DESIGNED FOR SUPPORT

A PRACTICAL TOOLKIT FOR DEVELOPING SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

United Way Greater Toronto

WW+P

Acknowledgements

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

It is with profound respect that we acknowledge that we operate on the traditional territory and gathering place of many Indigenous nations including the Wendat, Anishnaabeg, and Haudenosaunee. We recognize and uphold the rights of Indigenous communities, acknowledging the ancestral and unceded territories of the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples throughout Turtle Island. Tkaronto is home to a growing community of urban Indigenous Peoples, including those who are First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. We recognize that the Greater Toronto Area is covered by several treaties, such as Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Williams Treaties with seven First Nations, including the Chippewas of Georgina Island. We respect Indigenous teachings and commit to fulflling our obligations to the land and one another. Our commitment is grounded in the principles of Truth and Reconciliation and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

African Ancestral Acknowledgement

We recognize all Treaty peoples, including those who arrived as settlers or migrants either in this generation or in generations past. We also acknowledge those who came here involuntarily, particularly those brought to these lands as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery. We must also acknowledge the deep-rooted inequities that persist today because of historical injustices. The legacy of colonization and slavery has left enduring impacts on Indigenous and African-descended communities, manifesting in disparities in economic opportunities, education, housing, health care, and systemic discrimination. In recognizing this history and the current context, we pay tribute to the ancestors of African Origin and descent.

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Collaborators

Toronto Supportive Housing Network

Toronto Supportive Housing Network brings together service providers, community partners, and sector leaders dedicated to providing supportive housing solutions for individuals experiencing homelessness and those living with complex mental health or substance use challenges. Grounded in the belief that safe, affordable housing is a basic human right and essential to mental health recovery, we work collaboratively to minimize barriers and ensure long-term housing stability across our city.
supportivehousingnetwork.ca

United Way Greater Toronto

As the largest funder of community services in the GTA, outside of the government, United Way Greater Toronto reinforces a crucial community safety net to support people living in poverty. United Way's network of agencies and initiatives in neighbourhoods across Peel, Toronto and York Region works to ensure that everyone has access to the programs and services they need to thrive. Mobilizing community support, United Way's work is rooted in groundbreaking research, strategic leadership, local advocacy and cross-sectoral partnerships committed to building a more equitable region and lasting solutions to the GTA's greatest challenges. unitedwaygt.org

WW+P Architects and Planners

WW+P (formerly SvN Architects + Planners) is a global, multidisciplinary design practice with 40+ years of experience delivering complex housing, community, and social-infrastructure projects across Canada and internationally. We design with purpose, integrating architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, and planning. We believe housing supports the social, cultural, and economic life of communities and have designed homes across the full continuum, including shelters, supportive housing, affordable rental, co-operative housing, and mixed-income development. We establish long-term relationships to help clients strategize and deliver housing that meets people's needs. https://www.wwparchitects.com/

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Foreword

Designing Supportive Housing for Lasting Impact

Supportive housing creates the conditions for people to thrive. A stable home, paired with the right supports and access to care, can improve health and well-being, strengthen community connections, and create a stronger foundation for opportunity. The benefits extend well beyond individual residents. Decades of evidence and experience have shown that supportive housing can reduce reliance on crisis-driven services, improve outcomes across health and social systems, and build stronger, more resilient communities.

As governments work to address homelessness and housing need, supportive housing is increasingly being recognized as an essential component of a more effective and sustainable housing system. But successful supportive housing is about more than creating a place to live. It is about creating homes with environments that support residents, enable effective service delivery, and remain adaptable to changing needs over time.

The design of supportive housing plays a critical role in achieving those goals. Decisions made during planning and development infuence r esident experience, operational effectiveness and adaptability, staffng, safety, maintenance, and long-term sustainability. The best supportive housing developments refect a deep understanding of how design can support dignity, independence, belonging, and housing stability.

This resource brings together practical knowledge gained through decades of experience developing, operating, and improving supportive housing. Drawing on lessons learned by supportive housing providers working alongside partners across housing, healthcare, government, development, and community services, it offers guidance for those planning, designing, funding, and delivering the next generation of supportive housing developments. Used alongside service planning, it helps ensure the physical environment supports and reinforces how housing,

Decisions made during planning and development influence resident experience, operational effectiveness and adaptability, staffing, safety, maintenance, and long-term sustainability.

healthcare, and other services are delivered, creating a stronger foundation for resident success. Every supportive housing development represents a long-term investment in people, communities, and public systems. The decisions made today will shape how those investments serve residents and communities for decades to come. By capturing the experience and insights of those who have helped shape supportive housing in practice, this resource provides a foundation for creating developments that are effective, sustainable, and responsive to people's needs over the long term. These are the kinds of investments that help build healthier communities, reduce pressures on public systems, and create lasting value for generations to come.



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Introduction

An estimated 65,000 people experience homelessness on any given night across reporting Canadian communities, according to the Everyone Counts 2025 Report. Homelessness across Canada continues to grow, increasing by 79% between 2022 and 2024 alone.[1] The shortage of affordable housing is still the primary driver of homelessness, and many people who are homeless face mental health challenges, addiction, trauma, and histories of incarceration that require additional services in order to achieve stable housing and recovery.[2]

Supportive housing is needed now more than ever to meet growing demand and close longstanding gaps in housing and support systems. Safe, stable housing combined with appropriate supports can transform lives, strengthen communities, and reduce pressure on public systems. However, to make supportive housing an essential part of Canada's housing response, investment needs to be accompanied by practical tools that can help providers and public sector partners plan, procure, and deliver successful projects more effectively.

This toolkit was developed in response to a growing need for supportive housing that is thoughtful in design, durable in construction, and dignifed for the people who call it home. It builds on work undertaken in early 2025, when supportive housing providers were asked to identify the factors that contribute most to successful developments. The resulting report, Delivering More Supportive Housing Faster,[3] underscored the need for a practical guide to support public sector, non-proft organizations and other partners through the development process. This toolkit is the result: a resource grounded in sector experience and designed to help bring more high-quality supportive housing projects to life.

Created by an Advisory Committee[4] of Toronto Supportive Housing Network members operating a range of supportive housing models across Toronto, the toolkit draws on decades of collective experience in the sector. It has also been strengthened by feedback and insights from organizations beyond Toronto and Ontario, helping ensure its relevance across diverse contexts. As such, the design requirements outlined throughout refect the practical knowledge and expertise of the advisory committee.

Supportive housing is needed now more than ever.

This toolkit is comprehensive and detailed, though not exhaustive, and it is not intended to be applied uniformly. The specifc needs of the individuals and communities who will live in a given supportive housing development should take precedence over any general guidance offered here. Wherever possible, the voices of people with lived experience of homelessness, inaccessibility, and unmet support needs should be centred throughout the planning process.



Evangel Hall, EHM, WW+P Architects and Planners, Toronto ON, 2006
Photo Credit: Ben Rahn/A-Frame

Context

Supportive Housing as an Innovative Solution to the Homelessness Crisis

At its core, supportive housing is rental housing that enables tenants to live as independently as possible within their broader community. It is permanent housing with supports attached. There are different models of care that can inform supportive housing. This toolkit is grounded in a community-based model of care, not an institutional one: support services are intended to be delivered fexibly, within a tenant's own home and neighbourhood, rather than concentrated in a single controlled facility that separates residents from the surrounding community. However, higher-support housing that may require a more institutional approach through more concentrated and controlled facilities can still incorporate many elements of this toolkit. A community-based approach favours integration over segregation, locating supportive housing within existing neighbourhoods, connecting tenants to community resources and social networks, and designing units and shared spaces that support daily life rather than a clinical or custodial routine that isolates and confnes residents.

The term "supportive housing" has been in use for over fve decades. It is often used in the context of adults with disabilities (intellectual, physical, aging and mental health) although more recently it has been associated with people experiencing chronic homelessness who might also have a mental health or substance use issue. In the 1980s and '90s, mental health housing was often provided within congregate housing, meaning that the residents had a bedroom (although often shared) and shared bathrooms, kitchens, dining, lounge, and recreational areas. These were called boarding homes, homes for special care, and group homes. These living situations did not have tenancy protections.[5]

Supportive housing enables tenants to live as independently as possible within their broader community.

Defining Supportive Housing

Supportive housing is an umbrella term that encompasses various levels of support for people who have complex needs.

In general, supportive housing is economically accessible based on income, usually the maximum of either welfare or disability rent portions. In Ontario in 2026, Ontario Works provides $390 a month for shelter/rent, while the Ontario Disability Support Program provides $611 per month for rent. Added to the economic support are the social supports in areas of primary care, mental health and addictions, income, food security, and activities of daily living.

The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) defnes supportive housing as “housing that provides a physical environment that is specifcally designed to be safe, secur e, enabling and home-like, with support services such as social services, provision of meals, housekeeping and social and recreational activities, in order to maximize residents’ independence, privacy and dignity.”[6]

The Government of Ontario states that supportive housing “refers to a combination of housing assistance and supports that enable people to live as independently as possible in their community.”[7]

Similarly, the Government of British Columbia defnes supportive housing as pr oviding “ongoing assistance so residents can live independently,” while clarifying that this “does not include personal assistance services such as bathing, dressing, or medication assistance,” which are instead referred to as assisted living.[8]

There is no legislated defnition or consistent agr eement across regions and organizations delivering supportive housing, and only British Columbia has a regulatory defnition. The term supportive housing thus often overlaps with related housing categories like transitional housing and complex care housing. This ambiguity continues to cause regulatory gaps, diffculties dir ecting individuals to suitable housing, and concerns around unregulated and inconsistent worker safety measures.[9] While there is considerable variation across supportive housing models, low cost or deeply affordable housing is an important feature of most supportive housing programs.

Experts in the supportive housing sector understand that with the right type of housing and the right type of supports, some residents can move on to less specialized housing. Residents that will live in housing with high levels of support often include:

- People experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- People using substances
- People who have experienced trauma
- People who have developmental disabilities
- People who have physical disabilities
- People who have experienced varying degrees of mental and physical health

The late 1990s saw a general increase in homelessness in Canada due to a variety of factors. The population of Canada grew from 27,790,600 in 1990 to 30,769,700 in 2000.[10] However, policies did not keep pace. In 1993, the federal government ended funding for new social housing, while continuing to support much of the existing stock through ongoing subsidies. Responsibility for existing social housing was downloaded to the provinces. Some provinces such as B.C. held onto authority, while others such as Ontario downloaded authority to municipalities. While the population of Canada grew from 27,790,600 in 1990 to 30,769,700 in 2000 and 38,008,005 in 2020,[11] overall access to affordable housing, new social housing, and private market housing declined dramatically, as evidenced by smaller vacancy rates and climbing rent.

All of this resulted in a stark rise of homelessness. For instance, the number of people staying in Toronto's emergency shelters rose from 22,000 in 1988 to nearly 30,000 in 1999, an increase of 40%.[12] Sometimes, individuals would end up homeless and, with some assistance secure housing again, but a growing number of individuals would end up on the streets and in shelters repeatedly.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, a wave of so-called deinstitutionalization closed psychiatric institutions faster than community-based care and housing could absorb those discharged, leaving many former patients cycling through shelters, rooming houses, and homelessness. This was compounded by the federal government's withdrawal from funding for new social housing in 1993, as noted above. The federal government's downloading of the administration of federal social housing programs to provinces and territories ended 50 years of direct federal involvement and also offoaded the indir ect costs of inadequate housing (emergency shelters, health care, policing) onto provinces and municipalities that have more constrained revenues. With little new supply for decades as low-rent stock eroded and homelessness grew more entrenched, a shortage of housing developed for people with mental illness, addictions, and other complex needs — the very population supportive housing exists to serve today.[13]



Sutton Youth Services, York Region Housing, WW+P Architects and Planners.
Toronto ON, 2012
Photo Credit: Michael Muraz

By the 2000s, supportive housing for adults experiencing chronic homelessness began to be delivered through a Housing First approach. Finland launched a nationwide Housing First program in 2007 that is now widely regarded as the gold standard for reducing homelessness. Its success demonstrated that investing in permanent housing and supports not only helps people achieve long-term housing stability but can also reduce demand on emergency shelters, hospitals, ambulance services, and other public systems.[14] In 2009, the Mental Health Commission of Canada launched one of the largest research projects on mental health and homelessness called "At Home/Chez Soi". The fnal r eport identifed that Housing First with supports had a signifcant impact on homelessness.[15]

Housing First has since been adopted in jurisdictions around the world, including in Canada. A key principle of Housing First is security of tenure: residents hold the rights and responsibilities of tenants, and their continued housing is not conditional on participation in programs or progress toward specifc goals. In Ontario, this is typically r efected thr ough a tenancy governed by the Residential Tenancies Act, meaning that supportive housing residents may receive additional services but still retain the legal rights and protections of other tenants.

Since that time, there have been some markers of progress: renewed federal spending on affordable housing began in the early 2000s, the National Housing Strategy launched in 2017, and Build Canada Homes launched in 2025 a new federal effort to invest in affordable housing.

Today, the housing landscape presents both a challenge and an opportunity: the need for supportive housing continues to grow, but there are now also many more examples of successful, innovative models from which to draw lessons for the future.[16] This toolkit is designed to meet the moment, building momentum towards the ambitious scale of supportive housing that is urgently needed across Canada by providing practical guidance to those interested in developing, funding, and operating supportive housing.

The need for supportive housing continues to grow, but there are now many successful models.

USING THIS TOOLKIT

Having set this important context, this toolkit will now explain in great detail how to practically build and develop supportive housing

Who is This Document For?

This toolkit has been prepared for use by organizations involved in decisions related to the development of new supportive housing. This includes:

Supportive housing capital funders

Funding organizations can use this tool to better understand the specifc needs of this housing type in order to establish meaningful and relevant project parameters. The toolkit can be used to inform site selection, inform capital planning, fund operational budgets, and inform effective Requests for Proposals (RFPs). As municipalities, hospitals, primary care agencies, foundations, and private donors express interest in supportive housing that responds to people who have been chronically homeless, this toolkit can support efforts to get new projects out of the ground.

Supportive housing policymakers

Municipal, provincial, and federal policymakers have different roles in the development of supportive housing. Federal policymakers are more likely to fund the brick-and-mortar of supportive housing projects. Municipal policymakers are more likely to help with zoning, planning, and land, while provincial policymakers have a dual role, often in brick-and-mortar as well as the supports and services that make a project viable from an operating perspective. Organizations and operators tend to bear the cost of operations, services, and long-term maintenance. Policymakers' involvement in the planning and design of the brick-and-mortar should be informed by strategies to ensure resilience and longevity, thereby reducing the burden of cost on organizations' operating budgets.



YWCA Elm,WW+P Architects and Planners. Toronto ON, 2012
Photo Credit: WW+P



11 Brock, City of Toronto, WW+P Architects and Planners, Toronto ON, 2024

Supportive housing organizations looking to develop new supportive housing

Many supportive housing organizations have a wealth of direct experience on the operational side but are newer to development. This document will help situate this experience and sector-specifc knowledge within the development process and can be used by supportive housing organizations to develop a set of owner's requirements to clearly communicate project needs to other project stakeholders (e.g. development manager, consultant team, funders). It can also be used to create RFPs to solicit design and other consulting services and frame conversations with potential owners, representatives, and funders.

Supportive housing organizations engaged in the development process as the future operator

When a supportive housing organization is brought into the design and development process as a future operator, this document can help in providing the tools to engage with the design team to ensure their priorities and operational needs are addressed through the entire process. That includes ensuring that their total cost of building ownership — development, construction, maintenance, and operation over 50+ years — informs early decision-making to reduce risk. This toolkit will be most impactful at project feasibility, project planning, and early design phases.

What Does this Toolkit not Address?

This toolkit does not address supportive housing for people who require highly complex medical care or 24-hour personal support, also known as assisted living. Some recommendations and considerations from this toolkit will be applicable across multiple types of supportive housing, though organizations providing housing for populations with specifc needs may need to modify, adapt, or selectively use this toolkit. It is vital to recognize diverse needs, identities and experiences, such as those of people with developmental or physical disabilities, women and gender-diverse people feeing violence, youth transitioning fr om care, and Indigenous Peoples, and to understand the pathways needed to connect people with culturally responsive and specialized supportive housing. Nonetheless, a broad continuum of support for residents with unique needs is embedded in the design by ensuring space to meet with helping professionals, peer group supports, and multi-purpose spaces.

Indigenous Supportive Housing

This toolkit does not provide guidance on supportive housing intended to serve First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, which is best planned, designed, developed, and operated by Indigenous organizations and communities, refecting their distinct cultur es, knowledge systems, and lived experiences.

Indigenous supportive housing providers have demonstrated the importance of approaches that integrate housing with culture, wellness, community connection, and access to Indigenous-led services. These models are shaped by local communities and recognize that long-term housing stability is strengthened when supports are delivered in ways that are culturally safe, community-driven, and grounded in Indigenous knowledge.

Readers are encouraged to engage directly with Indigenous housing and service providers when planning supportive housing intended to serve Indigenous residents. Consistent with the principle of For Indigenous, By Indigenous, these organizations are best positioned to guide solutions that advance self-determination and refect the priorities, str engths, and aspirations of the communities they serve.

Glossary of Terms

Approvals
Municipal and regulatory permits (e.g. zoning, building, environmental) required before construction are broadly referred to as approvals.

As-of-Right
A project is as-of-right when it complies with every applicable zoning standard, so that no zoning by-law amendment and no minor variance is needed.

B3 Occupancy
A building code classifcation that r efers to a “care occupancy” where care is provided to persons who are not capable of self-preservation without assistance, this includes facilities such as long-term care homes.

CCDC
The Canadian Construction Documents Committee develops, produces, and reviews standardized contract documents used across Canada for construction projects.

CPTED
Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design strategies reduce crime via natural surveillance, territorial control, and access management.

DfMA
Design for Manufacture and Assembly is a design methodology optimizing buildings for off-site manufacturing and rapid assembly.

Envelope
The building enclosure (walls, roof, windows, foundation) that controls heat, moisture, and air movement is called the envelope.

Lighting Colour Temperature
Measured in Kelvin and ranging from warm (2700-3000K) to neutral (3500-4000K) to cool (5000K+), lighting colour temperature affects mood and safety perception.

Maglocks
Electromagnetic locking devices are used for secure building access.

MMC
Modern Methods of Construction are factory-based and off-site building techniques that include modular units, mass timber, laminated timber, and panelized systems for faster, higher-quality construction.

NBC
The National Building Code is a Canadian federal set of building standards adopted provincially for safety and compliance.

Pre-development Stage
The early phase before construction begins, covering feasibility studies, land acquisition, initial fnancing, and team assembly.

Proforma
A fnancial pr ojection modeling project costs, revenue, operating expenses, and returns.

Program
In the supportive housing context, a program refers to space and function requirements, such as room counts, square footage, or accessibility needs.

Project Delivery Model
The contractual framework defning r oles and responsibilities of construction professionals and partners is called the project delivery model.

RFP
A formal solicitation document inviting contractors or frms to bid on a project is known as a Request for Proposal.

Seed funding
Initial capital used to launch the pre-development phase of planning, design, and feasibility.

Supportive Housing Levels

Supportive housing may involve different levels of support depending on the needs of residents. High-level generally involves 24-hour staffng, intensive medical or psychiatric care, and structured programming for individuals with complex needs. Moderate-level refers to regular but not continuous staff support, weekly case management and access to community services. Low-level/minimal is limited to independent living with period check-ins and minimal on-site staff presence.

