



Addressing Tensions

IN BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE HOME LIFE FOR PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

1 OF 4 STRATEGIC LEARNING BRIEFS



INTRODUCTION

The *Future of Home: Inclusive Housing Solutions Lab* draws on the principles of human-centred design and social innovation to generate new and creative housing and support models that are accessible, affordable, and support the social inclusion of people with developmental disabilities.

The Lab explored many aspects of what it will take to refresh and reform housing models - from the community level to large-scale systems change. Through their work, participants also defined the **'tensions' involved in creating an inclusive home life** for persons with disabilities and what it will take to navigate and address those tensions.

This document is a summary of their insights and ideas.

The *Future of Home* is a collaboration between Skills Society, Inclusion Alberta, Cvida (formerly Capital Region Housing) and Homeward Trust. Lab participants included people with developmental disabilities, their families and allies, service providers, funders, architects, advocates, and housing developers.

Visit our website to learn more about the *Future of Home* project and view Phase One Prototypes, lab tools, and other background information:

<https://skillsociety.ca/projects/future-of-home-inclusive-housing-solutions-lab/>

A Skills Society Action Lab project conducted in partnership with Inclusion Alberta, Cvida, and Homeward Trust.



THE CHALLENGE:

BUILDING A HOUSING MODEL THAT IS INCLUSIVE, ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE, SUSTAINABLE AND SUPPORTED BY STAKEHOLDERS

The participants of the *Future of Home Lab* were given a straightforward yet difficult challenge: create a home-oriented housing model for people with developmental disabilities that was inclusive, accessible, affordable, economically sustainable and possible within current housing and support systems. The model also had to be supported by all key stakeholders.

Table 1: Five Key Attributes that Guided Prototyping

ATTRIBUTE	DESCRIPTION
Inclusive	Having meaningful things to do and places to go; feeling valued and respected by others; having choice, autonomy, and freedom; and having rich and varied relationships.
Accessible	The physical design of the building is 'universally' accessible to all its residents; is located close to neighborhood amenities and to human services.
Affordable	People participating in the Provincial Assured Income for Severely Handicapped (AISH) program can afford rent or mortgage .
Economically Sustainable	The housing model is economically viable for the building developer/manager, feasible within the funding model and budgets of PDD, and doable with municipal bylaws and zoning.
Supported by Stakeholders	The model is supported by key stakeholders, including persons with disabilities, their families, PDD providers, other residents, and housing developers and managers.

Through its work, Lab participants generated a number of prototypes to address different challenge areas, ultimately collaborating on a single prototype model that would lead to more inclusive apartment style living for people with disabilities. This exciting new prototype is described in more detail below.

INCLUSIVE APARTMENT LIVING

Phase Two Prototype Description

What could a new model for inclusive living look like? Imagine a six-storey, mixed-use apartment building located in a desirable, central neighborhood that is close to amenities and accessible by transit. Drawing on an Intentional Community model, there is a clause included in the rental agreement that outlines the inclusive philosophy of the building. The building has 90 units; 15% of these units are offered below market value in order to be affordable to someone living on AISH. Shared common areas in the building and vibrant retail spaces on the main floor create 'bumping grounds' for community connections to begin to form. A Community Concierge, a full-time paid position, regularly initiates community-building activities in the building. In partnership with a local disability service provider, people with disabilities receive PDD-funded support services in their own apartments on demand. Interested neighbors in the building are also contracted by the service provider to provide overnight support as needed.

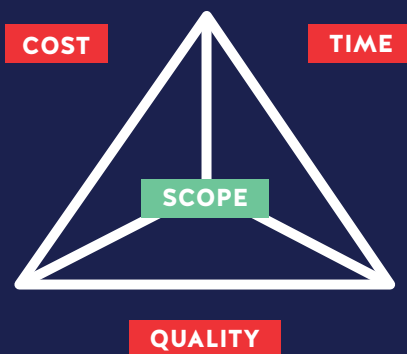
KEY INSIGHTS

In the process of exploring different prototype models, Lab participants uncovered important insights around the tensions that can arise with creating home-oriented models that are affordable, accessible, inclusive, viable/sustainable and supported.

