



CUISR
COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH

Housing Insecurity, Renter Equity, and Homelessness in Saskatchewan

Workshop Summary Report

Natalie Tai and Keith Da Silva



PATHWAYS TO EQUITY

January 29, 2024

Community-University Institute for Social Research

Building healthy, sustainable communities

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2. Social Economy and Social Relations
3. Rural-Urban Community Links
4. Indigenous Community Development
5. Community-university partnerships

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Community-University Institute for Social Research

University of Saskatchewan

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is important to acknowledge that this workshop was held on the land of Treaty 6 Territory and Homeland of the Métis. This land is acknowledged as our Mother, the Earth. The University of Saskatchewan is committed to honour and support the Indigenous peoples, Indigenous cultures, Indigenous values, and Indigenous languages that belong to the land of Treaty 6 Territory and Homeland of the Métis. The University of Saskatchewan is committed to working towards mending colonized lands and protecting the land in a way that demonstrates honour, respect, and love. The University of Saskatchewan extends this commitment to the lands and Treaty territories (Treaties 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10) that constitute kisiskâciwan ([Saskatchewan], “the swift current,” Cree/Saulteaux), and all Indigenous people that call kisiskâciwan home. We are born to the land and the land claims us.

The Pathways to Equity Working Group would also like to acknowledge those who helped to plan and coordinate the event. This includes Meaghan Riesling, the Project Coordinator, Research Acceleration and Strategic Initiatives (RASi), University of Saskatchewan, and Leah Houseman, Programs Officer, RASi, University of Saskatchewan, who both worked hard behind the scenes to ensure a successful event. The group also thanks graduate research assistant, Natalie Tai, who helped to coordinate working group activities and served as the lead for data collection for the report. Lastly, our thanks to the graduate students, Kenechukwu Aneke, Ryan Cupid, Charles Dettaniba, Dana Ismail, Kaiyla Cote, Melissa Smith, Nazanin Jannati, Ryley Hawkeswood who assisted with notetaking during the event.

INTRODUCTION

Pathways to Equity is a research initiative, supported by Research Acceleration and Strategic Initiatives, University of Saskatchewan, that explores cross-agency and cross-disciplinary research in the areas of homelessness, social justice, education, and health across the province of Saskatchewan. The initiative, which is funded by an anonymous donor, includes support for community-engaged research projects, workshops and events. The current thematic focus of Pathways of Equity is on housing security and homelessness.

The current Pathways to Equity Working Group represents a network of community members and faculty members and with representation from individuals, community organizations, and persons with lived experience. The overarching goal of this research initiative is “to raise levels of equity and wellbeing through focused, thematic areas of research conducted in direct partnerships with the knowledge and experience of our communities and committed to bringing results back to participants and decision-makers in those communities.” A guiding principle for the group is an understanding that different communities experience and understand homelessness differently. Knowing that people experiencing homelessness are not defined by their situation, this initiative fully supports their ability to define their own experience in a way that respects their dignity.

In November 2021, Pathways to Equity hosted a virtual workshop to explore cross-agency and cross-disciplinary research in the areas of housing insecurity, renter equity, and homelessness. By bringing together faculty, community leaders, and those with lived experience with housing

insecurity and homelessness, the working group set the stage for ongoing conversations and determined the next steps to engage in meaningful research projects.

A total of 76 participants attended this highly interactive virtual workshop which included break-out groups, a panel discussion, and featured keynote speakers Michèle Biss and Sahar Raza from the National Right to Housing Network. Through this event, the following themes were identified as areas of priority:

- Indigenous Peoples and Decolonization of Colonial Structures
- Equity and Intersectionality
- Accessibility and Disability
- Mental Health and Addictions
- Affordability and Availability

Outcomes of the workshop led to three new research projects (described in the section on research panel discussion) funded by Pathways to Equity.

Building on the success of the inaugural virtual workshop hosted in November 2021 and seeking to build on the momentum of existing and planned funded research projects, the Pathways to Equity Working Group hosted an in-person workshop on Monday January 29, 2024, Station 20 West, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Workshop objectives

The specific objectives of the workshop were to engage with community partners, community members, policy makers and researchers to achieve the following:

- To build a network of community-based organizations and researchers with an interest in this housing insecurity, renter equity, and homelessness
- To understand the current challenges and barriers associated with housing security
- To explore opportunities in advocacy and research that would improve housing security.
- To ensure the voices of people with lived experience are heard in a meaningful way.