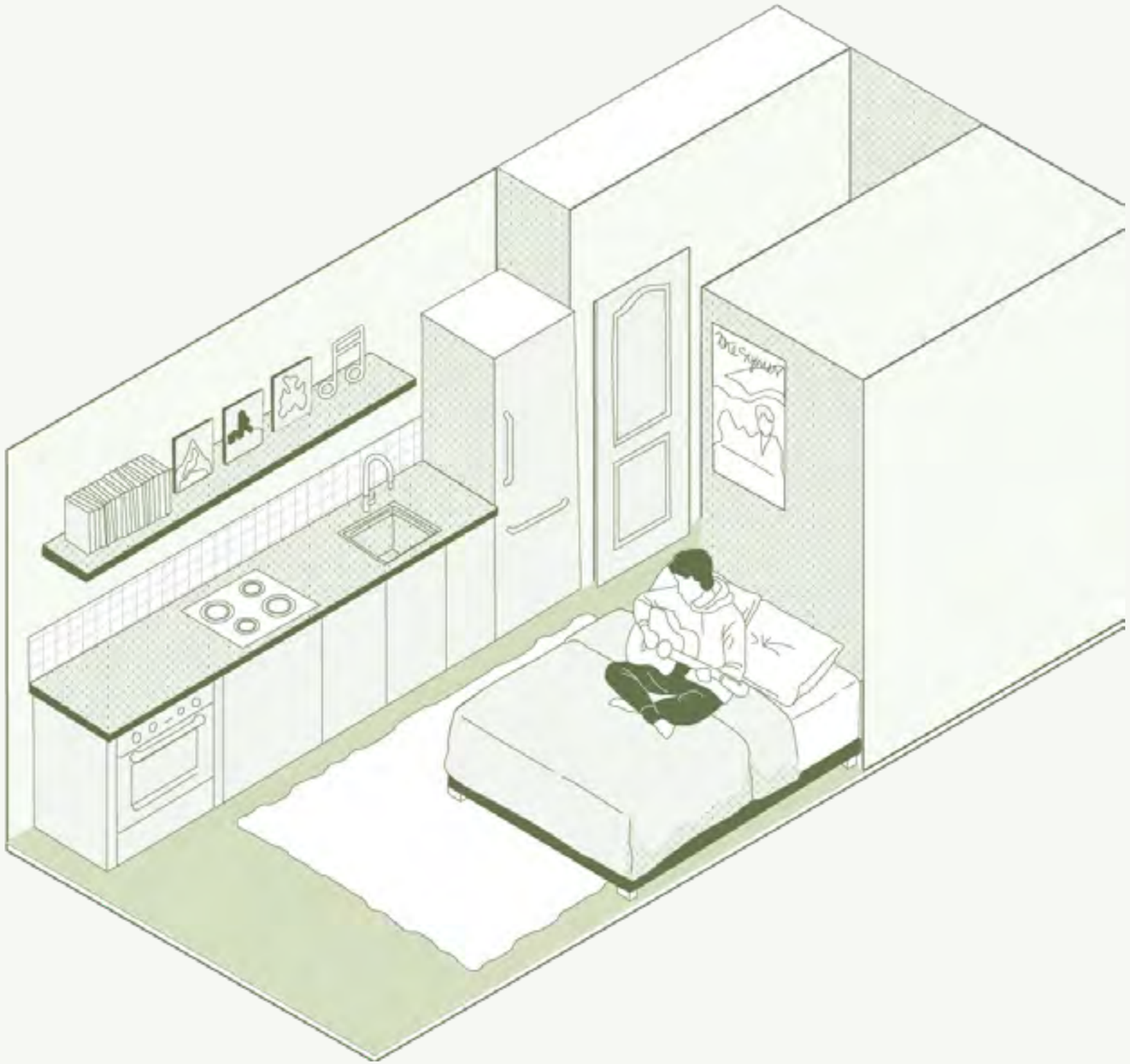
Wraparound Services

Wraparound services provide comprehensive support services delivered both onsite and through community access, including case management, primary care, peer support, psychiatric care, vocational training/ employment support, legal aid, secure site measures (security personnel/ systems), personal support workers (ADL assistance), community connection activities, and recreational programs. The goal of wraparound services is to provide holistic, person-centered care coordinated across services.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following guiding principles are key to the success of a supportive housing project and are paramount to decision-making throughout the planning, design, and development phases. They describe the qualities of environments that support residents' feelings of safety, welcoming, comfort, connection, and a sense of home, while recognizing diverse needs and experiences. Each principle provides a general definition and examples of how it can be reflected in the planning, design, and character of the built environment. Rather than being tied to a specific use or functional area, these principles apply across all spaces within a supportive housing building and establish an overall vision for the community.

A Place That Feels Like Home



A residential, human-scaled atmosphere helps foster a sense of belonging, autonomy, and psychological permanence which are critical foundations for long-term stability and recovery. By offering choices over personal space, lighting, and daily routines, a home-like environment restores individual agency and autonomy. Even in non-permanent housing settings, residential design cultivates a felt sense of permanence and security, helping residents transition out of crisis modes and build habits for long-term stability. For individuals with past trauma from shelters, hospitals, or the justice system, institutional environments can make it diffcult to feel safe enough to r est and recover. Instead, supportive housing should feel welcoming, dignifed, and integrated into the community. The examples below illustrate ways to create a home-like environment while thoughtfully balancing safety, accessibility, durability, and the operational needs of supportive housing.

Examples of creating a non-institutional home-like environment

Residential character. A building that feels residential with characteristics of the neighbourhood that it resides in; this could include front yard seating or a garden, a sloped roof or a facade rhythm like adjacent houses. It should have a welcoming



Edmond Place, Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre, Toronto ON, 2011
Photo Credit: Corey Mihailiuk

front entrance and well-sized windows that allow visible connection to the street. Design should eliminate the stigma associated with living in supportive housing by prioritizing dignity and pride of place. When a building features high-quality materials, thoughtful architectural details, and inviting front yards that mirror nearby homes, it conveys value to residents and can prevent neighbouring communities from labeling or stereotyping the building and its occupants.

Create smaller, legible clusters. Thoughtfully shaping the building's massing — its overall size, shape, and three-dimensional form — allows larger developments to be broken down into smaller, recognizable unit clusters. This avoids long, institutional corridors, which amplify noise, block natural light, and closely mirror hospital or correctional facility layouts that trigger stress and a feeling of being managed. Instead, short clusters foster quiet, neighbourhood-like sub-communities while maintaining clear sightlines for resident safety, wayfnding, and staf f supervision.

Integrate security thoughtfully. Security measures should be discreetly integrated without making the environment feel institutional. Good design can limit the use of surveillance equipment.

Support personalization. Provide opportunities for residents to personalize their units and shared spaces, fostering a sense of ownership and home.

Use warm, residential lighting. Select warmer colour temperatures and residential-quality fxtur es while maintaining appropriate lighting levels for safety and security.

Use a residential material palette. Incorporate warm, natural materials, wood tones, and varied textures while ensuring fnishes ar e durable and easy to maintain.

Biophilic Design: Bring nature into the building by incorporating plants, natural materials, views to green spaces, gardens, and access to outdoor spaces. Position plants thoughtfully, considering access to natural light, watering, maintenance, and resident safety.

Create welcoming common spaces. Use artwork, comfortable furniture, plants, and other familiar residential elements to make shared spaces feel more like home. Furniture should balance comfort and a residential appearance with durability and the ability to withstand regular cleaning or steam treatment to help manage bed bugs, pests, and other operational concerns.

Welcome guests and pets. Where possible, accommodate guests and pets, which are important aspects of everyday life and can contribute to a resident's sense of home, connection, and belonging.

Trauma-Informed Design



Trauma-informed design recognizes that physical environments deeply shape a person's sense of security, belonging, and overall well-being. For individuals recovering from trauma — whether rooted in personal struggles, systemic injustice, or shared crises — their surrounding space can either support recovery or act as a barrier to it. For instance, when someone has experienced trauma in an institutional setting like a hospital or shelter, supportive housing that mirrors those same stark, sterile conditions can trigger past distress and hinder healing. Trauma-informed design ensures architecture makes people feel respected, safe, and in control of their lives.

Examples of trauma-informed design strategies

Support clear and comfortable wayfinding. Use intuitive layouts and clear sightlines, and avoid dead-ends, hidden corners, and other spaces that may feel diffcult to navigate or monitor.

Maximize natural light. Provide access to natural light where possible and avoid harsh or overly bright artifcial lighting.

Create acoustic comfort and minimize unnecessary noise. Use sound-absorbing materials and thoughtful planning to reduce

unwanted noise and provide adequate acoustic separation between residential suites and noise-sensitive areas. Limit highly sound-refective fnishes and select building systems and equipment that minimize unnecessary or startling sounds, supporting privacy, rest, and overall well-being.

Provide privacy, control, and security. Ensure residents have control over their personal space through secure, lockable unit doors and window coverings. Provide ways for residents to see who is at their door without having to open it, such as door viewers or appropriately located glazing.

Consider gender-specific spaces thoughtfully. Gender-specifc ar eas can provide a greater sense of safety and comfort for some residents while potentially making non-binary people feel excluded. Consider the residents and guests carefully before making gender-specifc decisions and pr ovide options where possible.

Improve visibility in confined areas. Consider features such as mirrors in stairwells or tight hallways to allow residents to see around corners and anticipate what is ahead or windows to see outside. Include glazing sidelights beside solid doors.

Keep circulation spaces calm and uncluttered. Avoid excessive furnishings or visual clutter in entrances, hallways, and other shared spaces.

Use calming and inclusive visual elements. Select calming colours and use artwork thoughtfully rather than overloading walls with visual stimulation.



Meares Street Youth Supportive Housing, Beacon Community Services, DIALOG, Victoria BC, 2023
Photo Credit: DIALOG



Rose Haven Community Day Shelter, Gensler, Portland ORE, 2022
Photo Credit: Gensler

Artwork should refect the cultural, racial, gender, and sexual orientation diversity of residents and be durable enough to withstand regular use and reduce opportunities for damage or graffti.

Agency and Empowerment. Provide residents with choice and control over how they use and experience spaces, including the ability to move furniture, personalize their environment, and choose where to spend time. Where feasible, provide options to move away from noise, confict, or other distressing situations, including areas of refuge or quieter spaces for privacy and retreat.

Trauma-informed design research acknowledges that architecture has the power to make people feel respected, stable, and in control of their lives.

Resident + Staff Safety



Tahanan Supportive Housing, Mercy Housing, David Baker Architects, San Francisco, USA, 2021
Photo Credit: Bruce Damonte

Providing safe and secure supportive housing is a foundational goal and expectation for both residents and staff. Due to the experiences and circumstances of people who have been unhoused, or lived in shelters, encampments, or correctional facilities, there may be factors that affect an individual's ability to feel and imagine safety. This can be particularly true for individuals who use illegal substances, where the circumstances surrounding their procurement and distribution may increase exposure to violence. These experiences can have traumatic effects on both residents and the staff providing support and security. Safety is therefore an essential element of supportive housing design. The following design considerations are informed by the experience of supportive housing operators.

Examples of design strategies for resident and staff safety

Provide passive oversight. Arrange common areas, entrances, and circulation spaces to support natural visibility and passive supervision by residents and staff.

Create active spaces near entrances. Locate welcoming, frequently used spaces near entrances where residents and staff naturally gather. Community presence and a sense of ownership can be an important part of building safety.

Control access. Use controlled entry points, such as secure main entrances and mag-locks at secondary exits, while ensuring safe and accessible emergency egress. Consider restricting access by floor to only residents of those units.

Control access to stairwells and elevators. Use controlled access where appropriate, with staff override capabilities and provisions for safe emergency egress.

Provide controlled visitor entry. Use an intercom system for individual units while requiring visitors to be admitted at the main entrance rather than providing remote access from the unit.

Use CCTV strategically and discreetly. Closed-circuit television (CCTV) — a network of private security cameras — should support safety without making the building feel like an institution. Prioritize open layouts and clear sightlines to keep camera counts low. Where cameras are needed, integrate them discreetly into trim or lighting so residents feel safe rather than monitored.

Provide adequate exterior lighting. Use well-designed perimeter and entrance lighting to improve visibility and safety while avoiding excessive glare.

Provide multiple exit routes from support spaces. Where appropriate, provide two exits from staff and support areas so staff can leave safely if one route is blocked.

Provide emergency communication systems. Install panic buttons in staff offices and support rooms and provide alarms in public washrooms so assistance can be requested when needed.

Incorporate tamper-resistant and and harm-reducing design. Consider building features and hardware that reduce opportunities for self-harm while maintaining a welcoming, residential environment. This may include anti-ligature fixtures and hardware, as well as appropriate window opening restrictors or safety latches on upper-storey windows to reduce the risk of serious injury or harm, while maintaining ventilation and meeting applicable emergency egress and building-code requirements.

Design suite doors for durability and emergency entry. Staff and first responders must be able to enter a suite quickly during an emergency. An inward-swinging door can be blocked by a person who has fallen behind it, or barricaded. Where corridor widths and code permit, consider outward-swinging suite doors. However, also consider the potential trip hazard/obstruction of suite doors that open into shared hallways.

Select windows and glazing for safety. Provide tamper-resistant window opening limiters, particularly above the ground floor, to prevent falls and objects being thrown. Consider laminated or



Fred Victor Mission,WW+P Architects and Planners. Toronto ON, 2013
Photo Credit: WW+P

impact-resistant glazing, or security flm, at gr ound-foor windows, entrance glazing, and high-use common areas. At ground-foor windows, consider sightlines and screening that protect resident privacy and limit items being passed into the building outside of the main entrance.

Monitor indoor air quality. Incorporate indoor air quality (IAQ) monitoring and appropriate ventilation strategies to support resident and staff health and well-being.

Reduce cooking-related risks. Consider induction cooking as opposed to traditional electric or gas stoves to reduce burn and fr e risks, including automatic shut-off features, while also supporting improved indoor air quality.

Plan for smoking and vaping. Smoking rates are high among people who have experienced homelessness. Unrealistic or unenforced policies can push smoking into suites, stairwells, and hallways, increasing fr e risk, staff exposure to second-hand smoke, and confict between tenants. Pr ovide a convenient, comfortable outdoor smoking area; reduce smoke transfer between suites and into common areas; and choose detection systems and fnishes suited to how the building will be used. Develop the smoking policy and building design in line with the operator's approach to harm reduction.

Complete a safety assessment during design and construction. Conduct safety assessments throughout the design and construction process to identify and address potential risks.[17]

Fire Safety

Fire safety requires particular attention in supportive housing. Smoking, cooking, candles and open fames, hoar ding, and charging e-bikes and scooters can all increase fr e risk, and some residents may need assistance or prompting to evacuate. At the same time, frequent false alarms disrupt residents and can be distressing for people who have experienced trauma. They also diminish trust in the alarm system and may result in municipal false-alarm charges. Design fr e and life-safety systems for the resident population and operating model, coordinate them with access control and security systems, and review them early with a code consultant and the local fr e department. Provide full sprinkler coverage throughout the building including the suites. Use tamper resistant, recessed or concealed heads or protective guards in the suites and common areas to prevent damage and fooding.

Limit sprinkler water damage with clearly marked staff-accessible control valves by foor or zone. Send waterfow alarms to the staf f offce for immediate r esponse to sprinkler activation.

Put the fr e alarm annunciator at (or visible from) the main staff offce at the entrance so that staff can see the alarms and can meet the responders.

Make sure that the maglocks and door hold devices release automatically during a fr e alarm to allow for safe evacuation.

Contain fr e with separations between the suites and corridors and with self-closing fr e rated unit entry doors.

Provide a dedicated, ventilated, sprinklered room for e-bike and e-scooter storage and charging (with direct exterior access where possible).

Think about evacuation requirements when you are deciding on accessible and higher support suites. A suite on a lower foor close to an exit may be the better option. Pr ovide areas of refuge, emergency lighting and visual and audible alarms.

Promote Community + Social Connection



Creating opportunities for community and social connection is central to supportive housing's ability to provide a healing and supportive environment. Thoughtful design can create welcoming spaces that encourage connection, belonging, and community while giving residents choice in how and when they engage with others. The built environment should support a range of social experiences, from informal interactions and shared activities to quieter, more private opportunities for connection.

Examples of design strategies that promote social connection

Provide a range of social spaces. Offer spaces at different scales, from larger gathering areas to smaller, quieter spaces, allowing residents to choose the level of social interaction that feels comfortable. This balance between community and privacy is particularly important in supportive housing.

Create flexible, adaptable spaces. Use adjustable lighting and fexible fur niture to support different activities, group sizes, and programming.

Make common spaces easy to find and access.

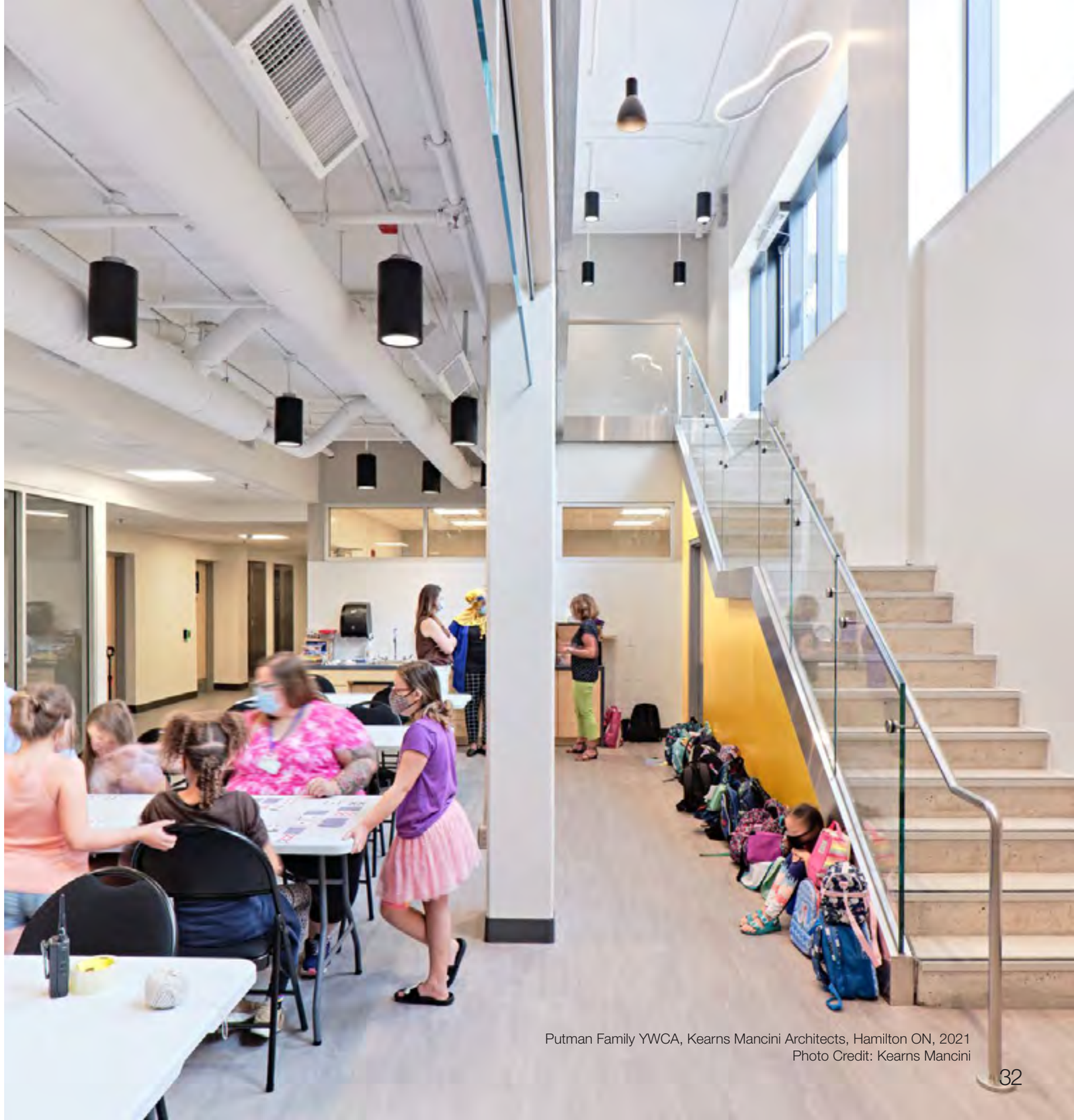
Locate social spaces along well-used circulation routes and make them visually accessible and inviting. Location, wayfnding, visibility, and physical access can infuence whether common spaces ar e used.

Provide outdoor communal space. Where possible, provide shared outdoor spaces such as courtyards or backyards. Enclosed or protected spaces can offer opportunities for connection while providing privacy and a greater sense of security.

Include gardening opportunities. Provide space for resident gardening where feasible. Gardening can foster social connections while supporting access to fresh food and helping address food insecurity during the growing season.

Create opportunities to cook and eat together. Provide communal kitchens and dining areas where residents can prepare and share meals, supporting social connections and community-building.

Provide comfortable, multipurpose lounges. Include welcoming spaces with a mix of seating, tables, and amenities such as a television to support informal gathering, relaxation, and programming.



Putman Family YWCA, Kearns Mancini Architects, Hamilton ON, 2021
Photo Credit: Kearns Mancini



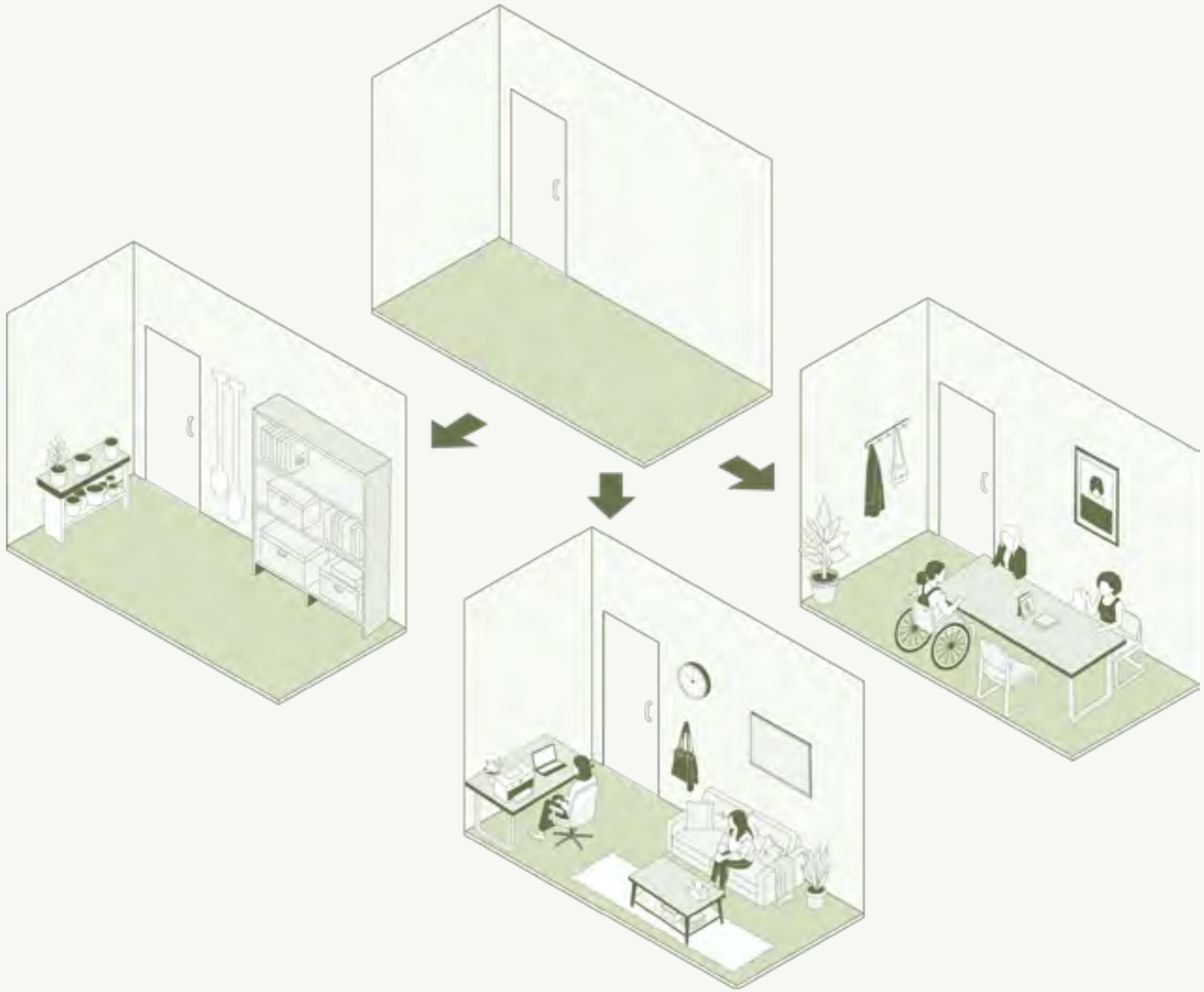
Colonia Paz Affordable Housing, Pinnacle Architecture, Lebanon ORE, 2022
Photo Credit: Pinnacle

Create opportunities for resident participation and ownership. Provide spaces where residents can organize activities, contribute to the community, or shape how shared spaces are used, supporting resident empowerment and voice.