INSIGHT 1: THERE ARE UNIQUE TENSIONS IN BUILDING A 'HOME-ORIENTED' HOUSING MODEL FOR PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

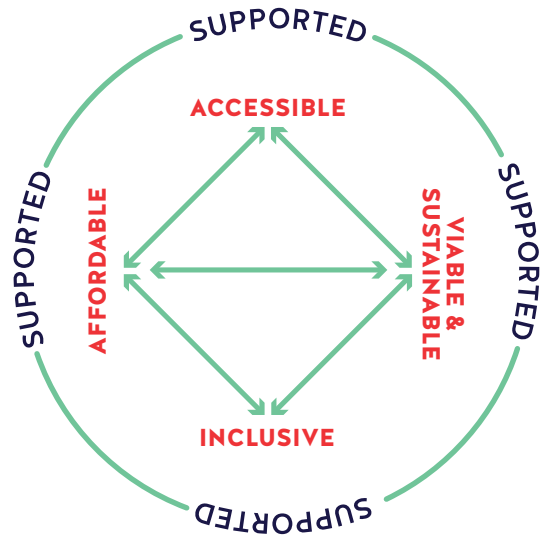
The idea that any 'model' has tensions is not new to anyone in the private sector, public policy and community development and services.

The Iron Triangle is a popular metaphor for describing how project managers must manage the tension between ensuring a typical project is delivered on time, that it is delivered under projected cost and that the final product is of good quality.



The common wisdom is that anyone working on developing a product, service, project or business model must constantly manage the trade-offs within this triangle – or other tensions between key features of the project.

In the case of the *Future of Home Inclusive Housing Lab*, Lab participants modified the traditional Iron Triangle to accommodate the different tensions around creating a housing model for people with developmental disabilities.



TENSION	DESCRIPTION
Affordability & Viability/ Sustainability	Tension between the minimal government income support available to persons with developmental disabilities (i.e., AISH is approximately \$1,685/month) and the realities of the housing market where the minimum rent return rate is roughly \$1,250/month.
Inclusivity & Affordability	Tension between building cost-effective housing and avoiding creating “institutionalized” settings that concentrate affordable units and human services in a single location.
Accessibility & Viability/ Sustainability	Tension between integrating a “universal design” into a building to make it accessible to all people and the extra costs associated with integrating these features.
Accessibility & Affordability	Tension between ensuring housing is close to community amenities and human services yet also affordable.
Inclusivity & Viability/ Sustainability	Tension between the economic viability of larger housing developments, the ‘efficiency’ of PDD service delivery, and the reality that inclusive communities and trusting relationships are easier to build on a smaller scale.

Note: Lab participants concluded that there were no tensions between the attributes of inclusion and accessibility.

INSIGHT 2: THERE ARE (AT LEAST) THREE WAYS TO ADDRESS THESE TENSIONS

The Lab participants identified three options for how these tensions may be addressed when creating home-oriented housing for people with disabilities.

Option 1: Focus on one or two priorities while sacrificing others

For many people with disabilities, making ‘hard choices’ is an unfortunate reality. Scarce financial resources means searching a small pool of housing units that can be rented for \$725/month or less (affordability), and then stretching any remaining income as far as possible to address remaining needs.

This acute focus on affordability means that most persons with disabilities may have a roof over their head – but their living arrangements fall well short of the accessible and inclusive home they seek. This difficult choice leads them to live in buildings with uneven physical access, in neighborhoods they don’t always feel safe, away from community amenities, disconnected from neighbors, and living within tight parameters that prevent them from making their apartment their own (i.e. owning a pet). “The status quo is unacceptable,” noted one Lab participant.

Option 2: Optimize by making trade-offs

To address these tensions, stakeholders can develop a model that aims to balance key criteria by making careful trade-offs in the design.

For example, in an effort to reduce the costs of a building—and increase its economic viability and affordability—a group might decide to install two rather than four elevators in a building. While this means a decrease in accessibility for those who have physical limitations, the group may feel that the trade-off is acceptable and creates a more balanced model. They may then discover that reducing the number of elevators requires them to reduce the number of units in the building in order to be compliant with city building codes. While this weakens the economic viability of the model, having fewer units in the building increases its sense of community and inclusivity.