HOUSING INSECURITY, RENTER EQUITY, AND HOMELESSNESS IN SASKATCHEWAN: WORKSHOP SUMMARY

The 2nd Pathways to Equity Workshop took place on January 29, 2024, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and brought together community members, researchers, and policymakers to address housing insecurity, renter equity, and homelessness. This workshop aimed to build networks, understand current challenges, and explore opportunities for advocacy, research, and policy improvements. Key discussions focused on financial and social support, stigmatization, long-term housing solutions, and collaboration. Participants were able to reconnect in person and engaged in discussions that emphasized the need for consistent funding, better support systems, and legislative changes to improve housing equity. The workshop also highlighted ongoing research projects aimed at addressing barriers to housing and income security for vulnerable populations.

2024 Workshop Agenda

Monday January 29, 2024

Station 20 West

1120 20th St W, Saskatoon, SK S7M 0Y8

Time	Topic
8:30 am – 9:00 am	Arrival/Registration
9:00 am – 9:30 am	Welcome Judy Pelly, Blessing and opening remarks Table introductions Icebreaking activity
9:30 am – 9:45 am	Pathways to Equity Program Description
9:45 am – 10:30 am	Keyonte Speaker Colleen Christopherson-Cote – Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership
10:30 am – 10:45 am	Networking Break

10:45 am – 12:00 pm	Moderated breakout session # 1: Current challenges Participants to rotate through topic tables
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm	Lunch and Learn Research Panel Discussion and Q&A Update on existing Pathways to Equity Funded Research Projects
1:00 pm – 1:45pm	Panel Discussion Debbie McGraw, Canadian Lived Experience Leadership Network Graduate Student Perspectives
1:45 pm – 2:00 pm	Networking Break
2:00 pm – 3:15 pm	Moderated breakout session # 2: Opportunities Opportunities Participants to rotate through topic tables
3:15 pm– 3:30 pm	Wrap-up activity and concluding remarks

Attendees

To ensure a broad range of voices and perspectives, the workshop was open and accessible to a diverse group of participants. A preliminary mailing list for invitations included those who had attended the pervious virtual workshop in 2021, along with individuals who had signed up to the Pathways to Equity mailing list. After a review of the preliminary list by working group members, additional community stakeholders were added. Once finalized, an invitation that included workshop details and registration information was circulated via email, as well as through the University of Saskatchewan and Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR) distribution channels. Those who received the invitation were encouraged to share the information through their own networks. A total of 86 participants attended the in-person workshop in Saskatoon.

The following subsections provide a summary of the various workshop activities, including the themes that emerged during the breakout sessions. Each breakout group discussion was

moderated by a member of the Pathways to Equity Working Group, who was assisted by graduate students who served as notetakers.

Keynote Speakers and Student Panel Discussion

The morning session featured a presentation from Colleen Christopherson-Cote, who is the Coordinator for the Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership. The presentation drew from her experience working in community & human service development for over 20 years in both urban and rural communities across Saskatchewan. During the sessions, she shared her extensive knowledge on the complexity of human service systems and the intricacies of how public policy and practice indirectly and directly impact community, particularly those who are most vulnerable, marginalized, and oppressed. Her presentation set the stage for further discussions throughout the day. The afternoon session featured a student panel discussion moderated by Debbie McGraw, co-founder of the Canadian Lived Experience Leadership Network. Debbie is an advocate, activist, and researcher on social issues, such as housing, homelessness, women's issues, and poverty and the strength of her work comes from her own lived experience. Following opening remarks, Debbie led a roundtable discussion with graduate students Natalie Tai (College of Dentistry, USask), Ryan Cupid (College of Law, USask), and Kenechukwu Aneke (College of Law) who have each contributed to research projects through the Pathways to Equity initiative. Through the moderated discussion, the graduate students were able to highlight their current work, discuss why this was a topic of interest, and share some insight as to how their experiences will influence them in their future careers.

Breakout Session # 1 – Current Challenges

For the first breakout session, participants were randomly divided into five different groups, each with a unique topic of discussion. After approximately 15 minutes of discussion, participants were asked to rotate to the next table to address a different topic. Once the full time elapsed, time was allotted for the whole group to reconvene and present a summary of key discussion points.

