smaller proportion rated their health as "fair" (26.6%, n = 34), while fewer respondents indicated "excellent" (7.0%, n = 9) or "poor" health (4.7%, n = 6). These results suggest that most respondents perceive their physical health positively, though a notable subset reported only "fair" or "poor" health.

Mental health responses reflected a similar pattern, with the majority rating their mental health as either "good" (34.4%, n = 44) or "very good" (23.4%, n = 30). However, 30.5% (n = 39) described their mental health as "fair," and smaller proportions indicated "excellent" (7.8%, n = 10) or "poor" (3.9%, n

5) mental health. These findings highlight that while many respondents feel positively about their mental well-being, a significant portion reported challenges.

Environmental concerns were a key area of interest, with 128 participants selecting from pre-defined options. Climate change emerged as the most frequently cited concern, identified by 71.9% (n = 92) of respondents, followed by land use (57.0%, n = 73) and air quality (53.1%, n = 68). Concerns about the impact of pesticides or chemicals on health were noted by 49.2% (n = 63), while 42.2% (n = 54) emphasized water quality. A smaller subset of participants (9.4%, n = 12) expressed no environmental concerns, and one person (0.8%) chose not to answer.

Open-text responses provided additional depth, revealing nuanced concerns beyond the pre-defined options. Common themes included deforestation, habitat destruction, and tree diseases such as Dutch elm disease. Several participants mentioned human-driven issues like litter, garbage, noise pollution, and traffic. Concerns about pollutants—including microplastics, heavy metals, and asbestos during retrofitting—were also noted. Climate-related impacts, such as heat waves, flooding, and droughts, featured prominently, as did the lack of green spaces and the urban heat effect in heavily paved areas. Broader systemic and social issues, such as distrust in government, racism within cooperative communities, and the accessibility of housing, were also highlighted. These insights underscore the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and systemic concerns within the respondents' communities.

These insights set the stage for the next section, which examines respondents' proficiency in everyday tasks, offering further understanding of how community dynamics impact daily living.

Proficiency in Everyday Tasks

Survey responses provided valuable insights into participants' proficiency in completing essential daily tasks, highlighting their confidence and challenges in navigating routine responsibilities. When asked

about the ease of reading medication instructions, the majority of respondents reported minimal difficulty. Specifically, 71.1% indicated that this task was "very easy," while an additional 21.9% found it "easy." A smaller portion (6.3%) reported experiencing "a little difficulty," and only 0.8% found it "difficult." These findings suggest that most participants feel confident in navigating essential health-related instructions. All 128 respondents provided valid answers to this question.

Regarding the task of filling out job applications, responses similarly reflected high levels of self-reported proficiency. Most participants found the task straightforward, with 64.1% describing it as "very easy" and 25.8% as "easy." A smaller segment of respondents reported challenges: 4.7% found the task "a little difficult," 2.3% rated it as "difficult," and 1.6% as "very difficult." An additional 1.6% selected "prefer not to answer." These results, based on 128 responses, highlight that while the majority feel capable of completing this task, a minority may require additional support or resources.

When asked about reading their child's school report, 73.2% of respondents found it "very easy," and 17.1% found it "easy," with nearly 90% of participants reporting little to no difficulty. However, 0.8% described the task as "a little difficult," and an equal percentage found it "difficult." Notably, 8.1% of respondents chose "prefer not to answer," possibly due to not having children or other personal reasons, resulting in a total of 123 valid responses. These findings reflect strong confidence among participants in navigating educational documents, with some exceptions.

In terms of performing basic arithmetic, such as calculating expenses in the grocery store, most respondents felt highly confident. A majority of 74.2% found the task "very easy," and 18.8% described it as "easy," collectively accounting for 93% of participants. A smaller proportion (7%) reported experiencing "a little difficulty," and no respondents selected "prefer not to answer," resulting in 128 valid responses. These results underscore a strong level of numeracy within the surveyed population.

The following section examines respondents' interest in politics at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels, providing insights into their engagement with governance and public affairs.

Interest in Federal, Provincial, and Municipal Politics

Participants expressed varying levels of interest in politics across federal, provincial, and municipal domains. Regarding federal politics, a significant majority (63.3%, n = 81) reported being very interested, while 32.0% (n = 41) indicated they were not very interested, and 2.3% (n = 3) stated they were not interested at all. Similarly, interest in provincial politics was notably high, with 69.5% (n = 89) expressing strong interest, 24.2% (n = 31) reporting moderate interest, and 3.9% (n = 5) indicating no interest. For municipal politics, the level of engagement was slightly lower; 52.0% (n = 66) reported being very interested, 40.9% (n = 52) were moderately interested, and 3.9% (n = 5) expressed no interest. Across these questions, a small proportion of respondents chose not to answer: 2.3% (n = 3) for federal and provincial politics and 3.1% (n = 4) for municipal politics. These findings suggest a stronger engagement with federal and provincial political matters compared to municipal issues among the surveyed population.