Connect the building to the surrounding community. Integrate the building both physically and operationally. Physically, ensure safe, direct sidewalk access to public transit, parks, and local shops. Operationally, partner with local neighbourhood groups, libraries, or health providers to share programming and host joint events, helping residents stay connected to the broader neighborhood.

Creating opportunities for community and social connection is central to supportive housing's ability to provide a healing and supportive environment.

Flexibility + Adaptability



Supportive housing needs to respond to changing resident needs, service models, and operational requirements over time. Strategic, low-cost decisions made early in the planning and design process can make future adaptations simpler and less costly, reducing the need for major renovations or capital expenditures. Flexibility and adaptability should therefore be considered from the outset, allowing spaces, building systems, and units to evolve as needs change. True long-term adaptability also requires environmental foresight by incorporating decarbonization and energy-effciency strategies into early design. Anticipating future electrifcation, emissions r eduction targets, and evolving climate standards ensures the building remains resilient, operational, and cost-effective over its entire lifecycle. The following strategies focus on designing for future adaptation, including the ability to accommodate changing accessibility needs, without requiring signifcant demolition or reconstruction.

Supportive housing is typically classifed as Gr oup C (Residential Occupancy) under the National Building Code, a category that includes most forms of housing. Early in the planning process, teams should consider the potential for future conversion to Group B, Division 3 (B3) Residential Care Occupancy. B3 occupancies are intended for care facilities where residents may require varying degrees of supervision or assistance and may not be able to evacuate independently during an emergency.

Considering this possibility at the outset can support residents' ability to age in place and accommodate changing care needs over time. Transitioning to a B3 occupancy can have signifcant implications for building design, including r equired sprinkler systems, increased fr e-resistance ratings, larger rooms to accommodate treatment and care activities, enhanced mechanical systems, wider doors and corridors, appropriately sized elevators, and additional space to support the transfer and movement of residents.
The objective is not necessarily to design a long-term care facility from the outset, but to make strategic design decisions that allow the building to adapt to higher levels of care in the future without requiring extensive or cost-prohibitive renovations.

Examples of design strategies that allow for flexibility and adaptability

Design for adaptable services and uses. Allow spaces to be converted as operational needs change — for example, designing a storage room that can readily become a support space.

Plan for changing accessibility needs. Incorporate features that allow units to adapt as residents age or their needs change, such as wall blocking for future grab bars, foor drains to facilitate bathroom retrofts, and suf fcient clearances and door widths thr oughout.

Provide flexibility within units. Minimize structural partition walls and, where possible, use removable or adaptable interior and demising walls — the boundary walls separating individual units from each other or from common areas — allowing spaces to be reconfgur ed or units combined without major demolition.

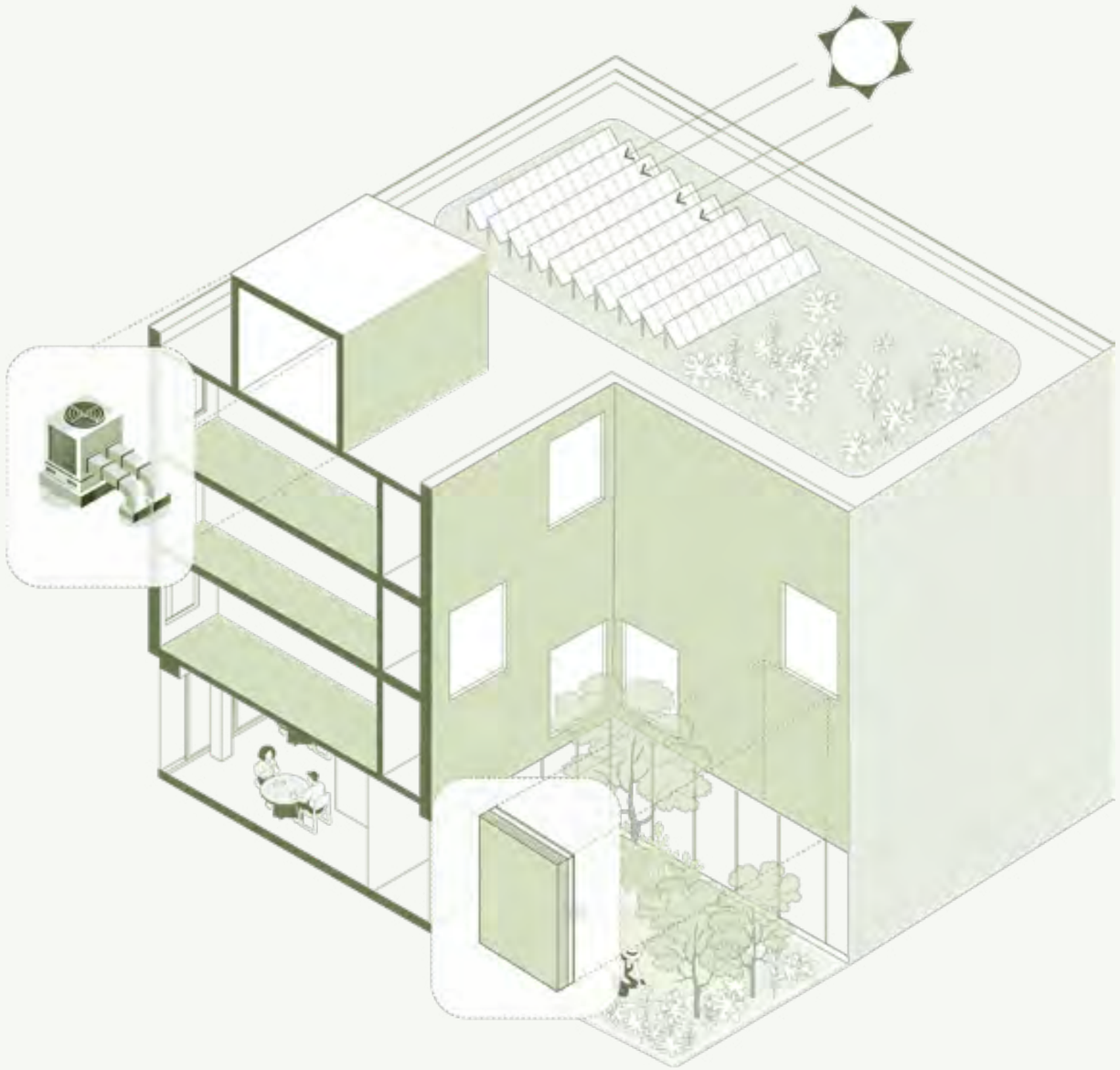
Plan for future building modifications. These future building modifcations may be varied and can include the following:

- Plan mechanical and plumbing risers to accommodate future unit layouts. Provide accessible service cavities and other infrastructure that allows building systems and features to be modifed or upgraded with minimal disruption and cost.
- Design resident rooms/apartments and washrooms so that increasing resident frailty can be accommodated without fundamentally changing the room geometry.
- Futureproof circulation to accommodate transfer of people by bed.
- Design life-safety systems so they can be adapted later or installed early and have a code consultant prepare a future B3 conversion strategy.
- Plan for emergency power.
- Plan for staff spaces and storage (medical records, etc.).



Fred Victor Mission,WW+P Architects and Planners. Toronto ON, 2013
Photo Credit: Fred Victor

Operational Efficiency



Operational effciency is essential to the long-term sustainability and success of supportive housing. Design decisions made during planning and development can have a signifcant impact on ongoing energy use, maintenance requirements, staffng demands, and operating costs. Ef fective design should consider not only upfront capital costs, but also the long-term operational realities of supportive housing, including the durability and servicing requirements of building systems and the needs and behaviours of residents. The following strategies can help create buildings that are effcient to operate, maintain, and manage without compromising resident experience or quality of housing.

Examples of design strategies that improve operational efficiency

Right-size the building. Consider the scale of the building needed to achieve operational economies of scale, such as shared staff, amenity, and building systems, while maintaining a human-scaled environment and ensuring that the size and confguration of the building support r esident well-being and community.

Invest in a high-performance building envelope. This is the most important decision that will impact

the performance of a building. A well-insulated and airtight building envelope can signifcantly reduce the size of equipment to heat and cool the building, thus potentially lowering energy consumption and operating costs. This includes high levels of insulation and high-performance windows that may include triple glazing. Operable windows and heat recovery ventilation will allow for fresh air and could reduce mechanical conditioning needs when they are connected to the mechanical system. Also consider testing the air-tightness of the building envelope with a blower door test.

Select mechanical systems with long-term operations in mind. Mechanical systems will provide the heating, cooling, and fresh air. High-performance mechanical systems can reduce energy consumption and operating costs, but servicing requirements should also be considered. Systems that require frequent in-suite maintenance can create additional operational challenges and costs, particularly where residents have direct access to equipment versus central systems that can be serviced from a mechanical room.

Low flow fixtures. Water use from toilets, faucets, and showers will impact operational costs, with high-effciency options available to r educe these costs. However, effciency measur es should be evaluated in the context of resident needs and building operations — for example, plumbing fxtur es should balance water conservation with durability and resistance to clogging.

Standardize where possible. Use consistent unit layouts, fxtur es, fnishes, and building components to simplify maintenance, repairs, replacement, and staff familiarity.

Design for easy maintenance. Select durable, readily available materials and systems that are easy to access, repair, clean, and replace, minimizing disruption to residents and ongoing operating costs.

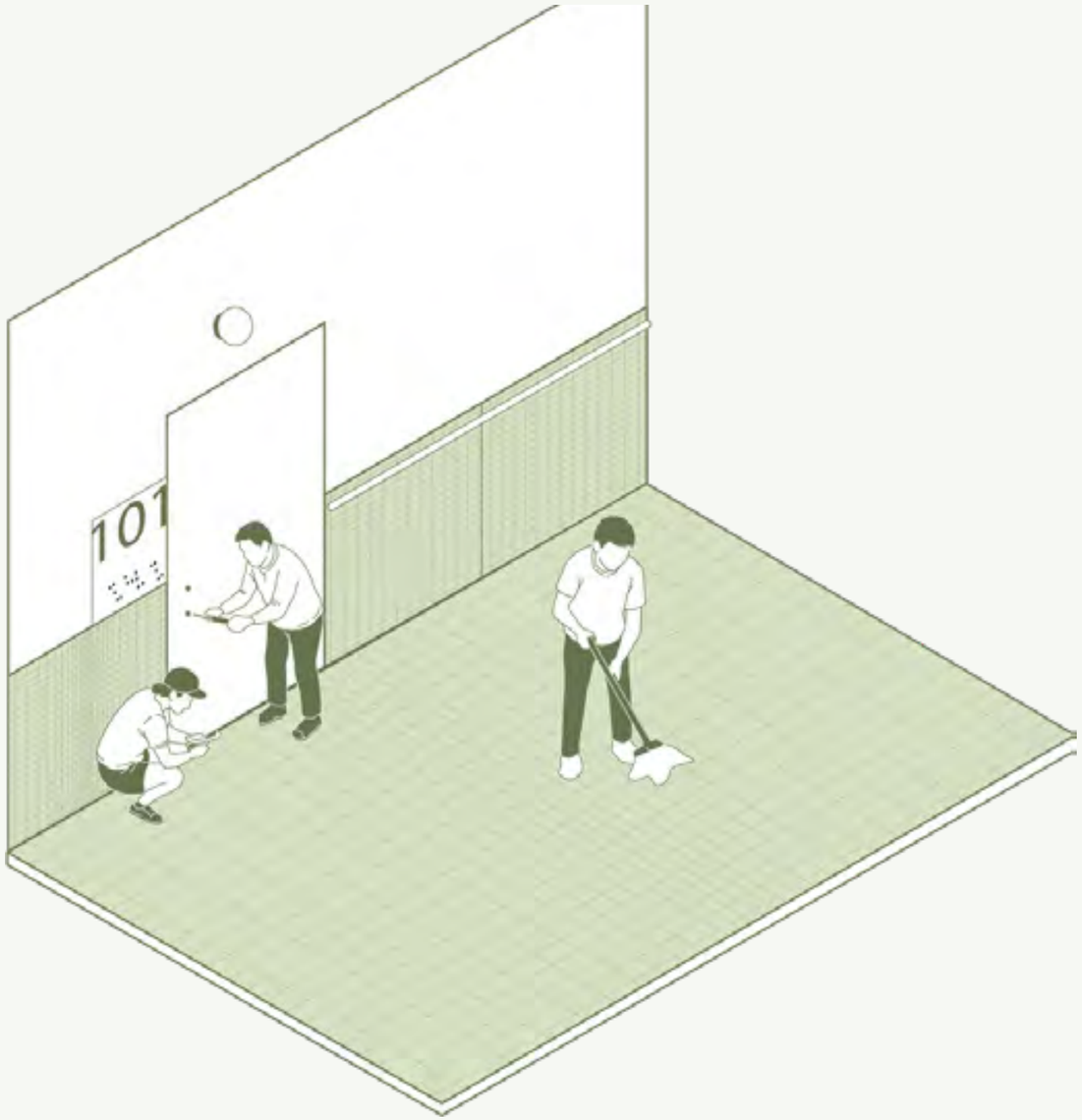
Consider staffing and service efficiency. Locate staff, support, storage, and amenity spaces strategically to reduce unnecessary travel and support effcient service delivery , while maintaining resident privacy and a home-like environment.

Balance durability, maintenance, and replacement costs. Consider the full life-cycle cost of materials, fxtur es, and building systems rather than focusing only on upfront costs. More durable options may have higher initial costs but can reduce repairs, replacements, and staff intervention over time. Where replacement is more practical, select components that are readily available, easy to access, and cost-effective to replace.



1120 Ossington Supporting Housing, St Clare's Housing, Smart density & McCallum Sather, Toronto ON, 2025
Photo Credit: Liron Weissman

Durability



Durability is particularly important in supportive housing, where building elements and fnishes may experience intensive use, frequent cleaning, and occasional damage or misuse. Thoughtful design and material selection can reduce maintenance, repair, and replacement costs while minimizing disruption to residents. Durable materials should also contribute to a welcoming, dignifed environment rather than feeling institutional or overly utilitarian. The following strategies focus on balancing long-term performance, ease of repair and replacement, and resident experience.

Examples of strategic durability

Balance durability with replaceability. Identify which building elements should be highly durable and which should be designed for easy, economical replacement. For frequently replaced items — such as doors, windows, locks, toilets, sinks, vanities, and kitchen components — select readily available, cost-effective products that can be easily sourced and replaced.

Select durable, cleanable finishes. Choose materials and fnishes that r esist staining and wear, are easy to clean, and can be repaired when damaged. Use washable, higher-sheen paints rather than fat fnishes, while selecting colours and materials that maintain a warm, residential feel.

Prioritize durable flooring. Select fooring that can withstand heavy use, is easy to clean, pr ovides appropriate slip resistance, and will not require frequent replacement. Consider lifecycle costs, as a higher upfront investment in durable fooring can r educe long-term maintenance and replacement costs.

Protect high-impact areas. Use corner guards and other protective measures in high-traffc areas and accessible units, particularly where larger mobility devices may increase the risk of wall damage.

Design building systems for easy maintenance. Select reliable, readily serviceable windows, doors, locks, and mechanical systems. Where appropriate, provide secure access to components such as electrical panels while ensuring staff can safely perform routine resets and maintenance. For doors, consider kick and edge protection, commercial-grade closers and locks, and hardware that resists door propping and can be quickly re-keyed or re-credentialed. Electronic or fob-based suite access can reduce the cost of lost keys and re-keying.

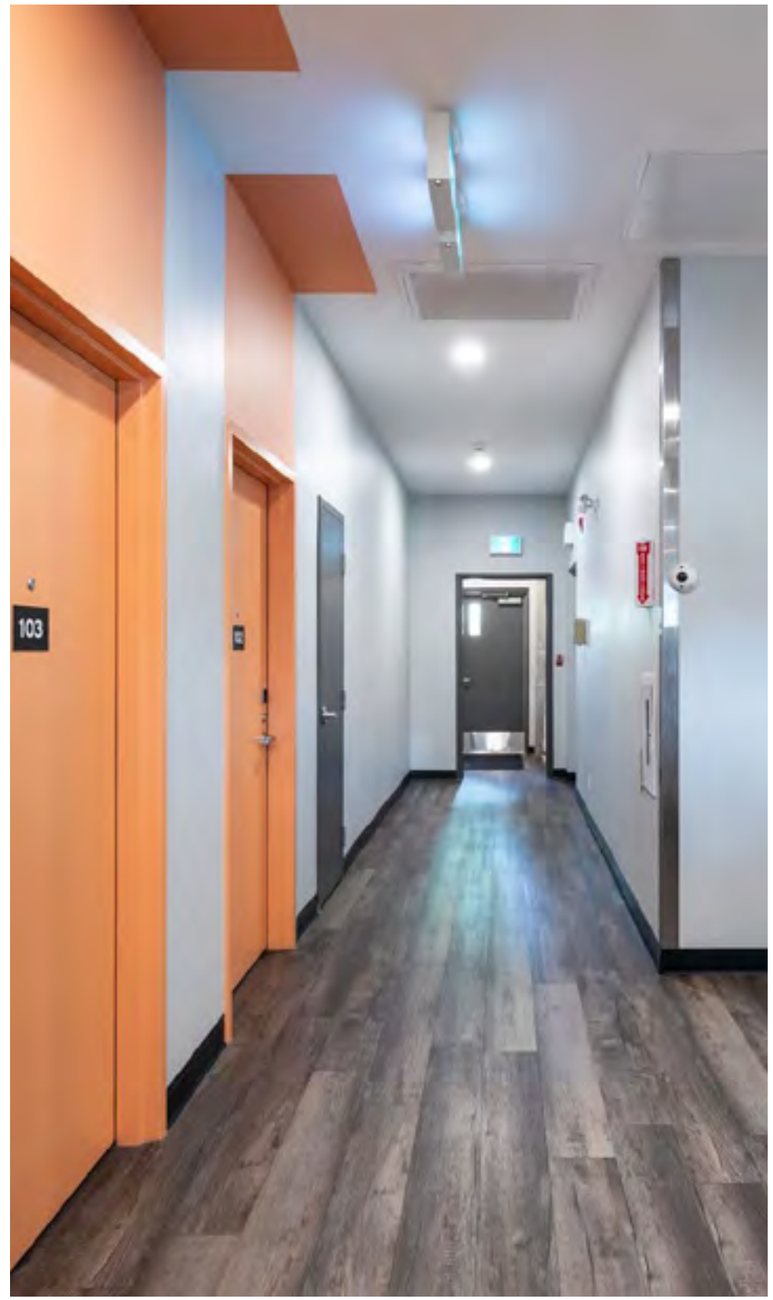
Prevent water damage. Provide properly sloped bathroom foor drains, appr opriate thresholds, and sealed plumbing fxtur es to contain water and reduce the risk of damage to surrounding spaces and units.

Design bathrooms for long-term use. Provide suffciently large shower stalls to accommodate bath chairs and future mobility needs, including the potential installation of grab bars.

Consider the lifecycle cost, not just the upfront cost. Evaluate materials and systems based on their expected lifespan, maintenance requirements, replacement costs, and disruption to residents. A higher-quality material may have a higher upfront cost but provide better long-term value.