The specific questions that were assigned to each table are as follows:

1. What challenges currently exist related to housing availability in Saskatchewan?
2. What challenges currently exist related to housing affordability in Saskatchewan?
3. What challenges currently exist related to maintaining stable housing in Saskatchewan?
4. How does housing insecurity and/or homelessness affect different groups in Saskatchewan?
5. What challenges currently exist for those seeking to support initiatives to end homelessness in Saskatchewan?

See also **Appendix A** for probing questions.

Three common themes were raised during the workshop discussion about current challenges in housing availability, affordability, and stability in Saskatchewan; these included the lack of financial support, the lack of social supports, and stigmatization within the housing sector.

Financial Support

A common point of discussion was the lack of financial support within the uneven distribution of wealth, with an emphasis placed on the gap between individual or household income and the

rent/mortgage required for an appropriate housing environment. In addition to mortgage or rent, there are utility costs, maintenance expenses, pet fees, as well as internet and electricity bills that are often not factored into the discussions on housing affordability. Participants at the workshop discussed how many financial incentives exist for landlords but very few programs exist to provide financial aid for renters; for example, in Saskatchewan, there is currently no rent control to protect tenants when agreeing to or renewing a lease. Individuals in the housing industry further observed that the majority demographic of homeowners are Baby Boomers; they further voiced that the current cost of living and income levels do not afford many individuals the opportunity for home ownership. Furthermore, the group noted that the current housing system is set up with a goal of generating a profit, rather than providing affordable housing; not only does this design disregard the value of human life but it also contradicts the notion that adequate housing is a human right.

Social Support

Throughout the sessions, participants were engaged in deep discussions related to the current state of social programs and lack of support provided for individuals seeking safe housing. This was reflected in conversations regarding a gap in knowledge of renters' rights, the difficulty acquiring references as well as navigating complicated applications and associated jargon. Individuals also commented on the strict rules that many social housing programs have such as abstinence, sobriety for an indicated period, curfews and no pets or visitors. These regulations prevent individuals from obtaining social housing, excludes them from their social network, and in some instances, may deter them from applying. The example of pets was raised as individuals may choose not to pursue social housing if it requires them to leave their pets behind—and the

strong emotional bonds to their animals. In addition to restrictive housing rules, the group noted that there are insufficient numbers of case workers in Saskatchewan and often a lack of collaboration between or among agencies. This gap in service leaves many individuals on long wait lists and potentially unhoused for extended periods. A prominent point of contention was that the current Saskatchewan social housing system is unable to meet individuals where they are, thus creating a gap between the need and the support that is offered. However, social housing workers commented on the lack of consistent funding and the strict criteria that determine the demographic and level of support provided. Despite case workers wanting to help, they are often restricted by funding, administrative procedures, and associated reporting requirements.

Additionally, several healthcare workers in attendance commented on the lack of transitional living options from the hospital into the community. The current challenges to find stable housing are further exacerbated for those with complex medical needs; there are very few options between renting and going to an emergency shelter for recently discharged patients that do not have a home. Further the group noted the financial burden on the government of the consequences of its inability to discharge patients into safe housing. Similarly, participants voiced their concerns about the challenges formerly incarcerated individuals encounter. Case support workers in attendance described that the current support is almost non-existent and may only consist of providing a bus ticket to the discharged individual. This conversation also highlighted the gaps in services that exist even before an individual leaves a detention facility, as many support services such as income assistance appointments are not available until an individual is released from custody. These ideas were paralleled by conversations about

transitional programs out of substance abuse and detox treatment centres where social support is limited. If safe housing is not provided within an appropriate time, many individuals will have to go back to potentially unsafe living conditions; individuals need stability after treatment and after-care such as sober-living is imperative.

Stigmatization

Many participants also raised the notion of stigmatization in the housing industry. Case workers highlighted that the most vulnerable populations such as those who have been incarcerated, experienced addiction, or are homeless often face discrimination, racism, and marginalization in screening systems and from house owners. It was noted that in some housing applications, rather than focusing on inclusivity, they contain questions that are designed to screen individuals out of the process. Additionally, participants emphasized that without appropriate housing, employment opportunities cannot be pursued, and the vicious cycle of poverty and homelessness perpetuates. Without housing security, where necessities such as a phone number, email, and mailing address can be established, individuals cannot engage with the systems for support and employment. Furthermore, participants also considered how systematic barriers for securing housing may impact mental health and how having adequate housing is not only a human right but also a needed component of wellbeing.

