



**CUISR**  
COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH

# Housing Security and Neighbourhood Safety

## Pathways to Equity Workshop Report

Nadia Sedaghat, Isobel M. Findlay,  
and Rosmary Martinez Rueda



**PATHWAYS TO EQUITY**

March 26, 2025

## **Community-University Institute for Social Research**

### **Building healthy, sustainable communities**

Since 1999, the Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR)—formally established as a university-wide interdisciplinary research centre in 2000—has remained true to its mission of facilitating “partnerships between the university and the larger community in order to engage in relevant social research that supports a deeper understanding of our communities and that reveals opportunities for improving our quality of life.”

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CUI SR is committed to collaborative research and to accurate, objective reporting of research results in the public domain, taking into account the needs for confidentiality in gathering, disseminating, and storing information. CUI SR has five strategic research priorities:

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

These strategic directions build on the research priorities/ modules—quality of life indicators, community health determinants and health policy, and community economic development—that led to the formation of CUI SR to build capacity among researchers, CBOs, and citizenry.

CUI SR research projects are funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), local CBOs, and municipal, provincial, and federal governments.

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*Student training:* CUI SR provides training and guidance to undergraduate and graduate students and community researchers and encourages community agencies to provide community orientation in order to promote reciprocal benefits.

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Community-University Institute for Social Research

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## **LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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. We at Pathways to Equity at Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR), University of Saskatchewan, are 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. We are committed to working towards mending colonized lands and protecting the land in a way that demonstrates honour, respect, and love. We extend 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.

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Lastly, our thanks to the workshop facilitators and members of the working group: Isobel Findlay, James Dixon, Ehab Diab, Jim Woodcock, Davida Bentham, Andrea Kotlar, and Sarah Buhler along with Rosmary Rueda and Remi Kusimo as well as graduate student notetakers, Kenechukwu Aneke, Lilian Mallo, Ifeanyi Oguegbu, Tina Adeboyku, Chinwendu Ikwuegbu, Anu Yadav, Niloofar Nili, and Emilia Gillies.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Pathways to Equity Workshop on Housing Security and Neighbourhood Safety, held on March 26, 2025, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, brought together over 90 participants from diverse sectors to explore systemic challenges and opportunities related to housing insecurity and community safety. Hosted by the Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR) and Pathways to Equity Working Group, this workshop built on previous events in 2021 and 2024, continuing the Pathways initiative's commitment to community-engaged research and equity-driven dialogue.

The workshop featured expert panels, moderated breakout sessions, and reported back discussions that highlighted the complex interplay between housing, justice and advocacy, public safety, and social support systems and policies. Generally, key concepts included the disproportionate impact of housing insecurity on marginalized populations, the limitations of current policies such as the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods (SCAN) Act, and the urgent need for holistic, inclusive, and preventative approaches.

Participants emphasized the importance of centring lived experience, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and investing in wraparound care models that integrate housing with mental health, income, and legal supports. The workshop also underscored the need for data-driven decision-making, sustainable funding, and public education to combat stigma and promote inclusive policy reform.

The report concludes with a set of actionable recommendations aimed at building strong, safe, and inclusive communities. These include:

- Centre Lived Experience and Community Voice
- Build Connected, Safe, and Inclusive Communities
- Strengthen Collaboration and Cross-Sector Coordination
- Expand Education, Awareness, and Public Engagement
- Advance Policy Reform and Government Accountability
- Ensure Sustainable Funding and Support for Innovation
- Leverage Data and Evidence for Action
- Deliver Holistic, Wraparound, and Preventative Care
- Promote Accessibility, Equity, and Digital Inclusion

This workshop reaffirmed that housing is not only a basic need but a human right—and that meaningful change requires collective action, informed by those most affected.



## INTRODUCTION

Pathways to Equity is a research initiative and working group, long supported by an anonymous donor and administered by Research Acceleration and Strategic Initiatives, but now hosted within Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR), University of Saskatchewan. Pathways to Equity explores cross-agency and cross-disciplinary research in the areas of homelessness, social justice, education, and health across the province of Saskatchewan. The initiative 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 faculty members and community members representing diverse community organizations. 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 Pathways to Equity 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.