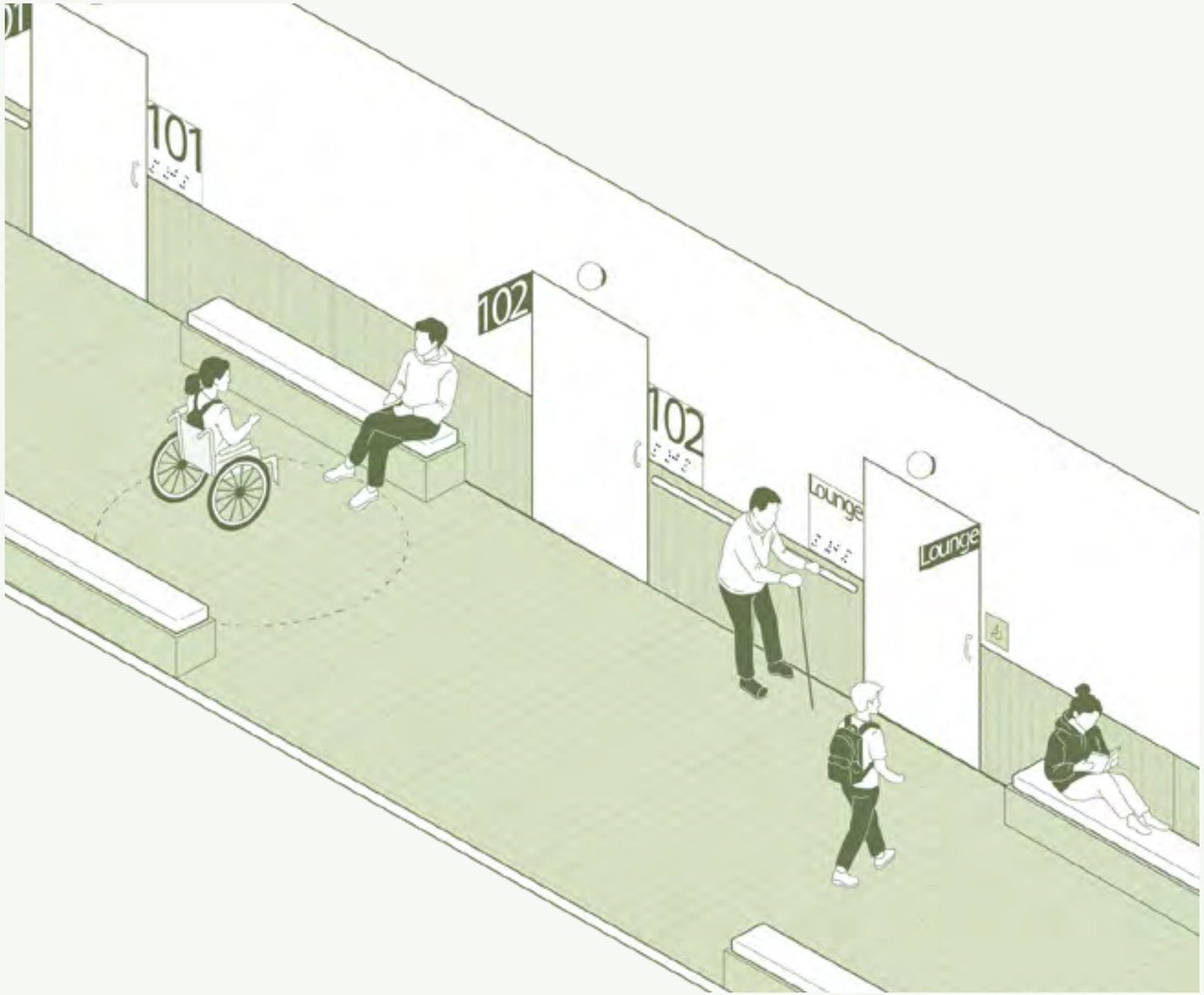
Design for repair and replacement with minimal resident disruption. Consider how damaged components can be accessed, repaired, or replaced without requiring major demolition or temporarily displacing residents. This is particularly important for fooring, plumbing fxtur es, doors, and other high-use elements.

Plan for pest management and cleaning. Select fnishes, fur nishings, and construction details that are easy to clean and inspect and that minimize places where pests, moisture, or dirt can accumulate. This is especially relevant in supportive housing, where bed bugs and other pests can create signifcant operational and fnancial impacts.



Unity Manor Supportive Housing, George Spady Society & Homeward Trust, GEC Architecture, Edmonton AB, 2022
Photo Credit: GEC

Accessibility



The accessibility requirements for a new building are determined by local building codes and municipal or regional policies. Different funding sources may have additional accessibility requirements that exceed those of the jurisdiction. In addition, the accessibility needs of a particular supportive housing organization's resident group may differ from or exceed funding or jurisdictional requirements.

Whether driven by funding requirements or resident needs, supportive housing tends to have higher levels of accessibility than other types of housing. This often results in larger spaces for a given use. As a result, compared to a typical multi-unit residential building of the same size, a supportive housing building may deliver fewer units and have lower overall effciency.
Funding and fnancing parameters for supportive housing should recognize this reduced effciency relative to other housing types and incorporate it into project performance expectations and targets.

Additional guidance should be reviewed alongside applicable building codes, municipal accessibility standards, and funding requirements. Resources such as CMHC's Universal Design Guide, CSA/ASC B652:23 Accessible Dwellings, the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certifcation (RHF AC) resources, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) can provide additional guidance and best

practices for creating more inclusive and accessible housing. These resources should be used to inform design beyond minimum regulatory requirements, with the specifc r equirements of the project, jurisdiction, and resident population considered.

Examples of design for accessibility beyond typical jurisdictional or building code requirements

Provide accessible, flush transitions. Use fush thresholds at balconies and showers to reduce barriers for mobility devices.

Provide additional manoeuvering space. Consider larger turning radii and clearances to accommodate power wheelchairs, scooters, and other mobility devices.

Provide accessible and comfortable outdoor spaces. Incorporate raised planters, smooth and accessible paths, shaded seating, and weather protection to support a range of mobility and sensory needs.

Provide redundant vertical circulation. Where housing is located on more than one foor, consider providing two elevators. Elevator outages can have a signifcant impact on r esidents when an elevator is the only means of convenient access to upper foors, and r eplacement parts may take weeks to arrive.

Provide automatic door operators. Install automatic door openers at amenity spaces, offces, and other frequently used common areas.



Cornerstone Suites, Indwell, Mississauga ON, 2024.
Photo Credit: Industryus, Tim Ridout



Cornerstone Suites, Indwell, Mississauga ON, 2024.
Photo Credit: Industryus, Tim Ridout

Use accessible hardware and controls. Provide lever handles on interior doors and locate light switches and receptacles at accessible heights and away from inside corners.

Support accessible kitchens and workspaces. Consider countertop extensions or adjustable elements that can accommodate residents with different mobility needs.

Incorporate sensory accessibility. Provide visual and audible accessibility features throughout the building, including strobe-equipped fr e alarms, Braille where appropriate, and design considerations for residents with low vision or hearing.

Provide rest points. Include seating or other opportunities to rest along long corridors and near elevators.

Design for a range of abilities. Consider physical, sensory, and cognitive accessibility throughout the building, using clear visual cues, colour contrast, intuitive controls, and a combination of visual, audible, and tactile information to support independent use.

Economic Efficiency

While all of the above guidelines should ideally reduce costs over the long term in terms of a project's longevity and effcacy, real-world funding constraints often force housing providers to consider short-term costs and tradeoffs. For instance, two elevators may provide long-term redundancy while also increasing construction and maintenance costs prohibitively.

This toolkit reinforces the premise that supportive housing requires upfront investments in durable fnishes and infrastructur e that will reduce ongoing maintenance and repairs. This ensures that predominantly non-proft, charitable supportive housing operators ar e not burdened with growing state of good repair liabilities[18], and prevents housing from becoming substandard. Building for longevity protects the public investment being made so that the housing continues to perform and provide an environment of dignity, healing, and recovery for decades.



Fiife House,WW+P Architects and Planners, Toronto ON, 2009
Photo Credit: WW+P

PROJECT FRAMEWORK

The Project Framework section outlines the key factors and decisions that shape a supportive housing project, from the earliest stages of planning through to delivery. It provides guidance on site selection, site types, funding, procurement, and delivery model selection, recognizing that these decisions are interconnected and can significantly influence the project's feasibility and viability, as well as its design, cost, timeline, and long-term operation. Together, these factors establish the foundation for moving a project forward and aligning its objectives with the needs of residents, operators, funders, and communities.

Site Selection

Site selection is the process of identifying and evaluating potential locations for a supportive housing project and determining which site is the best overall ft. It involves looking beyond whether a property is available or affordable to consider its location, physical characteristics, planning requirements, development potential, cost, and ability to meet the needs of future residents and support services. Site selection is one of the earliest and most important decisions in a supportive housing project. The site can infuence whether a pr oject is feasible, what can be built, how many and what types of homes can be provided, how effciently the building can be designed, how much it will cost, and how easily residents can access the services, amenities, and connections they need. Investing time in site selection early can help identify opportunities and challenges, reduce costly surprises, and set the project up for success.

The size, location, confguration, and permitted development rights of a site will infuence what can be built, the potential number and types of units, and how effciently the building can be designed to deliver the desired supportive housing model. Permitted development rights are the rules that determine what can legally be built on a property. These rules are established through the local land-use planning and zoning framework. An offcial land-use plan sets out wher e different types of housing and other uses are permitted, while zoning regulations provide more detailed requirements, including the types of buildings that can be developed, building size and height, where buildings can be located on a site, and the number of units or total foor ar ea that may be permitted. Understanding these requirements early is important because a site that appears suitable or affordable may not be able to accommodate the type or scale of supportive housing being considered.

Understanding the opportunities and challenges of different scenarios can help ensure that the spatial and operational needs of supportive housing are integrated into early site planning.



Fred Victor Mission,WW+P Architects and Planners. Toronto ON, 2013
Photo Credit: WW+P

Local Land-Use Planning and Zoning Framework

Understanding what type and size of development is permitted in the Offcial Plan and local zoning regulations is a key frst step. These ar e known as the “as-of-right” permissions. The Offcial Plan is the higher-order policy that may support intensifcation that is not yet refected in the zoning bylaw . If there is local support for more housing that is not yet refected in either policy , an Offcial Plan and/or Zoning Bylaw amendment may be required.

Supportive housing may not be listed in the zoning bylaw but its use may fall under group homes, residential care facilities, or rooming houses.

Where the proposed development is a small deviation from the zoning, a variance may be needed that requires approvals a typically takes a few months. Where the proposed development has a larger deviation from the Offcial Plan and zoning, approvals may take years to secure.

Even where zoning bylaws do not permit certain development as-of-right, there may be higher order policy and planning documents that are supportive. Where a proposed building does not comply in terms of use (i.e. supportive housing) or in terms of building massing (e.g. setbacks, height, density), planning approvals will need to be secured through the local Authority Having Jurisdiction (e.g. the Planning & Housing Committee of Toronto at the municipal level or the Ontario Land Tribunal provincially).

Site Servicing

A site also needs to be assessed for the availability and capacity of essential services and infrastructure. These can include water, sanitary and storm sewers, electricity, gas, telecommunications, and transportation access. Understanding what services are already available on or near the site, where they are located, and whether they have suffcient capacity to support th proposed development can help identify potential costs and constraints early.

The ease and cost of connecting a site to existing services can vary signifcantly. A site that appear suitable based on its size and location may require signifcant infrastructur e upgrades or extension before it can be developed. These costs can affect the overall feasibility of the project and should be considered alongside the purchase price and other development costs. Early discussions with the municipality and relevant utility or service providers can help determine whether the site can be serviced and identify any major issues that may need to be addressed.

Neighbouring Context

The surrounding neighbourhood is an important consideration when selecting a site for supportive housing. Consider access to transit, community services, health care, schools, employment, parks shops, and other amenities that residents may use, as well as the existing character and context of the neighbourhood.

Supportive housing can sometimes face stigma and misconceptions, which may lead to concerns or opposition from nearby residents, businesses, or community members. Understanding the local context early can help identify potential concerns and inform an appropriate engagement approach Community opposition should not, on its own, be a reason to exclude a site, but it is important to anticipate and plan for potential challenges during the approvals and development process.

Planning Approvals

When selecting or assessing a new site for supportive housing, engage a planning consultant in the earliest phases to review the planning context and identify possible approval pathways. The process for planning approvals can have a major impact on both the project timeline and cost.

There is a range of site types that could be identifed for new supportive housing. Understanding the opportunities and challenges of different scenarios can help ensure that the spatial and operational needs of supportive housing are integrated into early site planning.

Project Framework



Sutton Youth Services, York Region Housing, WW+P Architects and Planners. Toronto ON, 2012
Photo Credit: Michael Muraz



Putman Family YWCA, Kearns Mancini Architects, Hamilton ON, 2021
Photo Credit: Kearns Mancini

Site Types

Standalone sites. Sites like Dunn House, 11 Brock, and Edmond Place in Toronto are entities not connected to other developments. This type of supportive housing development may include intensification of existing sites where space permits.

Standalone building that is part of a larger development site. When a standalone building is part of a larger development site, there are several important questions to ask. Are there commonly owned or commonly operated exterior spaces? Clear operational responsibilities should be established with the larger development. Do residents have access to an outdoor space that feels safe and secure? Are there rental/lease income opportunities that would be mutually beneficial (e.g. lease to a municipal library, health hub, hairdresser, or social purpose enterprise opportunities)?

Dedicated area within a larger building - i.e. a wing or floor(s). There are some spaces that have dedicated areas within a larger building already. These include sites like Pilot Place (comprising two floors in a cooperative housing building) and a supportive housing space on Yonge Street. In some instances, residents of supportive housing within a larger building could have a separate entrance, depending on what else is located in the building. Support spaces should also be separate, with the possibility of common spaces being shared between the supportive housing and the rest of the building. Acoustic separation should be considered with differing needs of higher- and lower-support

housing. Regarding food risk: if the building does not have working foor drains, higher -support housing should be located on the lower foors to r educe the risk of water/liquid seeping downwards throughout the building.

Retrofit of existing building. There are several considerations when assessing the suitability of a building retroft for use as supportive housing. Depending on the existing building, it will be easier or more diffcult to modify. There are sustainability and cost benefts to achieve thr ough adaptive reuse of existing architecture.

- Existing and permitted uses
- Fire suppression - sprinklers in the units or ease of installation
- Fire exits
- Interior or exterior retroft, or both
- Structural integrity
- Age, typology, massing
- Courtyard, backyard, or even the potential of a rooftop amenity space
- Access, staging
- Ability to keep residents in place, minimize disruption
- Deep energy retroft funding/support availability
- Intensifcation potential
- Mould or other hazards (like lead or asbestos)
- Climate change readiness (like water dispersal in heavy rain events)



YWCA Elm,WW+P Architects and Planners. Toronto ON, 2012
Photo Credit: WW+P

Funding

Availability of funding for new supportive housing varies by jurisdiction and type of supportive housing, with the funding landscape often changing due to shifts in government commitments. All projects will require, at a minimum, the following types of funding associated with different phases of a project, from pre-construction to post-occupancy:

- Seed and/or pre-development funding (in Toronto, the Community Housing Pre-development Fund)[1]
- Capital funding (through provincial programs such as the Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative (OPHI) and Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative (COCHI) in Ontario,[19] Build Canada Homes (BCH)[20] federally, along with municipal programs)
- Operational funding (often from a variety of sources including municipalities, provinces and territories, foundations, and funders such as the United Way)

Funding sources may be conditional upon meeting certain requirements. This can have a major impact on the design of supportive housing and a project's proforma, and may include:

- Energy savings (relative to a baseline)
- Operational and embodied carbon impacts
- Use of MMC, including prefabrication, mass timber, panelization, etc.
- Accessibility requirements

Considerations

Understanding the relationship between capital funding and operational funding is crucial. Supportive housing buildings are typically owned and operated for the long term and receive signifcant public funding for operations. Though capital and operational funding may typically

Understanding the relationship between capital funding and operational funding is crucial.



Fiife House,WW+P Architects and Planners, Toronto ON, 2009

be secured through different processes, there is a long-term public beneft to incr easing capital expenditure in the development phase in order to reduce operational costs in the long term. Suffcient upfr ont capital to achieve as many of the recommendations outlined in this toolkit as is feasible can signifcantly impr ove the longevity and overall impact of a supportive housing project. That means having both development and operations teams at the table from the outset. Decisions made during capital investment and design can have lasting impacts regarding how successful the building will be in the long term. In order to acquire funding, the operational success of the building must be demonstrated. For all of these reasons, operations should drive many aspects of design including effciency, functionality, materials, etc.

Recommendations

Full life-cycle costing should be incorporated when establishing construction budgets, especially for the following building elements: structure, envelope (exterior walls and roof), mechanical systems, and durability of interior fnishes. A climate change adaptation and r esilience engineering consulting should be part of any project if the individual consultants are not familiar with this growing area of expertise.

Larger-scale development helps to reduce per-unit cost. The smaller the scale, the more challenging operational funding for high-support housing will be. In some high-support housing, at least two staff are required 24/7, and a larger scale helps with this. At a large enough scale, supportive housing can access higher levels of operational funding needed for more complex residents. Multiple, separate entrances can avoid the complicating factor of too many residents with complex needs crowding common spaces or elevators.

Ongoing state of good repair and operating costs present further challenges that can be addressed with durable fnishes and models of pr eventative and ongoing maintenance. Short-term savings can often translate to long-term costs for the operator.

Procurement and Delivery Model

Developing supportive housing involves many people, organizations, and types of work, from planning and design through construction or renovation, commissioning, and operations. Project costs are broadly divided into soft costs and hard costs. Soft costs include the professional services and other expenses needed to plan, design, approve, fnance, and manage the pr oject, such as architects, engineers, planners, project managers, and legal and fnancial advisors. Har d costs are the costs of physically constructing or renovating the building and site, including labour, materials, and equipment.

The way an organization selects and contracts these professionals and construction partners is known as the project delivery model. It determines who is responsible for different aspects of the project, how decisions are made, when team members become involved, how risks are allocated, and how the owner works with the design and construction team. How you assemble this team is one of the most important factors affecting project risk and the successful achievement of your requirements. The right approach will depend on the project, your organization's capacity, funding requirements, risk tolerance, and desired level of involvement.

When choosing a delivery model and selection process, some criteria may include:

Conditions of funders: Funding agreements may include requirements related to procurement, eligible costs, timelines, reporting, or how project partners are selected. These requirements can infuence which delivery models ar e possible.

Alignment with organizational values and goals: The delivery model should align with your organization's approach to collaboration, accountability, equity, resident-centred design, and decision-making, as well as its internal policies and processes.

Transparency: Consider how transparent the selection and decision-making process needs to be, particularly where public funding is involved. Some delivery models and procurement approaches provide more opportunities for open competition and clear evaluation.



Beaverton Heights, Durham Region & Blue Door, Montgomery Sisam Architects, Beaverton ON, 2024
Photo Credit: MSA



Evangel Hall,WW+P Architects and Planners, Toronto ON, 2006
Photo Credit: Ben Rahn/A-Frame

Risk tolerance: Different delivery models allocate risks differently between the owner, designer, contractor, and other partners. Consider which risks your organization is prepared and equipped to manage and which it would prefer to transfer to another party.

Level of involvement: Consider how closely your organization wants to be involved in design, procurement, construction, and decision-making, as well as the time and capacity it has available to take on these responsibilities.

Construction method and design complexity: The construction approach — including conventional construction, modular, or other off-site components — and the complexity of the design can infuence which delivery model is most appr opriate. Projects with innovative or complex construction methods may beneft fr om involving the builder earlier in the design process.

Schedule requirements: If the project has an aggressive timeline, consider delivery models that allow design and construction activities to overlap or bring key project partners to the table earlier. The procurement and approvals process should also be factored into the overall schedule.

Community and resident involvement: Consider how and when residents and community members will participate in the design process. A model that supports early and ongoing collaboration may be better suited to projects where resident input is a signifcant priority.

Availability of upfront pre-construction funding: Some delivery models require signifcant investment in design, consultants, and other pre-construction activities before construction funding is secured. Confrm that suf fcient funding is available to advance the pr oject to the required stage.

Internal skills and capacity: Consider the development, project management, procurement, fnancial, and technical expertise available within your organization. A model that r equires signifcant owner oversight may not be appropriate if the organization does not have the capacity to provide it.

Below are common contractual and delivery models from least transparent/least collaborative/highest risk at the top of the list to most collaborative/ transparent/highest emphasis on risk mitigation and accountability at the bottom.

- Design-Bid-Build (DBB)
- Design-Build (DB)
- Construction Management (CM)
- Progressive Design Build (PDB) (with CM, with Designer)
- Integrated Project Delivery (IPD)

Design-Bid-Build

The Design-Bid-Build (DBB) delivery model is the traditional method for project delivery, in which the agency or owner contracts with separate entities for the design and construction of a project. Traditional methods of procurement and delivery are models that generally put signifcant risk on the not-for-proft that ar e less familiar with construction and offer low levels of transparency. The DBB process is less compatible with offsite construction and tends to result in lower probability of hitting budget and timeline targets.

Design-Build

The Design-Build (DB) delivery model contracts design and construction services to a single entity. This model has a lower level of transparency and also has a higher risk of budget and timeline



The Station, Indwell, Invizij Architects, St Thomas ON, 2023
Photo Credit: Industryus, Tim Ridout

variances due to client changes during the design phase. Both DB and DBB models tend to be driven by a non-transparent RFP process that focuses on low cost. It may require the supportive housing provider to commit to a single builder with very little information about how they arrived at the price in their RFP as detailed specifcations ar e not available at the time of bid. A portion of the success of DB will rely on the quality of the ‘owners requirements’ provided as part of a RFP. Where the quality, durability, are not made clear at the RFP stage the contractor will need to make assumptions, typically at the lowest cost. Any details open to interpretation are prone to change orders, delays, or outcomes that do not match what the supportive housing developer had in mind.