This approach to managing tensions is relentless and iterative. It requires social innovators to work through multiple cycles of design and examine the trade-offs until they find a model that meets most—but not all—of the stakeholders’ key criteria. These models are an improvement on Option 1 but still fall short of the hopes and aspirations people with developmental disabilities have for their home.

Option 3: Use integrative approaches to build entirely new models

A third way of dealing with tensions in building home-oriented housing for people with disabilities is to resist the pressure to make conventional trade-offs and instead to try and create ‘third and better options’. This approach is referred to as ‘integrated thinking and design’ (Martin 2007, Riel & Martin 2017).

Take, for example, how an integrated approach might find a creative way to weave together the best of two distinct, yet imperfect, housing models for persons with disabilities. On the one hand is a large-scale, affordable housing development that feels more like a warehouse but is economically viable. On the other hand is a development that is much smaller in size, creates community interaction amongst residents but is more expensive because of its added amenities. Faced with these polarities, conventional designers would seek to find the ‘sweet spot’ by balancing two less-than-ideal outcomes.

An integrated approach, however, could seek to take the best elements of each approach and arrive at the following model: a large housing development with many smaller clusters of units, each designed around a small shared living area. This model of nested ‘micro-communities’ offers the size required to ensure economic viability and affordability, with the scale and community-oriented design that promotes inclusion.

This process of integrated thinking and design is demanding, requiring stakeholders with deep expertise in their field to be patient and not settle for the ‘least worst trade-off.’ It means systematically working through multiple, deeper, cycles of the integrated thinking process.

INSIGHT 3: BUILDING ‘HOME-ORIENTED’ HOUSING MODELS TAKES TIME

Lab participants employed practices of ‘optimizing trade-offs’ and ‘integrated design’ as they crafted a housing model that addressed all of their key criteria. In Phase Two, a smaller design team of architects and a business planner merged the Phase One prototypes into a single hybrid model that continues to be refined to meet the Lab’s key criteria. The result will be a feasibility study of the merged prototype to ‘test’ with local housing developers and other stakeholders.

Lab participants recognized this work is a small microcosm of the much larger, longer process required on many innovative housing projects. It can take years to create a robust new model with multiple rounds of developing, testing and refining different elements with developers.

As a result, the partners of the *Future of Home Lab* are committed to sharing the knowledge and insights that evolved from their experimental efforts—and the specific housing model that emerges—so that stakeholders can build on these learnings and continue to innovate new housing models in the future.

INSIGHT 4: THERE IS A NEED FOR INCREMENTAL REFORM AND TRANSFORMATIVE INNOVATION

Lab participants’ original vision for a home-oriented housing model for people with disabilities was constrained by a number of systemic barriers including:

- ▶ The low levels of income support available to persons receiving AISH, leaving them with very little money to spend on housing and reduced options when it comes to rental properties
- ▶ Municipal zoning and by-laws, reinforced by consumer demand, that leads to low-density housing developments, reduces accessibility to amenities, services and increases social isolation
- ▶ A consumer culture and home ownership paradigm which promotes individualism and private space rather than community and connection

- ▶ Social norms which frame persons with disabilities as people who need assistance with their deficits, rather than seeing them as full members of their communities

The realities of these barriers means that social innovators operating in these systems must work on three different types of innovation:

- 1. Incremental innovation:** which aims to develop, test and refine housing models that are viable and sustainable in existing systems, yet offer the possibility of only incremental – rather than dramatic – improvements in affordability, accessibility and inclusion
- 2. Reform-oriented innovation:** which seeks to address the systemic barriers that get in the way of home
- 3. Transformative innovation:** which is focused on creating radically new models and dramatically expanding the number, variety and quality of multi-dimensional, home oriented housing models.

See more on the different types of innovation required in the brief titled
**‘The Future of Home:
A Portfolio of Possibilities’.**

SOURCES

Key insights for this brief were generated based on observation of the two Core Teams prototyping process. Additional insights were gathered in a workshop held with Core Team members as well as through numerous reflexive conversations amongst stewards and Core Team members.

1. Riel, J., Roger, M. 2017. *Creating Great Choices: A Leaders Guide to Integrative Thinking*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.
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