Breakout Session # 2 – Opportunities

The second breakout session followed the same format as the first, with people rotating through five different discussion groups. The specific questions that were assigned to each table are as follows:

1. How could advocacy for improving housing equity in Saskatchewan be improved?
2. What are some potential areas of research that could be explored with the aim of improving housing equity in Saskatchewan?
3. How could social assistance programs (i.e. SIS) or housing subsidy programs be designed/delivered to improve housing equity in Saskatchewan?
4. How can we collectively bring more attention to current challenges related in housing equity in Saskatchewan?
5. What programs or initiatives currently exist that have helped to improve housing equity in Saskatchewan or abroad?

While challenges in the current system exist and were acknowledged, participants at the workshop were given time to discuss the opportunities for change. Three common themes were raised during the workshop discussion related to potential opportunities in housing availability, affordability, and stability in Saskatchewan: a focus on long-term housing solutions, a need for support workers, and collaboration.

Long-Term Housing Solutions

A common theme that emerged in several discussion groups was to expand and to invest in long-term housing solutions. This includes providing client education in case support settings, creating wraparound and transitional supports and investing in retention and eviction prevention services. It was emphasized by participants that emergency shelters are not long-term solutions. Many voiced that the lack of long-term social housing in Saskatchewan perpetuates the supply shortage in housing stock and that systematic changes are required to address the root causes. It was

echoed throughout the workshop that conducting comparisons of our public policies in Saskatchewan with other Canadian provinces such as British Columbia and countries such as New Zealand would be of significant value. This was identified as a potential area of interest for future research. As other similar jurisdictions may be experiencing better housing outcomes, it is imperative that advocates work with policy makers in Saskatchewan to re-examine existing legislation and policy to identify areas of improvement.

Resources for Support Workers

Ensuring there is adequate and consistent funding, particularly as it relates to support, was another major conversation topic for change. Individuals discussed the importance of having case support workers as resources because they are adjacent to system navigators in the social housing sector. However, as funding can be transient, case support workers can be removed suddenly which may leave individuals and their needs neglected. Furthermore, the lack of resources for single fathers and individuals requiring complex care was emphasized as an area that needs attention and greater attention. Providing incentives for developers to build affordable housing was proposed as a solution to increase support for vulnerable populations. However, even though communities of tiny homes can be a successful solution, there must also be government guidelines and programs in place to facilitate the hand-off from builder to operator. Non-profit organization workers voiced that charitable organizations cannot be the ones filling in the gaps for the government; there must be societal and legislative changes to address housing in Saskatchewan.

Collaboration and Advocacy

Furthermore, collaboration, education, and community were major points of optimistic conversation for improving housing in Saskatchewan. It was suggested that government representatives should be involved in roundtable meetings to hear from researchers, community members, and, most importantly, individuals with lived experience. Legislative policies and housing programs need to reflect the unique challenges and barriers face by those requiring the social services. In addition to involving the government, many participants felt that it was imperative the community is involved in conversations about homelessness, poverty, and housing security. Workshop participants stressed that the current political rhetoric on homelessness and poverty tends to put the onus on the individual requiring support rather than on the system and circumstances in place. Therefore, social media was examined as a tool to change the discourse and stigma on homelessness and housing. It was emphasized that people care more passionately about issues they connect with; therefore, media campaigns need to continuously demonstrate that housing issues are a societal problem that impacts the entire community. While there are many challenges within the current state of housing availability, affordability, and stability in Saskatchewan, the workshop discussions also demonstrated the immense opportunities there are to improve and achieve housing equity in the province.

Research Panel Discussion

One of the outcomes from the 2021 workshop was the launch of a new research funding stream, *Pathways to Equity—Community Partnership Grants*, which was to provide an opportunity for teams of researchers and community partners to further work in any of the five priority areas (Indigenous Peoples and Decolonization of Colonial Structures; Equity and Intersectionality;

Accessibility and Disability; Mental Health and Addictions; Affordability and Availability). A total of three different projects were funded through this initiative, and during the lunch break of the workshop, participants had an opportunity to hear from each research team about the scope and progress of their work. The following is a brief summary of each project:

Access to Justice for Renters in Saskatchewan

Dr. Sarah Buhler from USask's College of Law is working closely with Chantelle Johnson, executive director of Community Legal Assistance Services for Saskatoon Inner City Inc. (CLASSIC), on the project, "Access to Justice for Renters in Saskatchewan." The project seeks to identify barriers renters face in trying to access appropriate legal resources when it comes to fighting for their housing rights.