Construction Management

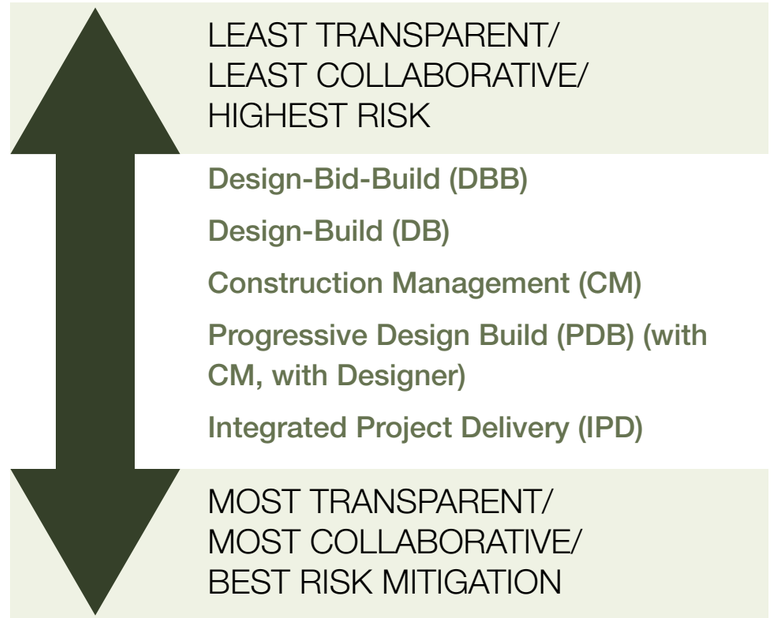
Construction Management (CM) is a modifed version of the DBB model wher e a construction manager is hired to act as an agent to oversee the project from start to fnish while applying pr oject management techniques to planning, design, and construction. Utilizing a CM procurement model fosters deep collaboration between the owner, design team, and builder from early planning through completion. By engaging the Construction Manager during pre-construction, teams can collaboratively evaluate constructability and refne budget estimates, which signifcantly lowers fnancial and schedule risks compar ed to traditional design-bid-build models.

Progressive Design-Build

Progressive Design-Build (PDB) is a collaborative approach between the owner and the contracting partner, beginning from the early stages of a project. Early contractor involvement can help reduce risk for all parties. Additional steps allow the owner and Design-Builder to collaborate and progressively develop a design solution before detailed design and construction begin.[21]

Integrated Project Delivery

Integrated Project Delivery (IPD) seeks to involve all participants through all the phases of design, fabrication, and construction. Unlike the DB model, in which the contractor leads the project, IPD collaboratively involves all key parties, sometimes through a multi-party agreement. This effectively creates a temporary organization in order to realize a project cohesively. IPD involves a fully open book accounting of the project, including a third-party verifcation of the pr oft margins of each key consultant’s cost of doing business and proft. All key parties put their pr oft at shar ed risk based on the success of the project and their collective efforts. This delivery system requires more upfront cost and time, but this is more than made up for in the overall project cost due to the signifcant





Dunn House, City of Toronto, Montgomery Sisam Architects, Toronto ON,

level of upfront risk mitigation and collaboration. The design also benefits from a wider level of expertise and collaboration.

Notes on Modern Methods of Construction

Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) require a high level of collaboration on very early design decisions between the modular manufacturer, the designer, the owner, engineers, and trades such as mechanical and electrical.

Methods for procuring or selecting the design and delivery team will vary depending on the construction contract structure being used. Some options that can be adapted to different contract types include procurement based on price, social procurement, and qualification-based procurement.

When a project is using MMC, it is important that the manufacturer/supplier of the MMC is selected and part of the team at the initial stage of design and feasibility. For most MMC, it is not possible to substitute a different manufacturer after design has begun without significant redesign and cost/timeline consequences so it is important to ensure the selected manufacturer is part of the feasibility test. A ‘MMC Project Integrator’ is a role that is commonly filled by the selected manufacturer or sometimes an independent MMC consultant or expert. The MMC Integrator helps ensure that the off-site constructed elements are properly integrated into the design and vice versa and that the full design team has the information they need to move the project forward.

Offsite construction and MMC can increase the speed of construction but typically requires design decisions to be made much earlier on in the design process. If this is done well it can signifcantly reduce the risk of change orders and clashes during construction that can create costly delays and rework. The greater the level of communication and collaboration upfront, the more effcient and timely the construction process will be.

Mass timber and prefabricated wood products offers real benefts, including lower embodied carbon, compatibility with offsite manufacturing, faster construction, and a warm, residential character however the impact of water damage deserves consideration in supportive housing development. The benefts of this construction material need to be weighed against the building's operating model and resident population and should consider additional mitigation measures.

The common causes of water damage include overfowing sinks, tubs, and toilets, damaged sprinkler heads, and plumbing failures. In concrete buildings, water is more likely to be contained within the suite or foor wher e it starts, and slabs can be dried and returned to service relatively quickly. In wood-frame and mass timber buildings, water can travel through the structure, damage multiple suites, create mould risk, and require more extensive repairs and longer resident displacement.

Requests for Qualifications

Requests for Qualifcations pr oduce a shortlisted selection of frms or entities to interview or vet for a social procurement process, qualifcation r eview, or subsequent RFP. Evaluated qualifcations may include the capacity to deliver on your timeline, willingness to participate in an open-book, transparent process, relevant experience with similar projects, and operational values that align with your organization.

Requests for Interest

Requests for Interest generate a roster of frms, consultants, and trade parties inter ested in partnering on your project. This tool is particularly useful during early planning phases when project details remain preliminary, helping identify value-aligned teams to engage in initial exploratory meetings or interviews.



YWCA Blockline Supportive Housing, Edge Architects, Waterloo ON, 2022
Photo Credit: Element5

Requests for Proposals

Requests for Proposals solicit detailed technical and financial plans from a select group of qualified teams. When requesting full, resource-intensive proposals, project owners should provide honoraria or stipends and restrict the invitation list to a small, shortlisted group of firms.

Canadian Construction Documents Committee (CCDC) contracts are standardized, nationally recognized forms used across Canada to establish legal roles, risk allocations, and responsibilities among owners, design teams, and contractors. Each standard project delivery model relies on a specific CCDC form matched to the owner's management capacity and requirements. While standard in format, these contracts feature a Supplementary Conditions section to customize terms, incorporate specific site requirements, or address unique project needs.

The following table outlines five typical delivery models and the associated CCDC contract documents.

CCDC Documents & Owner Requirements by Delivery Model

Delivery Model	Primary CCDC Contract	Owner Requirements
Design-Bid-Build (DBB)	CCDC 2 – Stipulated Price Contract CCDC 19-001 – Owner Requirements CCDC 19-003 – Schedule	• Complete design drawings & specs before tender • Provide CCDC 19-001 (scope, budget, performance criteria) • Supply site data, utilities, geotechnical reports • Obtain permits before construction starts
Design-Build (DB)	CCDC 14 (2026) – Design-Build Stipulated Price CCDC 15 (2026) – Design-Builder/Consultant Service	• Submit Statement of Requirements (CCDC 19-001) • Provide functional/performance criteria, not detailed design • Designate Owner's Advisor and Payment Certifier • Review design deliverables per contract schedule
Construction Management (CM)	CCDC 5A (2025) – CM Services CCDC 5B (2025) – CM Services & Construction CCDC 17 (2025) – Trade Contractor Contract CCDC 11 – CM Services Only	• Early CM involvement for constructability review • Open book accounting / GMP negotiation • Active decision-making during pre-construction phase • Multiple trade contracts (agency) or single GMP (at-risk)
Progressive Design-Build (PDB)	CCDC 32 (2026) – Progressive Design-Build Contract CCDC 33 (2026) – PDB Consultant Service	• Two-phase: development then execution • Collaborate on concept development (Phase 1) • Optional off-ramp before Final Project Proposal acceptance • No obligation to proceed to construction phase
Integrated Project Delivery (IPD)	CCDC 30 (2025) – IPD Contract CCDC 30-G (2025) – Guidelines	• Multi-party contract (owner, consultant, contractor, key trades) • Shared risk/reward pool (target pricing) • Project Management Team governance • Full financial transparency

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

This section outlines key considerations and potential design recommendations for spaces commonly found in supportive housing projects. The specifc spaces, their size, confguration, and level of pr ovision, will vary based on the resident population, housing and operating model, available services, and local context. These recommendations are intended to support project planning and design, rather than serve as prescriptive requirements, and should be adapted to the needs and context of each project.

Main Entrance

The main entrance includes the building's primary entry, vestibule, and arrival lobby. It provides the frst point of contact between r esidents, visitors, staff, and the surrounding community, and should establish a welcoming, accessible, and dignifed arrival experience. The entrance should be clearly defned and easily identifable fr om the street, with a direct visual connection to nearby offce(s) or staf f areas so that staff can passively monitor activity at the entrance and within the arrival lobby. The design should balance visibility and safety with a welcoming residential character and resident privacy and autonomy.

The design should balance visibility and safety with a welcoming residential character and resident privacy and autonomy.



11 Brock, City of Toronto, WW+P Architects and Planners. Toronto ON, 2024

Key Considerations

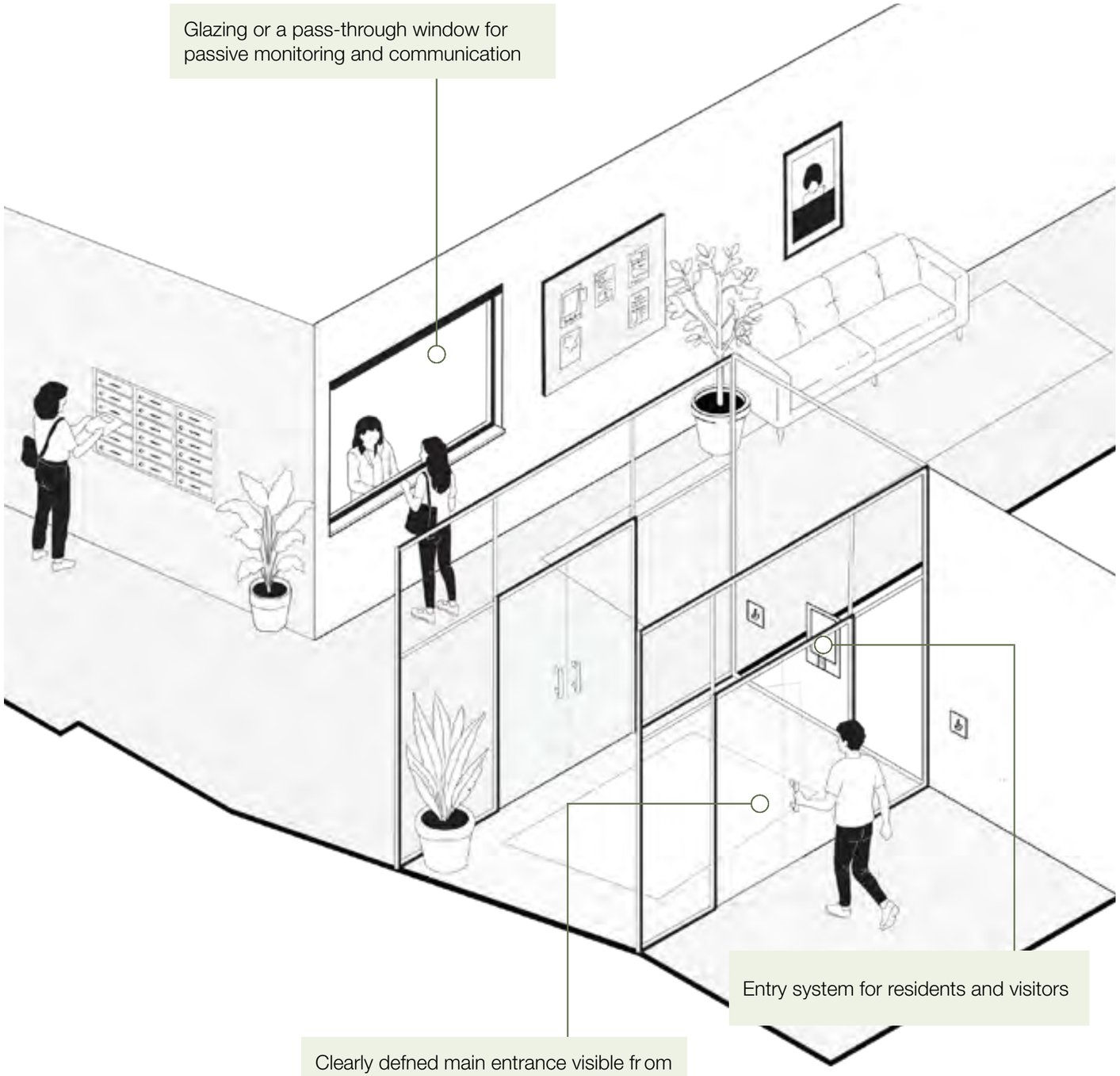
- Arrival experience for residents, visitors, employees, neighbours, and deliveries.
- Ease of use of entrance and entry system.
- Welcoming and residential character balanced with safety and security.
- Physical and visual relationship between the entrance, lobby, and staff offce(s) supports passive monitoring. What are the barriers in place? Are they enough for adequate privacy without being overly protective?
- Suffcient space to accommodate r esidents, visitors, waiting, and movement through the lobby.
- Dedicated consideration of the resident intake process, ensuring move-ins, administrative intake, and initial orientations occur in a private, calm setting away from high-traffc lobby ar eas.
- Durability and visual appearance of the entry spaces.
- Ease of use and responsibility for answering the entry system.



Putman Family YWCA, Kearns Mancini Architects, Hamilton ON, 2021
Photo Credit: Kearns Mancini

Design Recommendations

- Clearly defne the main entrance and arrival sequence from the street into the building.
- Locate staff offce(s) dir ectly adjacent to the lobby, with glazing or a pass-through window for passive monitoring and communication.
- Consider the intake process and the spaces needed, and how that is different from daily residents entering the building.
- Provide a generous, unobstructed lobby for entry, waiting, and manoeuverability. Clear waiting areas allow residents to remain in a safe and controlled environment.
- Position entry controls and intercoms to support both resident independence and staff oversight.
- Integrate security features discreetly to maintain a welcoming, residential character.



Administrative / Office Space

Administrative and offce spaces support housing management and the day-to-day operations of the building. The number and type of spaces should respond to the staffng and operational model for each site.

Key Considerations

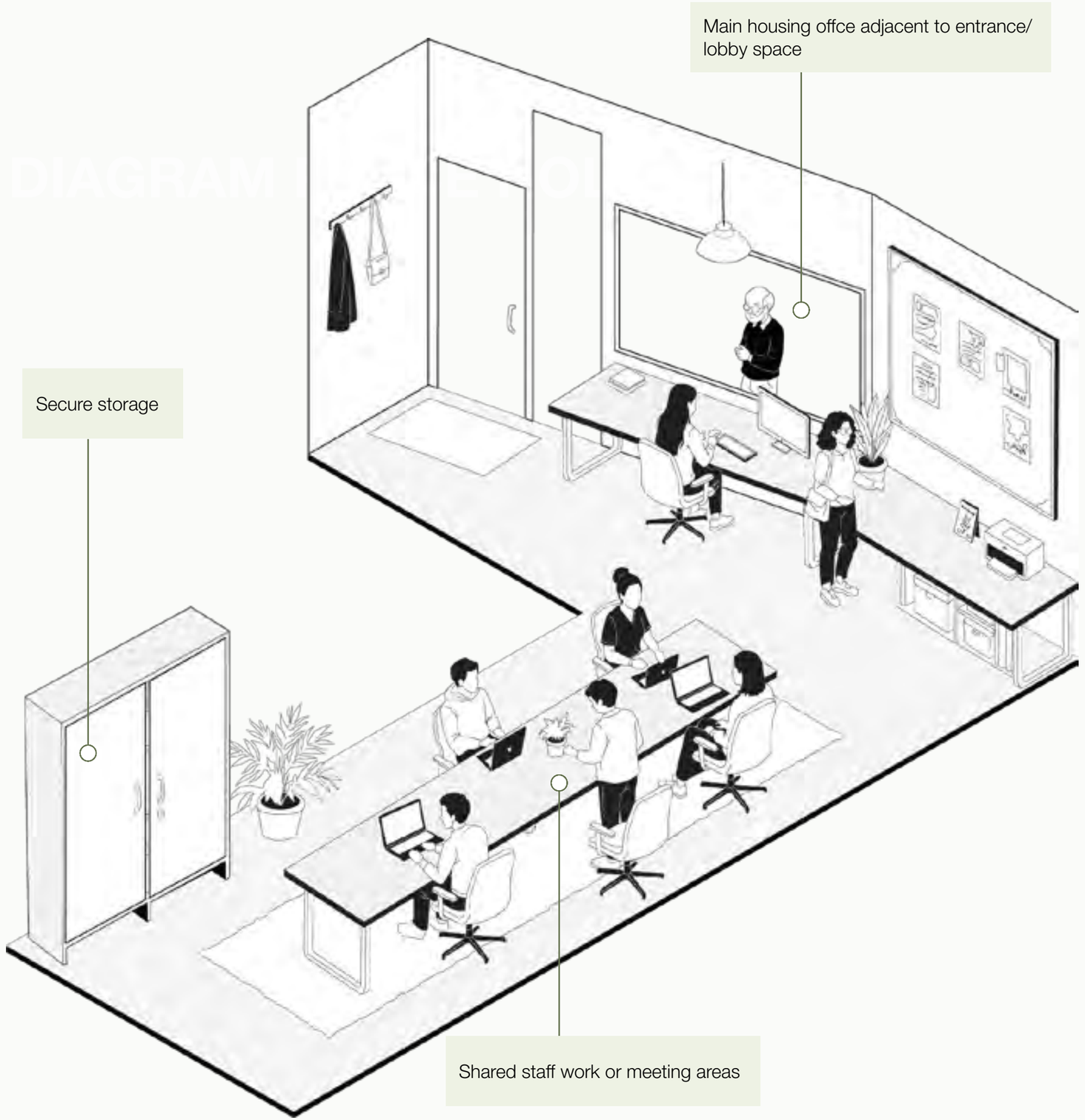
- Staffng and space r equirements will vary by operating model.
- Staff safety and passive oversight of key building areas.
- Privacy and confdentiality for administrative work.
- Secure storage for operational supplies, records, medications, keys, frst aid/harm r eduction supplies, and equipment.
- Security of spaces used for monetary transactions including vouchers.
- Accommodation for partner agencies or visiting staff where required.
- Effcient space for staf f work, coordination, and administrative tasks.
- Provide working and storage space for visiting or partner agency staff where required by the operating model.



YWCA Elm,WW+P Architects and Planners, Toronto ON, 2012
Photo Credit: WW+P

Design Recommendations

- Position the main housing offce adjacent to the entrance/lobby, with direct sightlines to the front door.
- Provide two means of egress from staff offces where required for safety.
- Provide secure, dedicated storage within or adjacent to staff areas for supplies, records, medications, keys, frst aid/harm r eduction supplies, and equipment.
- Provide shared staff work or meeting areas where appropriate to support changing staffng needs.
- Locate staff-only areas behind controlled access where separation from resident and visitor areas is required.
- Provide space for visiting or partner-agency staff where required by the operating model.



Support Rooms

Support rooms provide private, resident-focused spaces for in-house support staff and visiting service providers to meet with residents. They may support a range of services, including case management, counselling, health and wellness services, and meetings with community agencies. Spaces should support confdential, r espectful interactions while maintaining a welcoming, non-clinical environment.

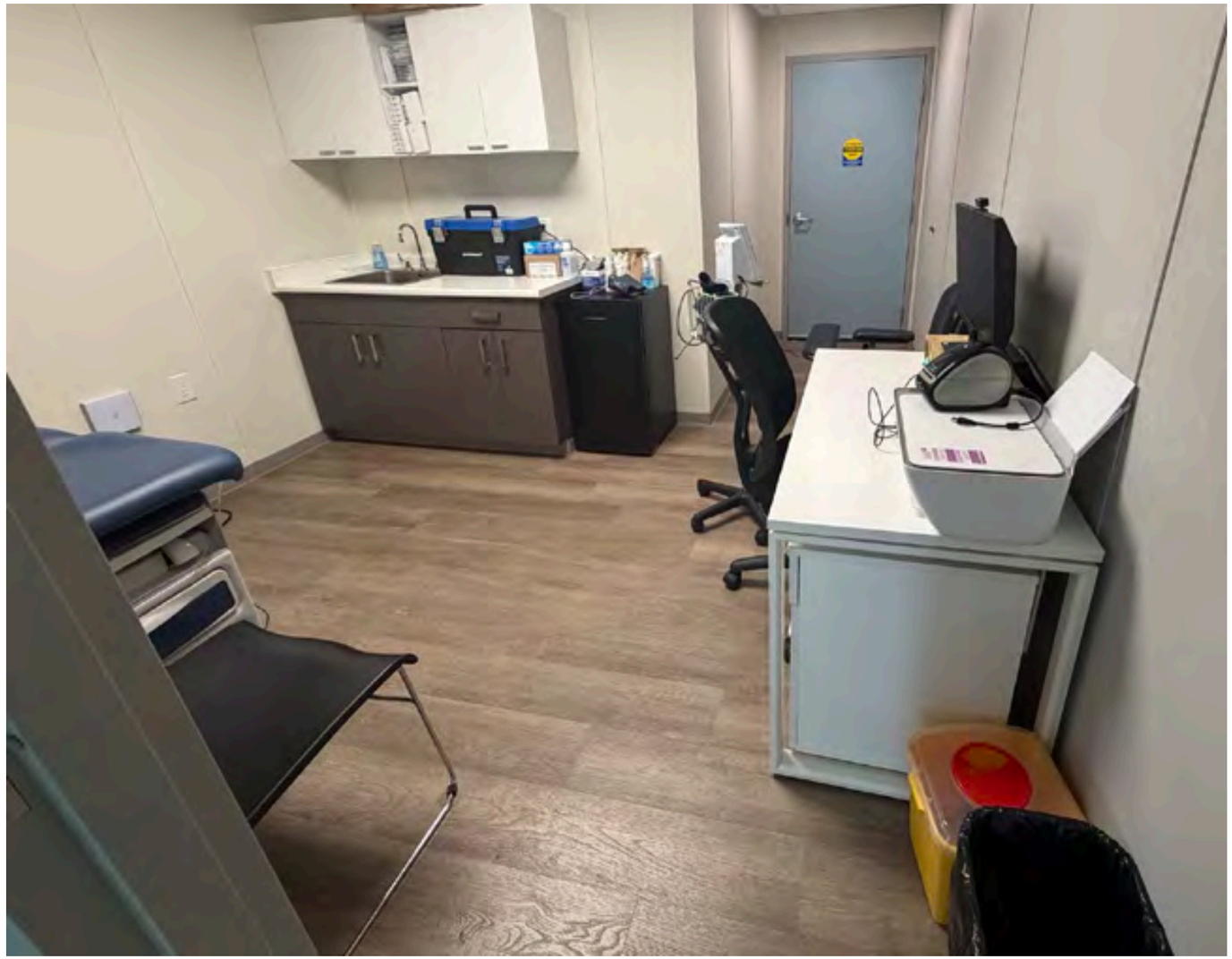
These spaces should support confidential, respectful interactions while maintaining a welcoming, non-clinical environment.



