Measuring Outcomes of Affordable Housing

INTRODUCTION

Affordable housing is generally associated with producing positive outcomes for residents. Various studies aimed at measuring the impacts of affordable housing on residents have focused particularly on the areas of health, family stability, education, employment, crime and safety, and child development.

Under the National Housing Strategy (NHS), the federal government is making historic investments in housing. Over the 10-year course of the strategy, the government will periodically be reporting on the outcomes of the strategy, beyond the provision of units.

CMHC commissioned KPMG to review a set of domains on measuring housing outcomes. The mandate also included leveraging the knowledge and experience of mixed-income (co-operative and non-profit) housing providers vis-à-vis appropriate indicators for measuring housing outcomes (and determining whether providers track them).

FINDINGS

With respect to housing, outcomes are categorized as non-housing outcomes (often called socio-economic outcomes, such as impacts on employment and income, health, education, family stability, and so on) and housing outcomes (referring to the availability to residents of housing that is adequate, suitable and affordable).

Affordable housing has *immediate* outcomes (housing outcomes that are expected to occur in the near term and are likely to occur most of the time as the result of provision of affordable housing) and *intermediate* outcomes (non-housing outcomes that are expected to occur in the medium term and are likely to occur much of the time under certain circumstances).

The focus of the literature review was on identifying the intermediate outcomes that have been shown to have strong causal links from the immediate outcomes of affordable housing. The review of literature found the following:

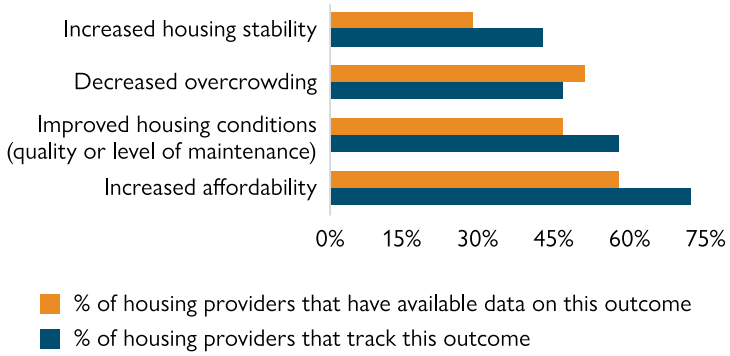
- There are four intermediate outcomes that have causal links from the immediate outcomes of public investment in affordable housing:
  - Improved physical health
  - Improved mental health
  - Improved educational achievement of children
  - Improved child development
- The immediate outcomes that have a significant effect on the occurrence of these intermediate outcomes are as follows:
  - Improved affordability (lower rent burden)
  - Better housing conditions (quality and adequacy of housing)
  - Lessened overcrowding
  - Increased housing stability (decreased need to move often)
- There are weak or no results indicating causal links from immediate outcomes to the following intermediate outcomes:
  - Family stability (stability of the family structure)
  - Employment and labour force participation
  - Crime, safety and perceived safety
  - Social inclusion
- There can be limitations in measuring certain intermediate outcomes without experimental or quasi-experimental study designs.
  - However, an important factor influencing their occurrence could be measured, for example, improved neighbourhood characteristics (as they influence all four intermediate outcomes).

The interactive sessions, held in February 2019, with 31 housing providers (although providers from across the country were invited to participate, participants included some from Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia) yielded the following findings:

- The main criteria used by housing providers to define successful socio-economic outcomes (that is, non-housing outcomes) for their tenants are affordability, housing stability, individual and family well-being, and community belonging.
- Regarding the four potential immediate outcomes of affordable housing, over half of the mixed-income housing providers track affordability and housing condition outcomes, and almost half of them track the other two immediate outcomes (degree of overcrowding and housing stability). Refer to figure 1.
- Housing stability, safety and security were the providers' main emphasis in terms of defining successful outcomes regarding vulnerable population groups (low-income Canadians, members of racial and ethnic minorities, elderly persons, Indigenous people, new immigrants, young children, etc.). Refer to figure 2.
- Housing providers view increased safety as the most important potential intermediate outcome to measure, with improved mental health, increased social inclusion and increased employment and labour force participation also seen as important.