Community Based Problem Solving: To Address Rural and Northern Homelessness in Saskatchewan

Dr. Brenda Mishak from USask's College of Nursing and Jason Mercredi with Métis Nation–Saskatchewan (MN–S) are leading a project aimed at addressing rising homelessness in rural and northern Saskatchewan. The project will create concrete datasets at the community level would have a significant impact and will engage with attendees at Back to Batoche Days in 2023.

Establishing a community-based research collaboration to improve income and housing security for individuals diagnosed with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder

Dr. Keith Da Silva (DDS), assistant professor at USask's College of Dentistry, and Andrea Kotlar, Executive Director of the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Network of Saskatchewan, are planning groundbreaking research aimed at the financial and housing welfare

of provincial residents with FASD. The collaborative project will reach out to those who have lived experience with FASD to better understand their barriers to accessing government income and housing assistance programs.

SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This workshop provided a timely opportunity for the community to come together in-person to discuss important issues related to housing insecurity, renting equity, and homelessness. Based on the discussions and findings from the 2024 Pathways to Equity Workshop, some possible next steps and future directions to consider are as follows:

1. Expanding Long-Term Housing Solutions

- **Invest in Transitional Supports:** Develop wraparound services and eviction prevention programs to ensure stable housing.
- **Policy Comparisons:** Conduct research comparing Saskatchewan's housing policies with those of other provinces and countries to identify best practices.
- **Legislative Advocacy:** Work with policymakers to revise existing housing legislation to better address the root causes of housing insecurity.

2. Enhance Resources for Support

- **Consistent Funding:** Advocate for stable funding for case support workers and social housing programs.
- **Targeted Support:** Increase resources for specific groups such as single fathers and individuals with complex care needs.
- **Incentives for Developers:** Provide incentives for developers to build affordable housing, ensuring proper guidelines for transitioning from builder to operator.

3. Foster Collaboration and Advocacy

- **Government Involvement:** Include government representatives in roundtable discussions to hear directly from researchers, community members, and individuals with lived experience.
- **Community Engagement:** Involve the community in conversations about homelessness and housing security to ensure policies reflect real-world challenges.
- **Media Campaigns:** Use social media to change the discourse and stigma around homelessness, emphasizing that housing issues affect the entire community.

4. Focus on Research and Data Collection

- **New Research Projects:** Launch additional research projects to explore areas such as housing equity, social assistance program design, and advocacy strategies.
- **Data Collection:** Create concrete datasets at the community level to better understand housing needs and outcomes.
- **Collaborative Research:** Establish community-based research collaborations to address specific issues like income and housing security for vulnerable populations.

5. Improve Access to Justice

- **Legal Resources:** Identify barriers that renters face in accessing legal resources and work to improve access to justice for renters in Saskatchewan.
- **Community Legal Services:** Strengthen partnerships with community legal assistance organizations to support renters' rights.

6. Address Rural and Northern Homelessness

- **Community-Based Solutions:** Develop problem-solving initiatives tailored to rural and northern communities, engaging local stakeholders and creating impactful datasets.

These steps aim to build on the workshop's momentum and address the identified challenges and opportunities in housing equity, ensuring a comprehensive approach to improving housing security in Saskatchewan.

Appendix A: Breakout Session Probing Questions

Breakout Session 1 – Current Challenges	
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What challenges currently exist related to housing availability in Saskatchewan? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provincial or in specific cities ○ For specific populations
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What challenges currently exist related to housing affordability in Saskatchewan? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cost of rental units ○ Availability of subsidies
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What challenges currently exist related to maintaining stable housing in Saskatchewan?
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does housing insecurity and/or homelessness effect the following groups in Saskatchewan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Individuals/families ○ Communities ○ Community support organizations ○ Government
Table 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What challenges currently exist for those seeking to support initiatives to end homelessness in Saskatchewan?

Breakout Session 2 – Opportunities

Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How could advocacy for improving housing equity in Saskatchewan be improved?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Who is currently involved?○ Who else needs to be involved?
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are some potential areas of research that could be explored with the aim of improving housing equity in Saskatchewan?
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How could social assistance programs (i.e. SIS) or housing subsidy programs be designed/delivered to improve housing equity in Saskatchewan?
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can we collectively bring more attention to current challenges related in housing equity in Saskatchewan?
Table 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What programs or initiatives currently exist that have helped to improve housing equity in Saskatchewan or abroad?



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