Hope Street Supportive Housing, Snug Architects, UK, 2023
Photo Credit: Fotohaus

Key Considerations

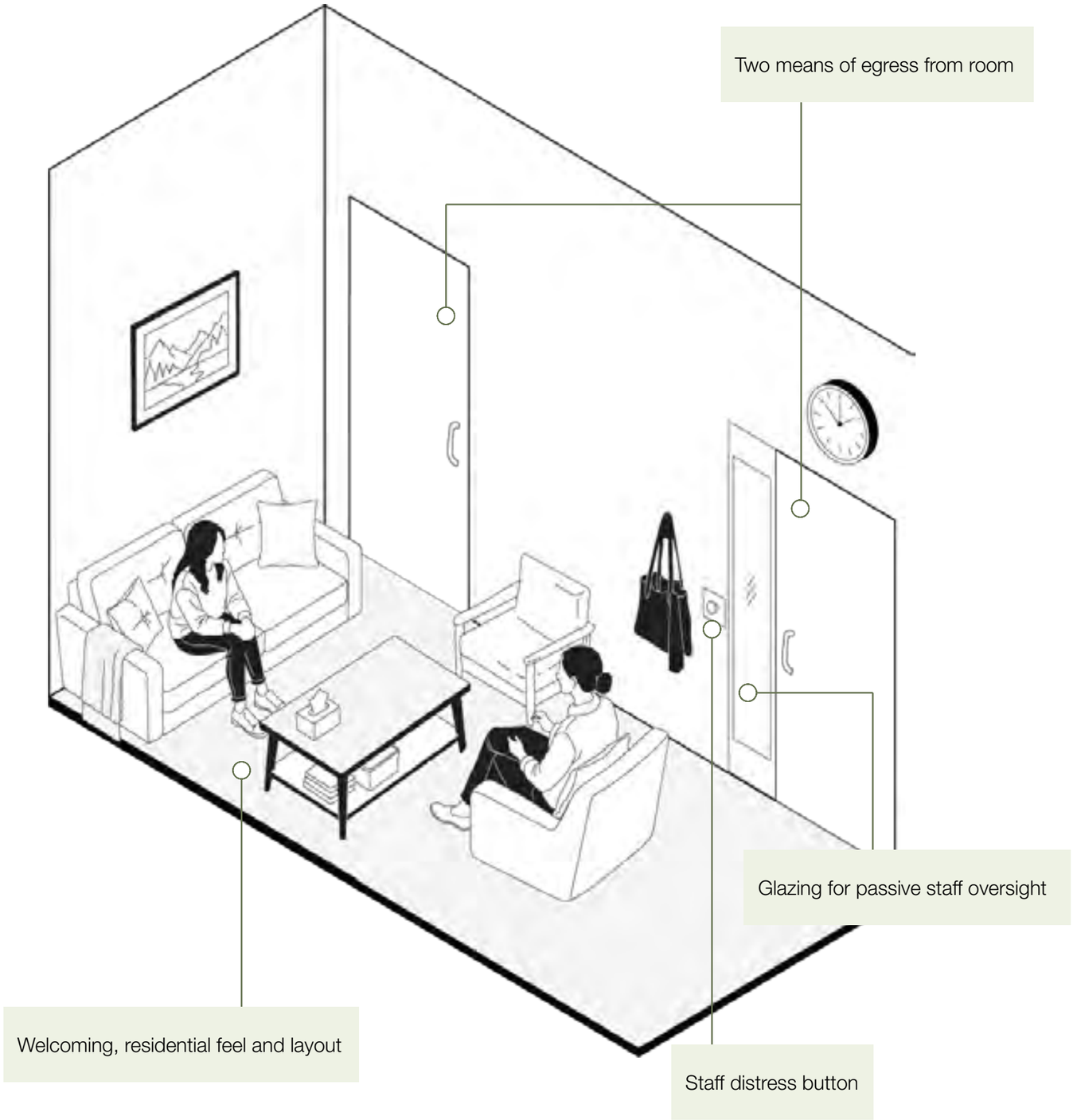
- Number and type of rooms should refect the range and frequency of services provided.
- Spaces should accommodate both in-house and visiting support providers.
- A variety of spaces should support one-to-one counselling through to larger meetings.
- Privacy and confdentiality ar e essential for resident interactions.
- Spaces should feel welcoming and residential rather than clinical.
- Support services should be separated from residential living areas where possible.
- Clinic space should be provided where health services are part of the service model.
- Staff safety should be supported through appropriate visibility and emergency measures.



Kingston House, Fred Victor, Scarborough ON, 2022
Photo Credit: Fred Victor

Design Recommendations

- Provide a range of enclosed room sizes for individual counselling, small meetings, and larger meetings.
- Locate support rooms on the ground foor wher e feasible, rather than on residential levels.
- Provide acoustic separation and solid doors for confdential meetings.
- Provide two means of egress from rooms where required for safety.
- Provide staff distress buttons within support rooms where appropriate to the operating model.
- Provide glazing for passive staff oversight while maintaining privacy through indirect sightlines and adjustable blinds or other privacy controls.
- Design counselling rooms with a residential-scale layout and furnishings rather than a conventional clinical arrangement.
- Provide a dedicated clinic room with a handwashing sink where health services are offered.
- Provide a small waiting area adjacent to support rooms where appropriate.
- Provide fexible meeting r ooms or multi-purpose offces that can be shar ed by visiting agencies, clinicians, and support workers.



Community / Commercial Kitchen

Indoor amenity, common, and special program areas provide residents and staff with dedicated spaces to gather, socialize, learn, and host events outside of individual units. These spaces should be spacious, warm, and fexible, of fering a variety of settings and scales to support diverse group sizes, skill-building activities, and specialized programming while maintaining clearly defned uses that foster connection and belonging.

Community kitchens should foster a communal, social atmosphere and encourage residents to cook and gather together.



YWCA Elm,WW+P Architects and Planners, Toronto ON, 2012
Photo Credit: WW+P

Key Considerations

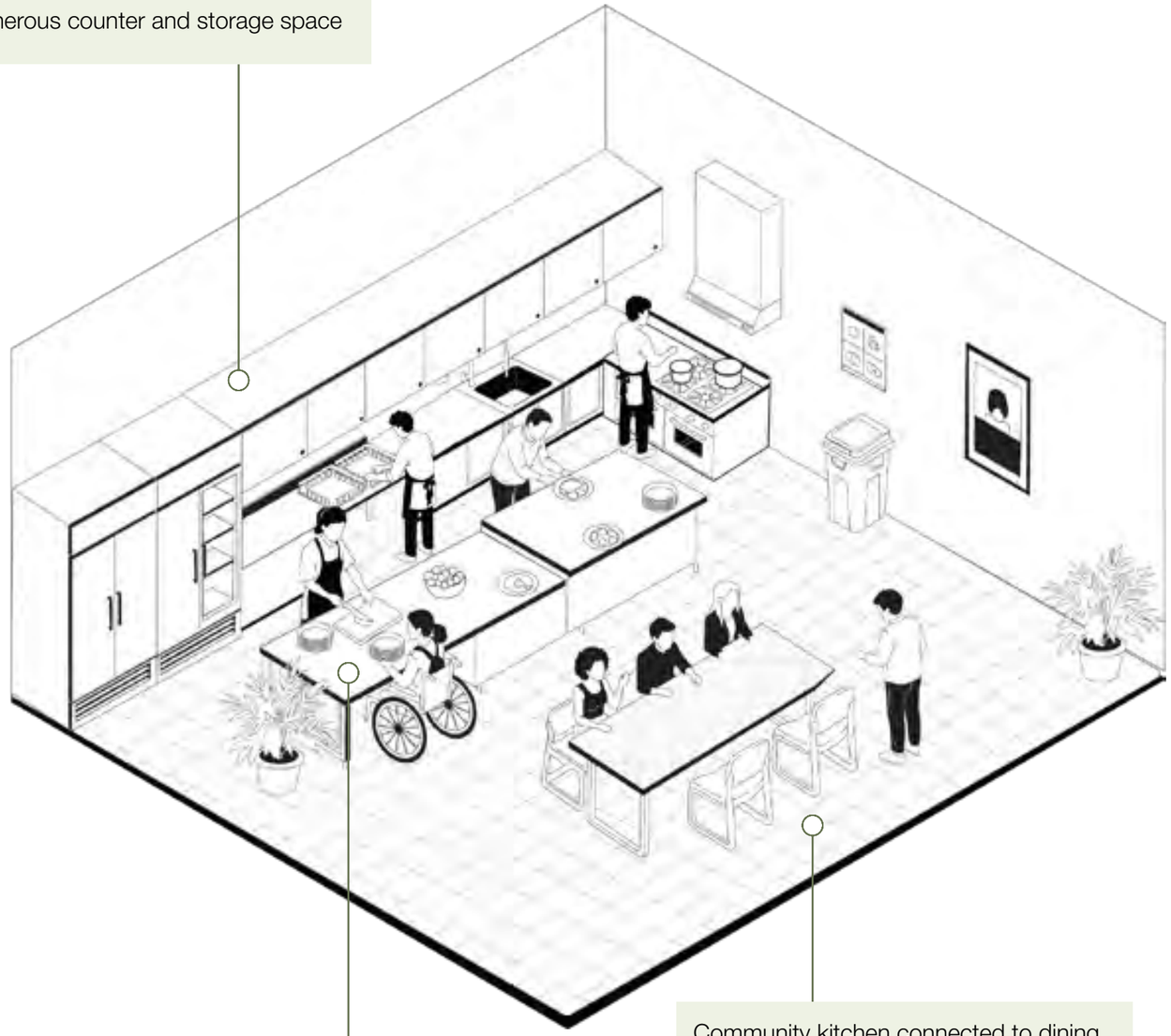
- Visual connection and visibility between common areas, allowing residents to observe activities and choose their level of participation based on their comfort.
- Strong connection to natural light, outdoor views, and adjacent circulation, promoting a sense of openness and intuitive navigation.
- Versatile program spaces suited for diverse group sizes and activities, including life skills, creative arts, ftness, and multi-generational use.
- Integrated storage solutions designed directly into fexible ar eas to support rapid transitions between different activities.
- Dedicated sensory decompression rooms allowing residents to lower stimulation, reset, and manage emotions in a quiet setting.
- Inclusive spiritual and trauma-informed spaces supporting prayer, cultural practices, and broad resident safety and well-being.



The Station, Indwell, Invizij Architects, St Thomas ON, 2023
Photo Credit: Industryus, Tim Ridout

Design Recommendations

- Provide a full commercial kitchen with commercial refrigeration/freezers, pantry storage, cooking and preparation areas, dishwashing/sanitizing, handwashing, and serving areas where required. Provide a commercial-grade cooking hood with a code-required fr e suppression system, coordinated with applicable building, fr e, and mechanical requirements.
- Incorporate a teaching kitchen area within the commercial kitchen where residents will participate in cooking programs. Separate the teaching area from high-risk commercial equipment and food-service operations.
- Provide a serving counter or pass-through between the commercial kitchen and dining/ common area where meals are served.
- Provide a durable, residential-scale community kitchen where residents will prepare food independently.
- Include a large central kitchen island in the community kitchen to support communal food preparation, conversation, and social interaction.
- Provide generous counter and storage space to support resident food preparation and accommodate cooking equipment.
- Position food prep and service space nearby to accommodate community celebrations, shared meals, and cultural events.
- Position the community kitchen to provide a direct connection to dining and gathering spaces.



Laundry

Communal laundry rooms provide residents with convenient access to laundry facilities and can also serve as informal opportunities for social interaction. The location, size, and number of machines should respond to the number of residents and the operating model of the building.

The laundry room has the potential to function as a social space.



YWCA Elm,WW+P Architects and Planners. Toronto ON, 2012
Photo Credit: WW+P

Key Considerations

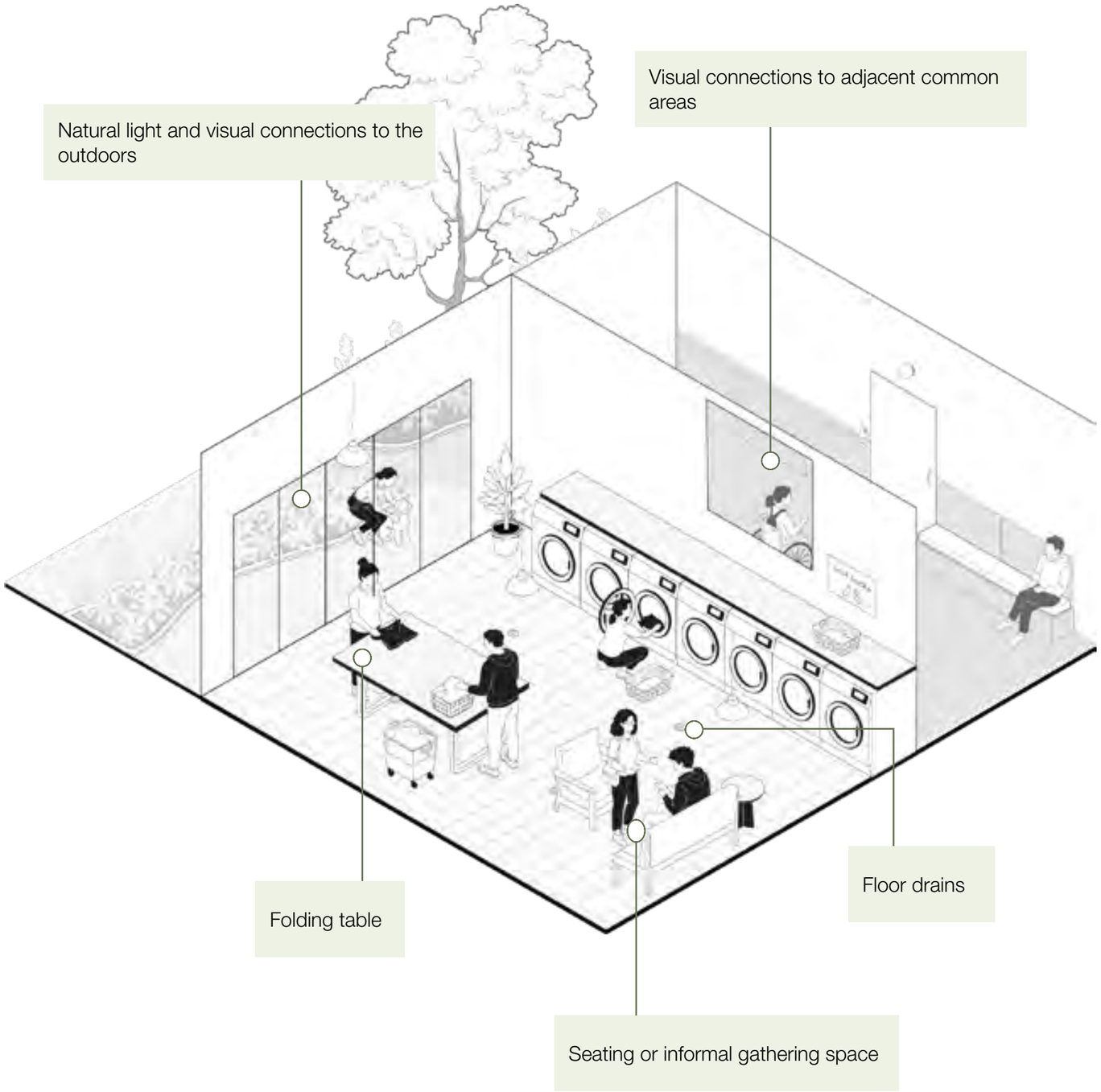
- Laundry capacity appropriate to the resident population and expected frequency of use.
- Free laundry as a means of encouraging regular use and reducing fnancial barriers.
- Controlled access appropriate to the resident population and operating model.
- Convenient location with visibility and connection to common areas.
- Potential for the laundry room to function as a social space, including its relationship to adjacent social, communal, or amenity spaces.
- Commercial-grade equipment suited to the expected volume of use.
- Maintenance access, including dryer vent clean-outs and equipment servicing.
- Drainage and water management in the event of leaks or fooding.



Waschküche Laurdromat, BRIQ, Berlin Germany, 2018
Photo Credit: BRIQ

Design Recommendations

- Provide commercial-grade machines, approximately one washer and dryer set per 8–10 residents, with additional capacity based on anticipated use.
- Locate laundry rooms on the main foor wher e feasible, near common or amenity spaces.
- Provide at least one accessible non-stacked washer/dryer set, with additional accessible sets as required.
- Provide generous manoeuvering and turning space throughout the laundry room.
- Include a folding counter/table, seating, and utility sink within the room.
- Install foor drains and appr opriate drainage to manage potential fooding.
- Provide adequate space and access for dryer vent clean-outs and equipment maintenance.
- Provide windows or glazing to adjacent common, social, or amenity spaces, supporting visual connection, social interaction, and passive oversight.
- Provide seating or informal gathering space within or immediately adjacent to the laundry room to encourage social interaction.
- Provide the power and internet connectivity required for card-reloading/payment systems.
- Use an access-controlled entry where appropriate to the resident population and operating model.



Heat Treatment Room

A heat treatment room provides a dedicated space for treating tenants' belongings and furnishings for bed bugs using high-temperature heat. Where provided, the room should support the safe and effcient movement of belongings into and out of the building while helping prevent the introduction or spread of pests.

Key Considerations

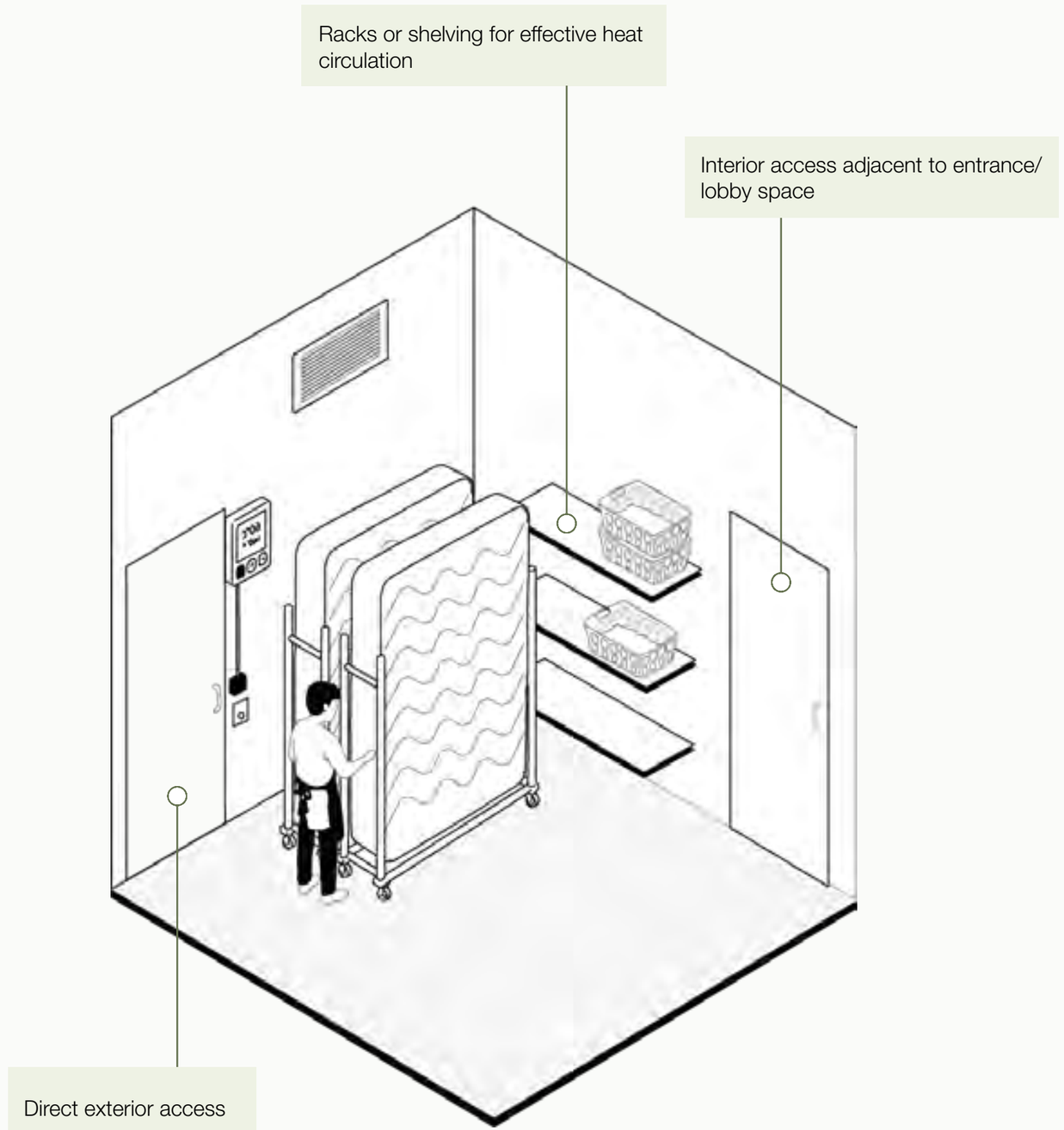
- Pest prevention as part of the tenant move-in process.
- Effcient movement of belongings between exterior, treatment, storage, and residential areas.
- Separation from residential, support, and amenity spaces.
- Secure access and safe operation by trained staff.
- Equipment, servicing, and building requirements associated with high-temperature treatment.