Building on the success of the inaugural virtual workshop on Housing Insecurity, Renter Equity, and Homelessness hosted in November 2021 and seeking to build on the momentum of existing

funded research projects, the Pathways to Equity Working Group hosted an in-person workshop at Station 20 West on Monday, January 29, 2024, on Housing Insecurity, Renter Equity, and Homelessness in Saskatchewan, engaging the broader community in reviews of research findings and discussion of emergent issues, challenges, and opportunities. The main focus of the discussions centred on financial and social support, stigmatization, long-term housing solutions, and collaboration. A total of 86 participants attended this highly interactive workshop, which included networking breaks, a panel discussion, and featured keynote speakers Colleen Christopherson-Cote from the Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership, and Debbie McGraw, co-founder of the Canadian Lived Experience Leadership Network. Contributions to research projects through the Pathways to Equity initiative were also shared by Natalie Tai (College of Dentistry, USask), Ryan Cupid (College of Law, USask), and Kenechukwu Aneke (College of Law, USask). Based on the discussions and findings from the 2024 Pathways to Equity Workshop, some possible next steps and future directions were identified:

- Expanding long-term housing solutions
- Enhancing resources for support
- Fostering collaboration and advocacy
- Focusing on research and data collection
- Improving access to justice
- Addressing rural and northern homelessness

This 2024 workshop was followed by a third in-person workshop focused on *Housing Security and Neighbourhood Safety*, held on March 26, 2025, Station 20 West, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, that attracted over 90 registrants representing a broad range of voices and perspectives. The workshop was open and accessible to a diverse group of participants, with invitations (and registration information) shared on CUISR distribution channels with those who had attended the previous virtual and in-person workshops in 2021 and 2024, along with individuals who had signed up to the Pathways to Equity mailing list. Those who received the invitation were encouraged to share the information through their own networks. The agenda below provides an overview of the activities and timeline for the workshop.

### 2025 Pathways to Equity Workshop Agenda

Time	Topic	Time	Who
8:30 am – 9:00 am	Arrival/Registration	30 minutes	
9:00 am – 9:30 am	Welcome Opening remarks and Blessing—Peggy Vermette Table introductions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Icebreaking activity</li> </ul>	30 minutes	Isobel Findlay & James Dixon
9:30 am – 9:45 am	Pathways to Equity Program and Research Group members Communities and Sustainability Signature Area	15 minutes	James Dixon & Isobel Findlay

9:45 am – 10:45 am	<p>Panel—Davida Bentham on Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act (SCAN) legislation</p> <p>Sarah Buhler, Housing security and Access to justice for renters in Saskatchewan (Pathways to Equity-Funded Research Project)</p> <p>Ehab Diab on Safety and barriers to public transportation</p> <p>Panel Discussion and Q&amp;A</p>	60 minutes	James Dixon
10:45 am – 11:00 am	Networking Break	15 minutes	
11:00 am –12:15 pm	<p>Moderated break out session # 1:</p> <p>Current challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants will rotate through 4 topic tables (15 minutes per table)</li> </ul>	75 minutes	Pathways to Equity Working Group
12:15 pm – 1:00 pm	<p>Lunch and Learn</p> <p>Panel –</p> <p>Isobel Findlay on downtown safety (Research Junction study findings)</p> <p>Keith Da Silva and Andrea Kotlar, Natalie Tai on A community-based research collaboration to improve income and</p>	45 minutes	Colleen Christopherson-Cote

	housing security for individuals diagnosed with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (Pathways to Equity-Funded Research Project)  Panel Discussion and Q&A		
1:00 pm – 2:15 pm	Moderated break out session # 2:  Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants will again rotate through four topic tables</li> <li>• Topics will be related to research, advocacy, policy</li> </ul>	75 minutes	Pathways to Equity Working Group
2:15 pm – 2:30 pm	Networking Break- SURVEY	15 minutes	
2:30 pm – 3:15 pm	Report back from break-out sessions and Discussion	45 minutes	Isobel Findlay & James Dixon
3:15 pm– 3:30 pm	Wrap-up activity on concluding statement/ manifesto and concluding remarks	15 minutes	Isobel Findlay & James Dixon

## **Report Purpose**

Against this background and context, this report aims to do the following:

- Highlight the research panel findings
- Summarize the event conversations
- Share the stories and concerns raised by community members
- Conclude with recommendations