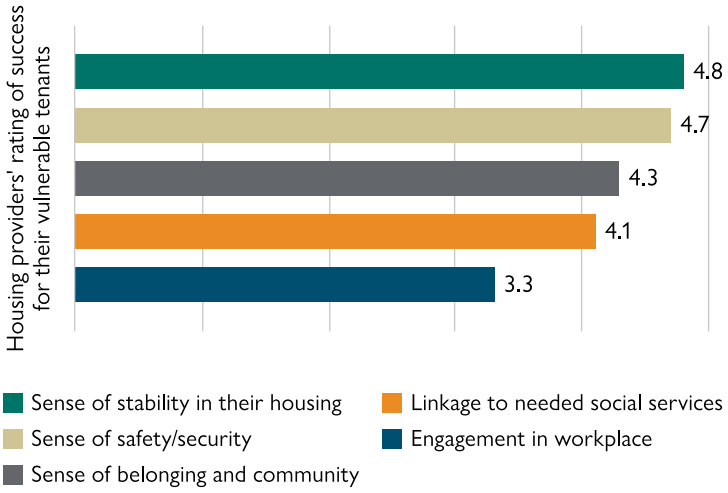
- Housing providers view privacy concerns and the inability to gather prior housing data as the most significant challenges associated with collecting data to measure these four immediate outcomes. Refer to figure 3.
- Other performance indicators noted by the housing providers included the following:
  - Number of tenants able to move into homeownership
  - Number of communities participating in community partnership programs
  - Client satisfaction levels (via survey)

Figure 1: Outcomes that housing providers track and on which they have available data. Over half of the mixed-income housing providers track affordability and housing condition outcomes.



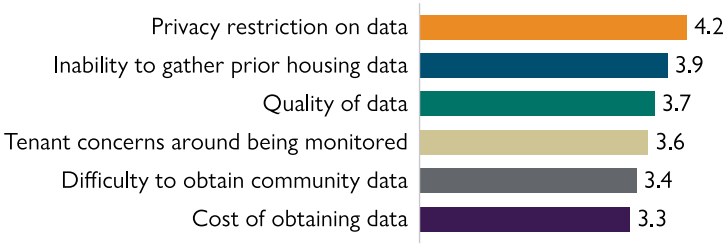
Source: KPMG

Figure 2: Housing providers' view of success for their vulnerable tenants. Sense of stability and sense of safety/security are the highest rated (1 being not at all important and 5 being extremely important).



Source: KPMG

Figure 3: Housing providers' perceived challenges in the collection of data. Privacy concerns and inability to gather previous housing data rank highest (1 being not at all significant and 5 being extremely significant).



Source: KPMG

Recommendations that can be adopted in support of a performance measurement system for measuring non-housing outcomes in the context of the NHS

A performance measurement system for the non-housing outcomes of affordable housing programs should be based on the collection of information on five variables:

- Affordability (lower rent burden for tenants)
- Better housing conditions (better quality housing for tenants)
- Lessened overcrowding (number of bedrooms for tenant families more in line with national housing standards)
- Increased housing stability (decreased need for tenants to move often)
- Improved neighbourhood characteristics (in particular, lower incidence of crime and vandalism)

Data on these variables should be collected through the following means:

- Interviews or focus groups of housing providers
- Collection of information from tenants on initial intake forms

FURTHER READING

Full report – *Measuring Outcomes of Affordable Housing* (https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/archive/research_3/measuring_impacts_of_affordable_housing.pdf)

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ALTERNATIVE TEXT AND DATA FOR FIGURES

Figure 1: Outcomes that housing providers track and on which they have available data. Over half of the mixed-income housing providers track affordability and housing condition outcomes.

	% of housing providers that track this outcome	% of housing providers that have available data on this outcome
Increased affordability	71%	57%
Improved housing conditions (quality or level of maintenance)	57%	46%
Decreased overcrowding	46%	50%
Increased housing stability	42%	28%

Source: KPMG

Figure 2: Housing providers' view of success for their vulnerable tenants. Sense of stability and sense of safety/security are the highest rated.

	1 being not at all important and 5 being extremely important
Engagement in workplace	3.3
Linkage to needed social services	4.1
Sense of belonging and community	4.3
Sense of safety/security	4.7
Sense of stability in their housing	4.8

Source: KPMG

Figure 3: Housing providers' perceived challenges in the collection of data. Privacy concerns and inability to gather previous housing data rank highest.

	1 being not at all significant and 5 being extremely significant
Cost of obtaining data	3.3
Difficulty to obtain community data	3.4
Tenant concerns around being monitored	3.6
Quality of data	3.7
Inability to gather prior housing data	3.9
Privacy restriction on data	4.2

Source: KPMG