Holyrood Supportive Housing, Homeward Trust Edmonton, GEC Architecture, Edmonton AB, 2025.
Photo Credit: Homeward Trust

Design Recommendations

- Position heat treatment room off the main entrance vestibule or with direct exterior access, where feasible, so belongings can be treated before entering the building.
- Where possible, position the room adjacent to a service entrance and elevator to facilitate movement of furniture and belongings.
- Provide a dedicated, staff-controlled room sized to accommodate the anticipated volume and type of belongings.
- Provide racks or shelving to allow items to be spaced appropriately for effective heat circulation.
- Provide appropriate fr e separation, insulation, ventilation, electrical, and high-temperature-rated components in accordance with the selected heat-treatment system and applicable codes.
- Minimize wall, foor , and ceiling penetrations to support effective treatment and pest control.
- Provide controls and monitoring equipment that can be operated safely from outside the treatment area where required by the selected system.
- Provide suffcient clearance ar ound equipment for maintenance and servicing.

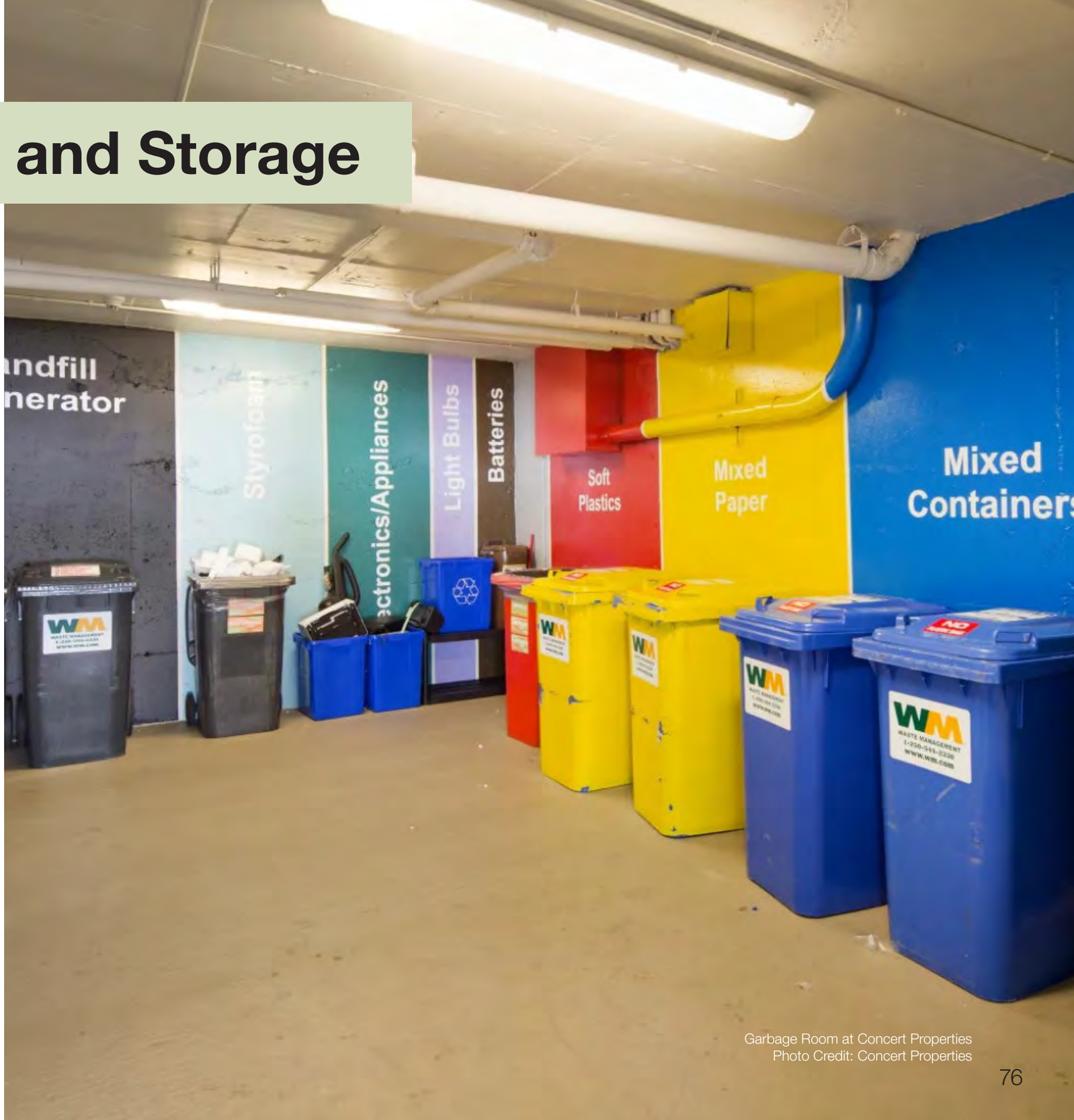


Garbage, Recycling and Storage

Garbage, recycling, and storage rooms support the waste management, as well as the secure storage of resident and operational items. The design of these spaces should support cleanliness, safety, durability, effcient staf f operations, and appropriate resident access. Storage areas should be secure, well-organized, accessible, and sized to accommodate anticipated resident and building needs, including bicycles, e-bikes mobility devices, seasonal items, and maintenance equipment.

Key Considerations

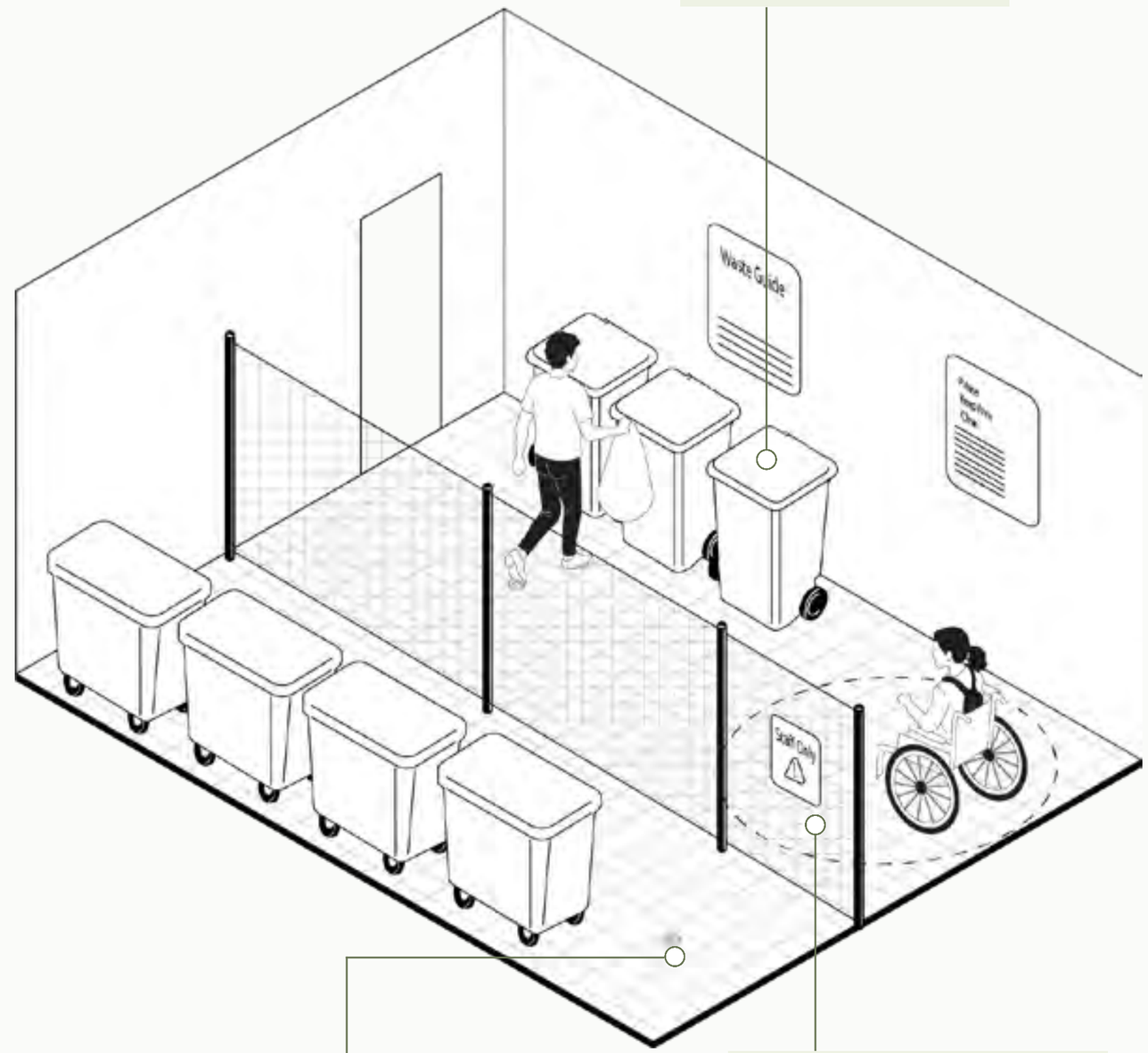
- Waste collection and removal system appropriate to the building and local municipal requirements.
- Balance between resident access and staff-managed waste handling.
- Cleanliness, odour control, and ease of maintenance.
- Separation from residential units and staff work.
- Clear and intuitive systems that encourage proper waste sorting and disposal.
- Safe and effcient movement of waste fr om the building to exterior collection. Consider charging provisions where e-bike use is anticipated.
- Provide a mix of bike parking options including space for cargo, adaptive and mobility devices.



Garbage Room at Concert Properties
Photo Credit: Concert Properties

Design Recommendations

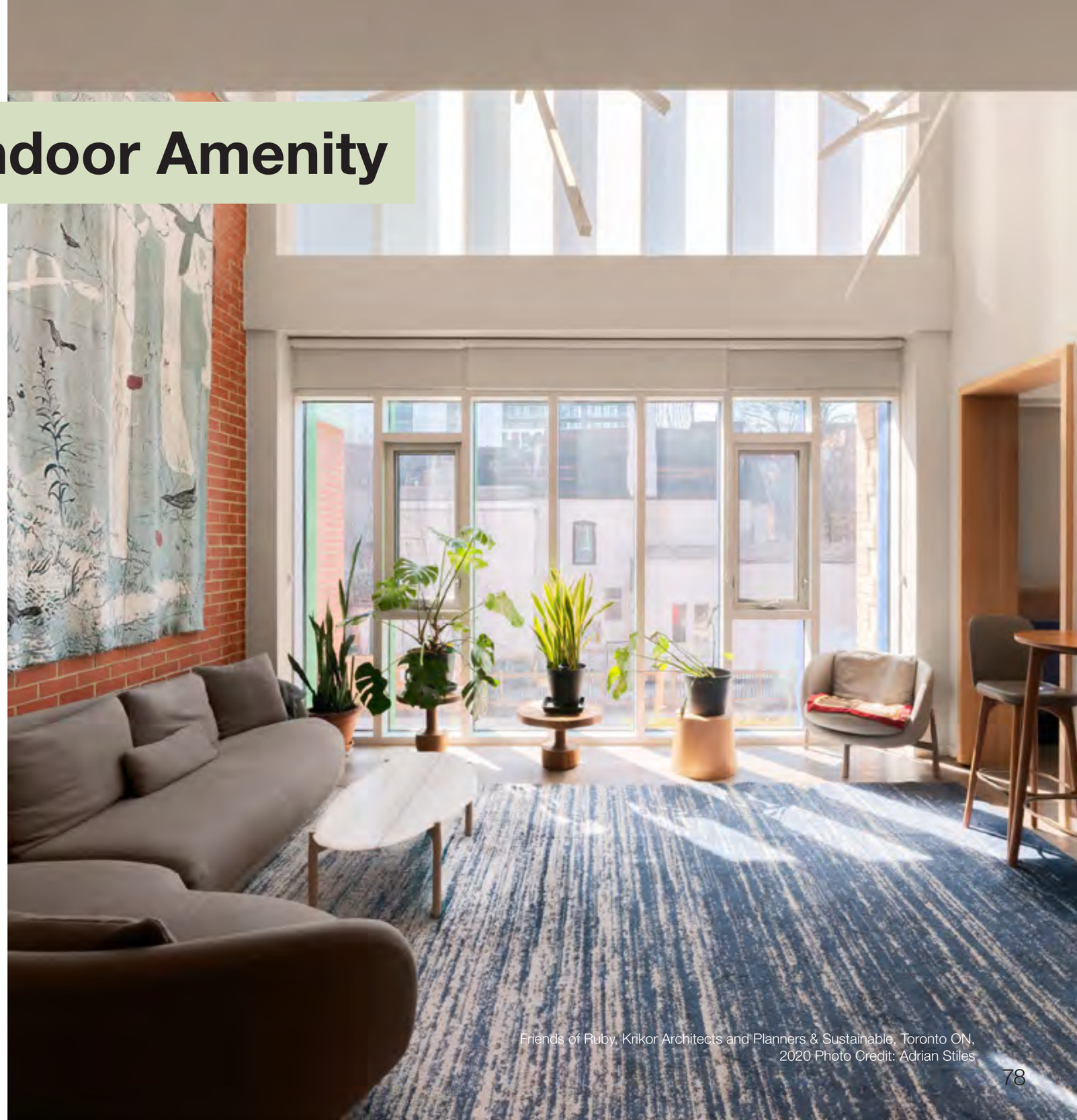
- Provide separate resident-accessible and staff-only areas, using lockable or fenced zones.
- Provide suffcient space for staf f circulation, bin maneuvering, and removal of full bins, with a direct exterior door where feasible.
- Position garbage rooms away from residential units and offces and pr ovide dedicated mechanical ventilation to control odours.
- Provide foor drains and hose connections for cleaning.
- Use durable, cleanable fooring and raised/ protected baseboards to withstand bin, bikes and equipment movement and cleaning.
- Provide bright lighting, clear signage, colour coding, and simple visual instructions to support intuitive waste sorting and overall cleanliness.
- Coordinate the room and waste system with municipal requirements and the building's waste service provider.
- Provide dedicated charging locations within the bicycle storage area or a separate battery charging room.
- Provide ventilation appropriate to the charging area and avoid locating charging stations in small unventilated rooms.
- Consider fr e-separated charging/storage rooms, non-combustible fnishes, and enhanced fr e detection systems in accordance with local code requirements and fr e authority guidance.



Common Areas + Indoor Amenity

Common areas and indoor amenity spaces provide residents with opportunities to gather, socialize, participate in activities, and spend time outside their individual units. Spaces should be spacious, warm, and welcoming, offering a variety of settings and scales while balancing fexibility with clearly defned uses that encourage residents to engage with one another.

Common areas and indoor amenity spaces should be spacious, warm, and welcoming.



Friends of Ruby, Krikor Architects and Planners & Sustainable, Toronto ON, 2020 Photo Credit: Adrian Stiles

Key Considerations

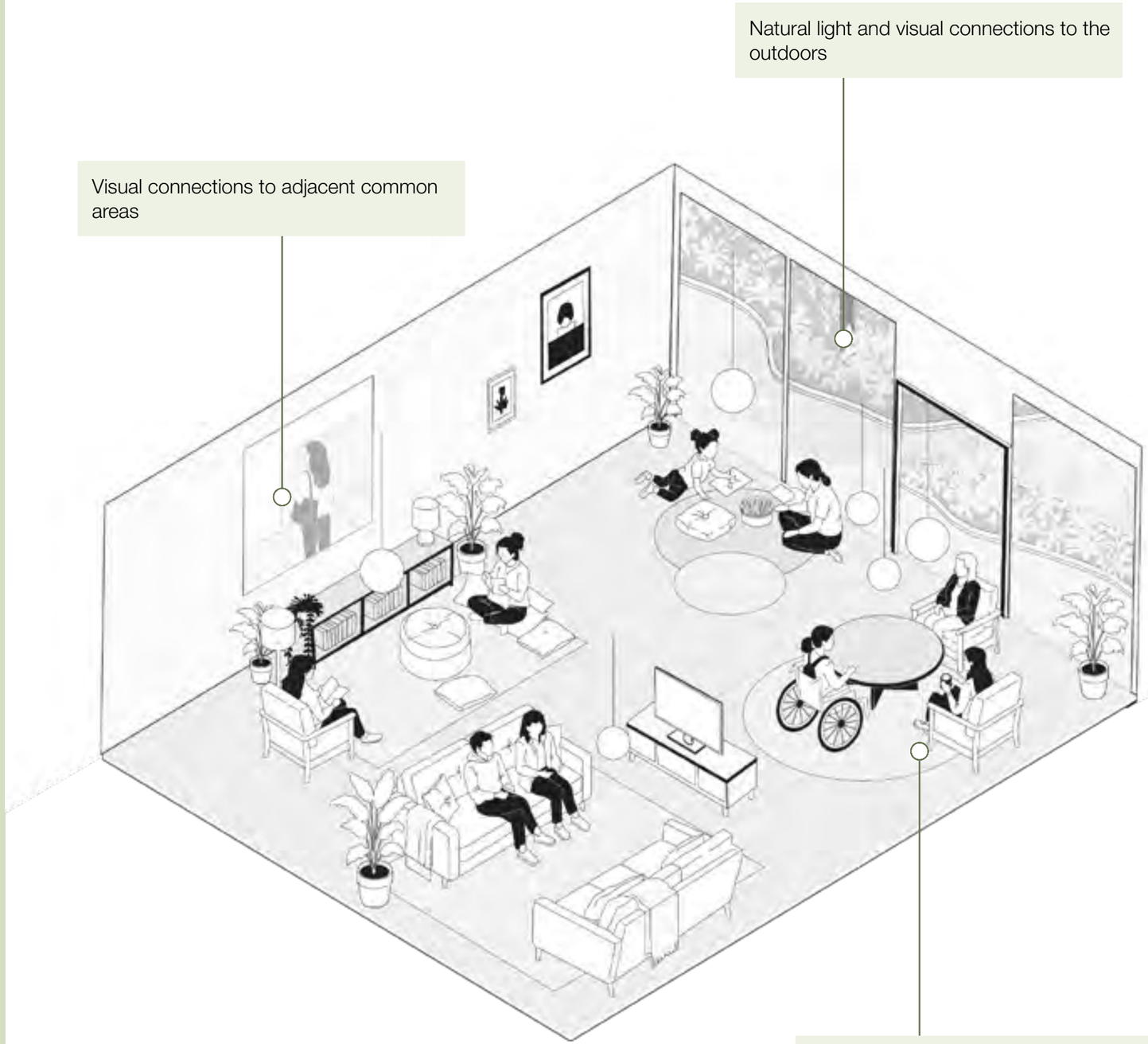
- Variety of social settings, from more active and communal to smaller and quieter spaces.
- Balance between fexibility and defned purpose, avoiding spaces that feel overly generic or institutional.
- Opportunities for both planned programming and spontaneous social interaction.
- Comfortable spaces that support different levels of social engagement and duration of use.
- Visibility and connection between common spaces while allowing residents to choose their level of participation.
- Connection to the exterior and natural light, supporting a sense of openness and connection beyond the building.
- Relationship to adjacent amenities, circulation, and other shared functions.



Tahanan Supportive Housing, David Baker Architects, San Francisco, USA, 2021
Photo Credit: Bruce Damonte

Design Recommendations

- Provide a range of distinct social spaces, such as lounges, activity areas, dining spaces, and smaller seating areas.
- Use furniture groupings, built-in elements, and changes in scale to defne dif ferent zones within larger rooms.
- Incorporate ready-made activity opportunities, such as games, books, crafts, or shared media, rather than relying on completely open-ended space.
- Provide fexible fur niture that can be rearranged for different activities and group sizes.
- Create visual and physical connections between common areas to encourage awareness of activity and opportunities to join.
- Include smaller, quieter spaces or seating niches adjacent to larger social areas for residents who want connection without participating in a larger group.
- Locate common areas along well-used circulation routes to support casual encounters and spontaneous interaction.
- Provide windows and visual connections to the exterior where possible to bring in natural light and create a connection to the outdoors.
- Provide integrated storage for games, activities, furniture, and program materials so spaces can be easily adapted while remaining purposeful.