The following section explores participants' suggestions for improving the health and well-being of their communities, offering insights into the areas they believe require the most attention and development.

Participant Suggestions for Community Improvement

The survey provided participants with an opportunity to share their perspectives on what is working well within their communities and to suggest changes they believe would improve health, well-being, and inclusivity. The open-ended responses highlighted a range of insights, from celebrating current successes to addressing systemic challenges at federal, provincial, and cooperative levels. Participants also reflected on broader societal issues and provided feedback on the survey itself, offering a nuanced understanding of community dynamics and areas for growth. This section organizes their input into

themes to present a comprehensive view of participants' suggestions for fostering stronger, more equitable communities.

What is Working Well

Participants highlighted various aspects that are functioning well within their communities. Some comments focused on cooperative-level initiatives, such as installing a gym to support members' health and well-being and creating regular opportunities for social interaction. One participant noted, "We installed a new gym for people to use recently. There are lots of opportunities to socialize with others."

Other participants acknowledged broader systemic strengths. For example, some emphasized the positive impact of funding for community events and municipal support in promoting social engagement. Another participant remarked, "Well-run co-ops are great. People want to know their neighbours and be part of & contribute to a caring community."

Areas for Improvement

Societal Issues

Broader societal critiques emerged. Others criticized the emphasis on homeownership in housing policies, advocating instead for secure, accessible housing for all income levels. One participant summarized this perspective succinctly, stating, "The focus should be on ensuring people have reasonable, comfortable homes, not on promoting property investments." Finally, some participants reflected on the importance of social engagement once basic needs such as housing and food are met. These critical reflections provide valuable insights into systemic and cultural issues that extend beyond individual co-ops, underscoring the need for structural changes and greater inclusivity in cooperative housing models.

Dependent on Federal Government

Housing affordability emerged as a pressing concern for many participants. Calls were made for increased support for cooperative housing models to alleviate the housing crisis and to provide access to diverse populations. For instance, one respondent suggested, "More co-ops! Seriously, housing affordability is a massive detriment to the community in numerous ways. Co-ops would allow more people of diverse backgrounds to live reliably in the community." Other participants advocated for federal grants or loans to assist with co-op renovations.

Dependent on Provincial Government

Several respondents addressed the need for improved security, particularly regarding issues such as homelessness, addiction, and mental illness. Others called for enhanced housing affordability measures, citing the impact of high rents on the community. For example, one participant stated, "We need to improve security. Homelessness, addiction, mental illness are major issues in the area. Province needs to make improvements on these issues, which in turn will make living in our co-op safer & happier."

Dependent on the Co-op

At the cooperative level, several areas for improvement were identified:

• Governance: Some participants voiced concerns over management practices, with one respondent stating, "Our BOD [Board of Directors] is very much out-for-themselves and rarely follows the rules of our co-op." Another suggested removing self-governance, noting the challenges it can create within co-op dynamics. A few respondents expressed frustration with co-op governance, highlighting issues such as manipulation of voting processes, lack of transparency, and a perceived prioritization of personal interests over community well-being.

One participant mentioned, "Our Board of Directors rarely follows the rules of our co-op and

manipulates decisions through 'confidentiality' clauses and threats, keeping members uninformed."

- Participation: A common theme was the need for more equitable participation among members.
 One suggestion was to enforce participation requirements, as some members do not actively engage in the community. Another respondent pointed to a lack of civility in communication, emphasizing that verbal conflicts harm vulnerable individuals disproportionately.
- Community Spaces: The loss of affordable community spaces was also highlighted as a barrier to
 hosting inclusive events, with one respondent stating, "We lost the use of our community centre
 and don't have an affordable alternative. It makes it difficult to host events that all can attend."
- Cultural and Identity-Based Concerns within the Co-op: One participant noted that white
 committee members must reflect on their privileged positions and how their actions can
 negatively impact non-white members. Another participant added that experiences of racism
 discourage non-white members from engaging in social activities within the co-op.

Comments on the Survey

Some participants expressed confusion over the survey questions, particularly regarding the definition of "community." Several participants questioned whether "community" referred to their co-op, neighborhood, or city at large. For instance, one participant stated, "Quick note: the first questions asked about how long I've lived in my community, but it didn't really define what was meant by community."

Others found the scope of the survey to be unclear, with one respondent noting, "This survey is confusing and misleading because it deals with life in the community and not in our housing co-op."

Some respondents argued that questions about race or ethnicity in surveys can perpetuate discrimination, describing them as "racist baiting." The diverse perspectives shared in this section

provide a foundation for actionable strategies and broader reflections, which are further explored in the study's concluding remarks.