Outdoor Areas

Outdoor amenity areas provide residents with opportunities for socializing, recreation, gardening, and spending time outdoors. Spaces should offer a range of settings and support both individual use and informal community activity.

Key Considerations

- Variety of outdoor settings and opportunities for different types of use including passive and active opportunities.
- Private separation from the public realm, with courtyards or backyards preferred.
- Connection to indoor common areas and visibility from the building.
- Opportunities for social interaction as well as quieter, individual use.
- Comfort throughout different seasons and weather conditions.
- Safety, security, and appropriate control of access.
- Connection to nature, gardens, and natural materials.
- Opportunities for gardening, outdoor cooking, and other resident activities where appropriate.
- Include a designated outdoor smoking area that is convenient and comfortable enough to use year-round, reducing smoking in suites, stairwells, hallways, and at building entrances.

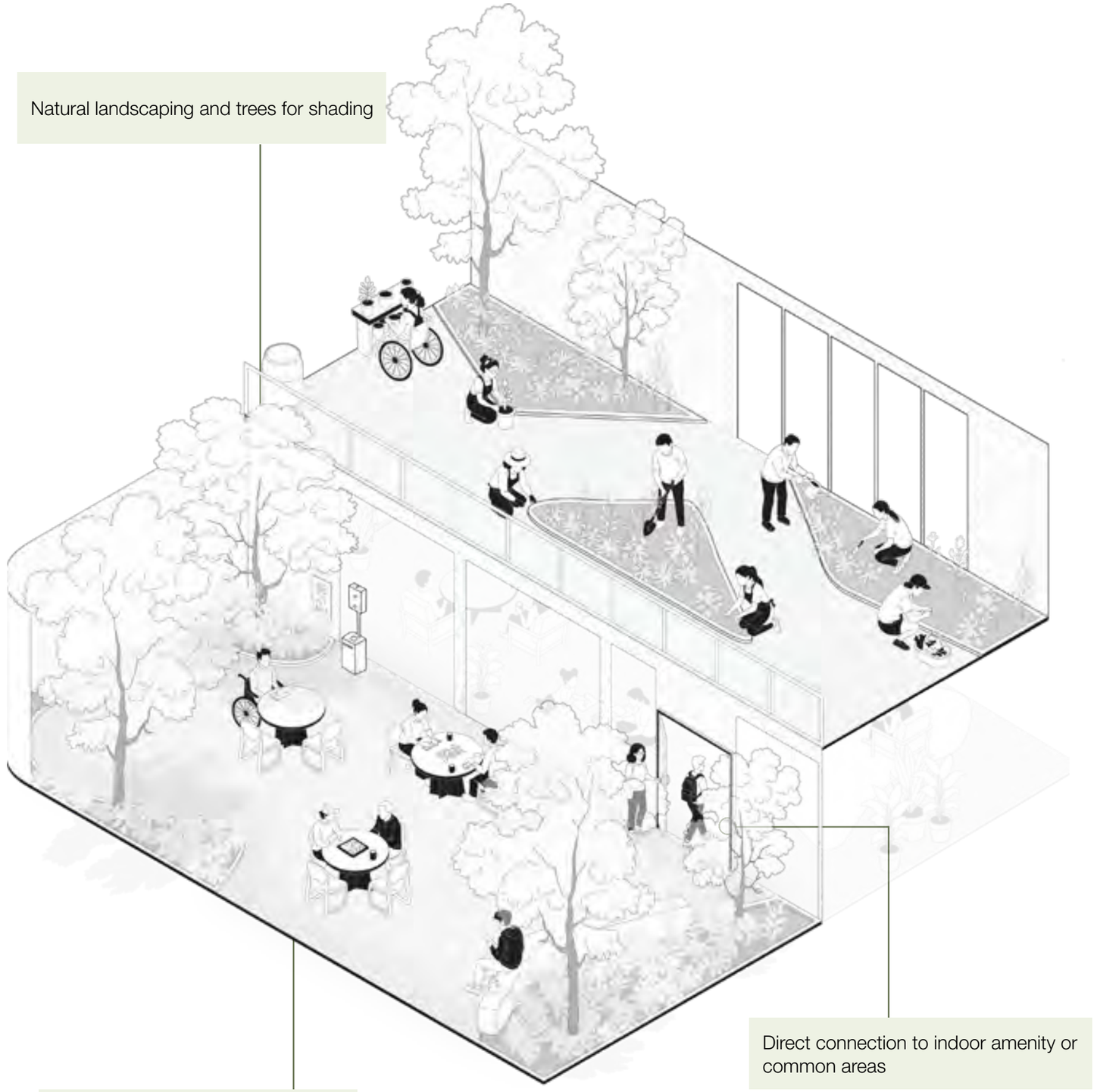
Design Considerations



Good Shepherd Non-Profit Homes (GSNPH), Vaughan, ON, 2009
Photo Credit: GSNPH

Design Recommendations

- Provide shade through trees, canopies, or awnings; provide an awning where natural shade is not available.
- Provide a BBQ connection with a staff-controlled shut-off valve where outdoor cooking is anticipated.
- Provide an exterior water source to support gardening and landscape maintenance.
- Provide a designated pet relieving area where pets are permitted.
- Provide fob-controlled access to yards, decks, and courtyards to prevent doors from being propped open and allow staff to restrict access when required.
- For decks and rooftops, provide non-climbable guards and appropriate fall-protection measures, with consideration given to adjacent structures or elements that could facilitate climbing.
- Provide a direct connection to indoor common areas where feasible, allowing residents to move easily between indoor and outdoor amenity spaces.
- Incorporate seating, tables, and gathering areas at a variety of scales, including seating options that accommodate different mobility needs.
- Provide a designated outdoor smoking area that is: a) Covered and partially enclosed for weather protection, while kept open enough to ventilate; and b) Located away from the main entrance, windows, balconies, and mechanical air intakes.



Shared / Communal Washrooms

Shared and communal washrooms provide residents and visitors with access to toilets and handwashing outside individual dwelling units. Accessibility should be considered in the planning and layout of washrooms to accommodate residents with a range of mobility needs and abilities. In supportive housing, washrooms should balance privacy and dignity with staff ability to respond quickly to emergencies and support harm-reduction practices.

Key Considerations

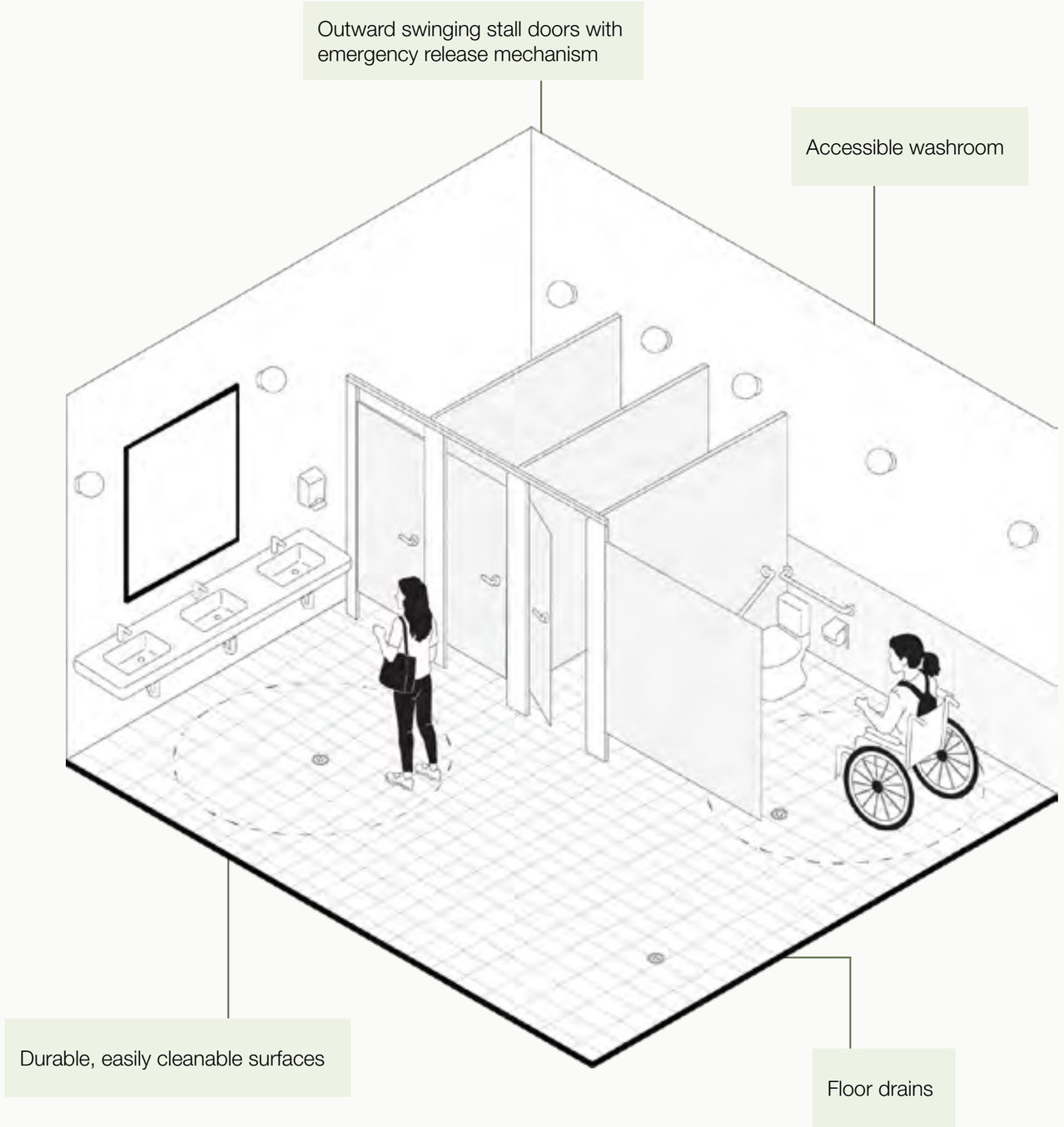
- Privacy, dignity, and a sense of safety for residents.
- Potential for overdose or other medical emergencies.
- Staff ability to identify and respond to emergencies quickly.
- Harm-reduction and safe disposal of sharps.
- Controlled access where the operating model requires staff oversight.
- Durability, cleaning, and maintenance requirements.



YWCA Elm,WW+P Architects and Planners. Toronto ON, 2012
Photo Credit: WW+P

Design Recommendations

- Provide emergency call buttons or alarms within washrooms and stalls, connected to staff response systems where appropriate.
- Provide outward-swinging stall doors where permitted, or doors with an emergency-release mechanism that allows staff or emergency responders to gain access from outside.
- Provide accessible washroom facilities, including appropriate clearances, grab bars, accessible fxtur es, and other features required to support a range of mobility needs.
- Where operationally appropriate, provide controlled access to communal washrooms that allows staff to monitor use while maintaining residents' privacy and dignity.
- Provide secure, tamper-resistant sharps containers within each washroom stall.
- Minimize concealed spaces behind fxtur es, panels, and service covers where items or sharps could be hidden.
- Provide durable, easily cleanable surfaces and foor drains to support fr equent cleaning and maintenance.
- Provide clear, inclusive signage and consider non-gendered washroom options where appropriate.
- Locate washrooms conveniently along common circulation routes to support access and emergency response.



Residential Suites

Residential suites provide people with a space to call home and can range from private self-contained units with bathrooms and kitchens (or kitchenettes) to individual sleeping rooms with shared kitchens. The appropriate confguration should r espond to the housing model, resident population, and level of support provided. Suites should provide a sense of home, with opportunities for residents to personalize their space.

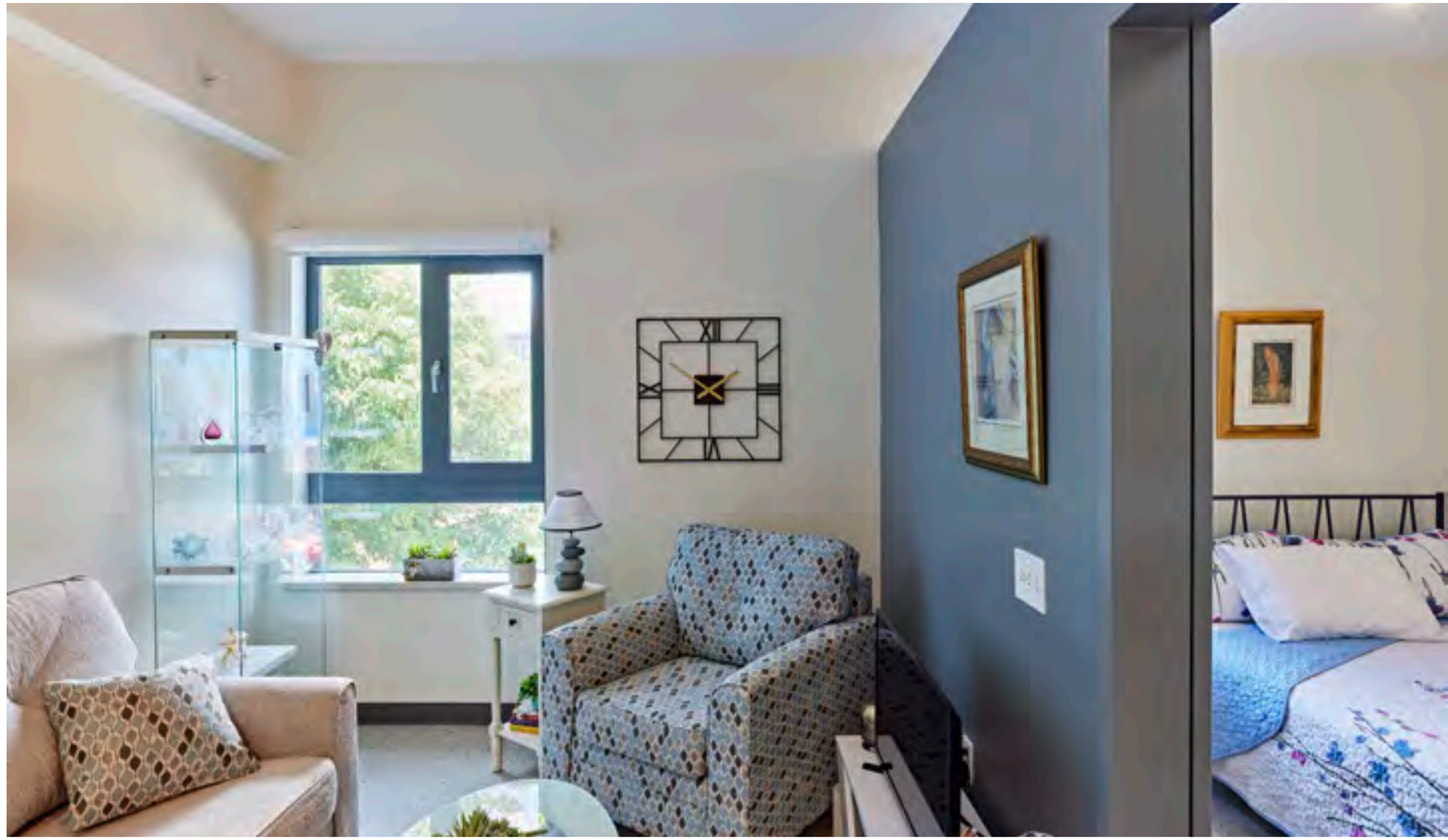
Suites should provide a sense of home, with opportunities for residents to personalize their space.



Sutton Youth Services,WW+P Architects and Planners. Toronto ON, 2012 Photo Credit: Michael Muraz

Key Considerations

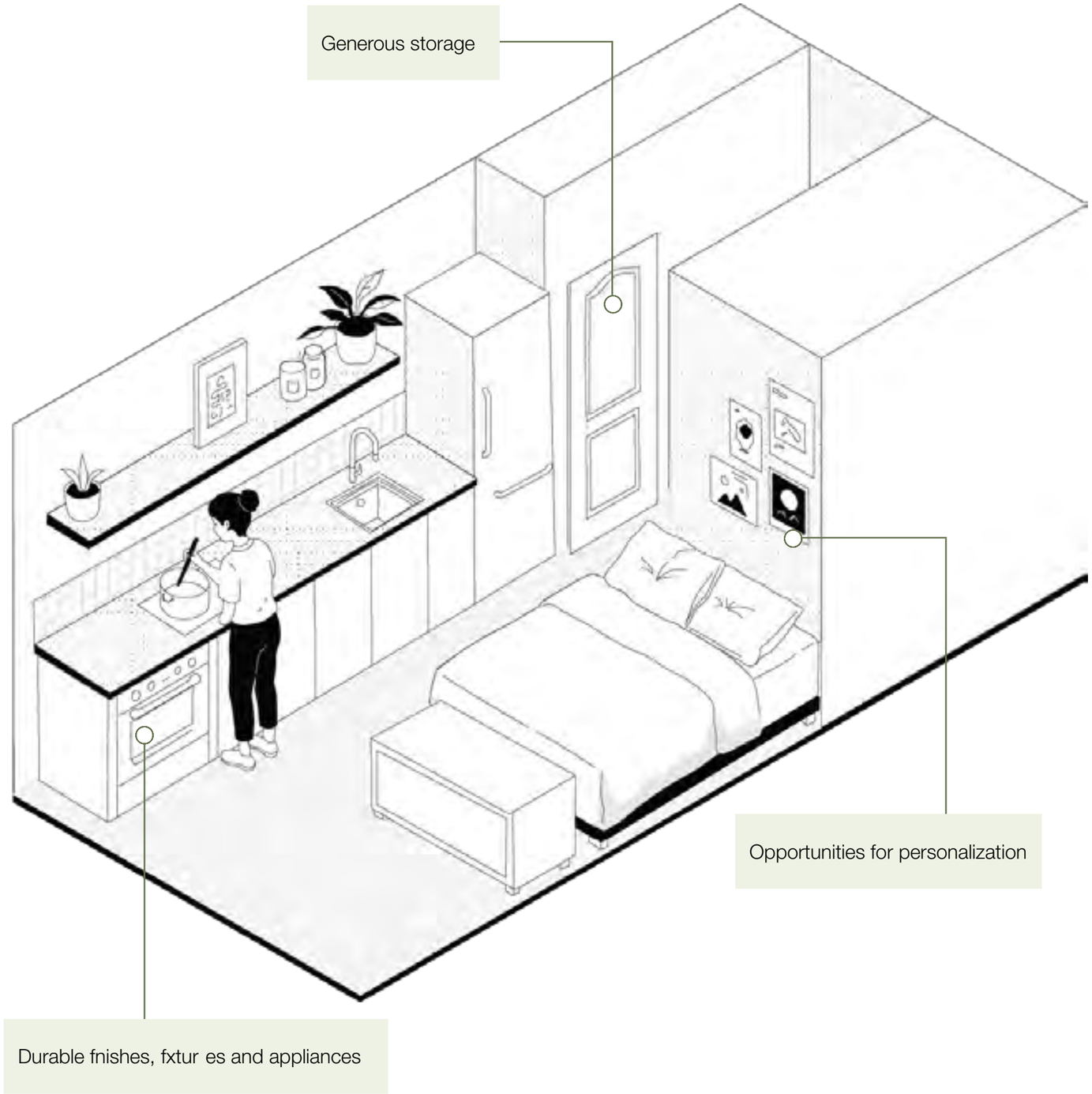
- Housing model, resident population, and level of support provided.
- Applicable provincial, territorial, and municipal affordable housing guidelines and standards.
- Privacy, security, and resident control over their personal space.
- Appropriate balance of private living space and access to shared facilities.
- Durable, easily replaceable furnishings and fxtur es.
- Opportunities for personalization and resident choice.
- Adequate space for residents' belongings and everyday activities.
- Standard appliances that can easily be repaired and replaced are preferred over built-in cooktops. Standard size appliances also allow residents to cook full meals as opposed to hot plates or portable units that have limited use and do not allow for baking.



Lakeshore Lofts, Indwell, Mississauga ON, 2022.
Photo Credit: Industryus, Tim Ridout

Design Recommendations

- Provide accessible and adaptable suites in accordance with applicable accessibility requirements and the anticipated needs of the resident population.
- Provide lockable suite or sleeping-room doors with staff/security access for emergencies and building operations.
- Provide simple, durable, and easily replaceable furnishings, fxtur es, and appliances appropriate to the housing model and expected level of use.
- Provide suffcient storage and foor ar ea to accommodate residents' belongings without compromising circulation.
- Provide walls and surfaces suitable for resident personalization, including space for artwork, photographs, and personal items.
- Where kitchens or kitchenettes are provided, use straightforward, durable fxtur es and appliances appropriate to the resident population and level of independence.
- Incorporate resident-controlled lighting, temperature, and privacy features where appropriate to the housing model.
- Provide drainage measures, including foor drains, secondary drains, and overfow drains at water fxtur es to mitigate fooding and water damage.
- Design suites to meet or exceed the applicable affordable housing, building code, and program standards for the jurisdiction.



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Two Steps Home Cabin Pilot, WW+P Architects and Planners, Toronto ON, 2024
Photo Credit: Two Steps Home

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Good Shepherd Non-Proft Homes (GSNPH), Vaughan ON, 2009
Photo Cedit: GSNPH

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Edmond Place, Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre, Toronto ON, 2011
Photo Credit: Corey Mihailiuk

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