Discussion

The findings from this study reinforce the significant role of cooperative housing in fostering health, well-being, and social cohesion, aligning with themes identified in the existing literature. As highlighted by Lubik and Kosatsky (2019), cooperative housing models promote social inclusion and mutual support, particularly through long-term stability and diverse community demographics. This study expands upon these insights by illustrating the impact of cooperative living on social networks, trust, and community engagement.

Demographics and Duration in Cooperative Housing

The demographic diversity observed in this study supports findings by Huron (2012), who emphasized the importance of cooperative housing in attracting individuals from varied racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The long-term residence durations reported here echo the stability that cooperative models provide, fostering both community trust and a sense of belonging. However, consistent with Heath (2021), challenges remain in ensuring equitable inclusion for marginalized groups.

Sense of Belonging and Community Trust

The strong sense of connection and trust reported by participants aligns with Carrere et al. (2020), who identified collective governance as a mechanism for enhancing community cohesion. Yet, the weaker connections noted by a subset of respondents suggest opportunities to strengthen inclusivity, as highlighted by Macaya et al. (2023), who cautioned against overlooking the relational tensions that can arise in communal living arrangements.

Social Networks and Discrimination

The robust social networks observed among respondents underscore the foundational values of cooperation and mutual support. However, as Procupez (2019) noted, perceptions of discrimination can diminish the potential benefits of collective living. This study corroborates these concerns, particularly among minority groups, emphasizing the need for targeted strategies to foster inclusivity and counteract privilege dynamics within communities.

Financial Security and Food Access

Economic stability remains a critical factor for cooperative housing residents. Consistent with Saegert and Benítez (2005), financial challenges and food insecurity reported by some participants highlight the importance of structural supports to mitigate vulnerabilities. As Puig Fernández (2021) suggested, addressing systemic barriers like housing affordability and economic precarity is essential for realizing the full potential of cooperative housing as a socially equitable model.

Health and Environmental Concerns

Participants' health perceptions reflect a complex interplay between physical and mental well-being and environmental stressors. These findings resonate with Michelini et al. (2021), who underscored the need for community-level interventions to address systemic health disparities. Additionally, concerns about environmental issues, such as pollution and land use, align with broader calls for sustainable practices within housing models to enhance both individual and communal well-being.

Participant Recommendations and Civic Engagement

Finally, participants' suggestions for improving cooperative housing governance echo Huron's (2012) observations regarding the need for democratic decision-making processes. The engagement with political matters observed in this study reflects a strong sense of civic responsibility, which can serve as a

foundation for advocating broader policy changes. As Chum et al. (2022) emphasized, integrating residents' voices into governance structures is essential for fostering both inclusivity and systemic transformation.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on cooperative housing by illustrating its potential to foster health, well-being, and social equity. However, the challenges identified, particularly around discrimination and economic precarity, underscore the need for ongoing innovation and policy support to address systemic barriers. By leveraging the strengths of cooperative models, future initiatives can further enhance their capacity to promote inclusive and sustainable community living.

Conclusion

This research sheds light on the transformative potential of cooperative housing in Canada as a model that not only provides affordable housing but also fosters health, well-being, and social cohesion among its residents. By systematically exploring how cooperative housing environments influence individuals' quality of life, the study highlights the unique capacity of these communities to address critical societal challenges, including economic inequality, social isolation, and environmental concerns.

The demographic analysis underscores the diversity within cooperative housing communities, showcasing a wide range of ages, educational backgrounds, income levels, and household compositions. Most participants reported long-term residency in cooperative housing, reflecting the stability and community engagement these models promote. The presence of diverse racial and ethnic groups, along with varied immigration timelines, demonstrates cooperative housing's role in accommodating and supporting individuals from different cultural and social backgrounds.

Findings on sense of belonging and trust revealed strong community connections, with the majority of participants reporting high levels of trust and a significant sense of belonging. These results underscore the cooperative housing model's capacity to nurture meaningful relationships and shared values. However, a smaller subset expressed weaker connections or more cautious attitudes, highlighting opportunities for targeted efforts to strengthen inclusivity and address barriers to trust.

Social networks and support emerged as key elements of cooperative living. Most participants reported robust familial and friendship connections and high levels of both formal and informal volunteering, reflecting a culture of reciprocity and mutual aid. These findings emphasize the role of cooperative housing in fostering active and supportive communities, where members actively contribute to collective well-being.

Despite these strengths, perceptions of discrimination highlighted areas of concern. While the majority reported feeling accepted within their communities, a notable minority experienced discomfort related to identity factors such as mental health, physical appearance, or ethnicity. These findings indicate the need for ongoing efforts to ensure inclusivity and equity across all aspects of cooperative living.

The analysis of time spent on leisure and physical activities revealed a balanced engagement in social and physical activities among participants, though some reported significant time constraints. These results suggest that while cooperative housing promotes opportunities for leisure and connection, broader systemic factors may limit residents' ability to fully engage in such activities.

The study also illuminated challenges related to financial and food security. While most participants reported financial stability and adequate access to food, a considerable subset experienced economic hardship and food insecurity over the past year. These findings highlight the need for strengthened economic and social supports within cooperative housing communities, particularly as living costs continue to rise.

Respondents expressed generally positive perceptions of their general health, with most rating their physical and mental health as "good" or "very good." However, a notable portion reported challenges, particularly regarding mental health, underscoring the importance of accessible health resources and community support mechanisms.

Environmental concerns featured prominently in participants' responses, with climate change, land use, and pollution identified as pressing issues. Open-text responses further highlighted concerns about urbanization, green space accessibility, and systemic inequities affecting housing and the environment. These findings suggest that cooperative housing communities are not only spaces for living but also potential platforms for environmental advocacy and action.

The findings underscore the practical and theoretical relevance of cooperative housing. On a practical level, they offer clear evidence that cooperative housing promotes long-term stability, mutual support, and a sense of belonging—outcomes that extend far beyond the basic provision of housing. For policymakers, these insights reinforce the value of including cooperative housing in national and regional housing strategies, particularly as a tool for advancing equity and sustainability. For housing cooperatives and public health advocates, the data provide actionable recommendations for enhancing inclusivity, improving governance, and addressing community-specific challenges like financial strain and food insecurity.

Theoretically, this study deepens the understanding of cooperative housing as a community-centered model, demonstrating how shared ownership and governance create conditions for enhanced social cohesion and mutual aid. These results contribute to broader discourses on equitable housing and public health by emphasizing the systemic benefits of cooperative living, not only for residents but for the broader communities in which they are embedded.

Overall, the findings confirm that cooperative housing provides significant social and health benefits while fostering a sense of community and mutual support. However, challenges such as financial

insecurity, discrimination, and environmental concerns underscore the need for systemic interventions and policy enhancements.

Several participants expressed concerns related to governance conflicts and the lack of equitable participation in shared responsibilities. To address these challenges, housing cooperatives could develop onboarding programs specifically designed for new members. These programs could include informational sessions on the core principles of community living, expectations for participation, and the mechanisms for collective decision-making.

By facilitating a smoother transition and promoting a deeper understanding of cooperative values, such programs would help new members integrate more effectively into the community. As one participant noted, "The lack of clarity at the beginning creates misunderstandings that can affect group dynamics." Implementing these initiatives could strengthen community cohesion, reduce conflicts, and foster a culture of commitment from the moment someone joins the cooperative.

To maximize the potential of cooperative housing as a model for sustainable living and social cohesion, future initiatives should also prioritize: 1. Strengthening inclusivity: Implementing programs to address discrimination and promote equity within cooperative housing communities. 2. Enhancing financial and social supports: Expanding subsidies, grants, and community resources to alleviate economic pressures and improve residents' quality of life. 3. Promoting health and well-being: Developing targeted health initiatives, particularly around mental health and environmental health. 4. Advocating for environmental action: Leveraging the collective power of cooperative communities to address broader environmental and systemic challenges. By addressing these areas, cooperative housing can continue to evolve as a transformative solution for affordable and sustainable living, offering a blueprint for housing innovation globally.

Despite the strengths of this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. The self-selection of participants may have introduced a bias, as those more engaged with cooperative living or the survey

topics may be overrepresented. Additionally, the geographic distribution of responses, with a majority from British Columbia, limits the generalizability of findings to cooperatives across other Canadian regions. The optional nature of the survey led to variations in response rates, particularly for sensitive questions, which may underrepresent certain experiences, such as discrimination or financial hardship.

Furthermore, as a cross-sectional study, the data capture perceptions at a single point in time, preventing conclusions about changes or causal relationships. The reliance on self-reported data also introduces subjectivity, influenced by individual biases or recent experiences. Finally, participant feedback highlighted differing interpretations of "community," suggesting that future research could clarify such terms to enhance consistency in responses.

These limitations provide critical context for interpreting the findings and underscore the importance of further research, including longitudinal and qualitative studies, to deepen our understanding of the long-term and nuanced impacts of cooperative housing on health, well-being, and community cohesion.

Ultimately, this research positions cooperative housing as a sustainable and socially transformative response to the housing crisis. Its findings are relevant to policymakers, housing practitioners, and researchers alike, offering a foundation for future studies and the development of housing strategies that prioritize human well-being alongside affordability. By showcasing the potential of cooperative housing to build resilient, inclusive, and healthy communities, this study highlights its critical role in addressing both current and future challenges in housing and social equity.

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