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The following subsections review the various workshop activities, including the themes that emerged from panels and during the breakout sessions after Peggy Vermette’s opening remarks and blessing. Vermette’s inspiring words, drawing on her personal experience of homelessness and professional expertise as a social worker and Like Skills coach, were as passionate as they were powerful and productive. As she has done for decades, her messages were about hope, about what we can and must do together to build alliances for safe, inclusive, and sustainable communities in the fight against local and global issues that are a result of deliberate social engineering and colonialism. Unions began due to mistreatment of workers and Indigenous people and women were originally excluded from unions and voting rights. We all are affected by colonialism and Scottish, Welsh, and Irish were early targets of colonial systems. Stressing that ageism also contributes to division, she promoted the value of intergenerational wisdom and unity and All My Relations, respecting all life, Earth, humans, animals. Her message was of change through kindness—something she has learned with age.

Each breakout group discussion was facilitated by a member of the Pathways to Equity Working Group or CUISR staff member, with support from graduate students who served as notetakers. While participants remained at the same table, facilitators and notetakers rotated among the groups to guide discussions and document insights. See Appendix A for the Facilitator Guide describing the process and listing questions discussed.



## Panel Discussion # 1



The morning session began with the first panel featuring Davida Bentham on the “Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act (SCAN) legislation,” Sarah Buhler on “Housing Security and Access to Justice for Renters in Saskatchewan”—a Pathways to Equity-funded research



project—and Ehab Diab on “Safety and Barriers to Public Transportation.” Davida Bentham, a staff Lawyer and Volunteer Engagement Director at Pro Bono Law Saskatchewan, which gives free legal advice to low-income people who might otherwise have no access to legal services, presented a review of the legislation called “Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act (SCAN).” This provincial legislation introduced in Saskatchewan in 2004 was amended in December 2024 to cover graffiti and nuisance properties. She elaborated on SCAN, which enables anonymous complaints to be submitted to the Director regarding properties suspected of illegal activity. SCAN officers investigate these complaints, gather evidence, and may pursue legal action through the Office of Residential Tenancies (ORT)—acting as an agent for the renter’s landlord—or through the Court of King’s Bench. The resulting judicial consequence can be eviction for renters, and closure of the property for up to 90 days for property owners. She explained key parts of the provincial legislation, highlighted key concerns about how SCAN operates, and its impact on vulnerable populations. In particular, she asked if SCAN makes communities safer and if so, which communities and who is safer and from whom? How does eviction or being unhoused for 90 days make communities safer? Once a complaint is lodged, it cannot be withdrawn and can effectively add a layer of punishment to those already facing charges. The government is investing \$2.7 million in 2025/26 to hire an additional 14 SCAN officers. She also shared experiences from clients who were negatively impacted by SCAN.

Davida’s presentation laid the groundwork for Sarah Buhler’s talk, which focused on research conducted in collaboration with CLASSIC (Community Legal Assistance Services for Saskatoon Inner City) and funded by Pathways to Equity. The research examined “Access to Justice and Tenant Non-Attendance at Eviction Hearings in Saskatchewan.” Sarah discussed eviction and its

negative impacts on tenants, as well as the legal processes surrounding eviction. She raised the issue that landlords almost always win and receive immediate eviction orders when they make an eviction application. This is in part because tenants do not participate in the hearings, and their absence is interpreted by hearing officers as agreement to the eviction. Interviews with 18 people who had been evicted without attending their ORT hearing showed that eviction had significantly impacted their lives. Many participants believed that landlords held ultimate power over the eviction process and that the ORT favours landlords, which indicates a perceived futility and highlights other barriers tenants face.



The last panelist for the morning session, Ehab Diab, an assistant professor in the Department of Geography and Planning, presented on the perceived barriers to starting or continuing the use of public transit and the factors influencing perceptions of safety while using it. Ehab and his team conducted an online survey on “Understanding Barriers to Using Public Transit and Safety Experience and Perception for the USask Community” from February to April 2024, targeting 5% of the USask student and employee population. The survey included sections on travel behaviour, telecommuting, mode satisfaction, perceived barriers, and safety perception and

experience. The findings illustrate that, across all groups, participants consistently identified transit route and system planning issues as the most common barriers. In terms of safety experience and perception, the study suggests that policies should prioritize targeted safety measures and support for affected groups. Collaboration with the community, along with improved lighting, can enhance safety perceptions.



### **Breakout Session # 1 – Current Challenges**

For the first breakout session, participants were randomly divided into eight groups and given 75 minutes to discuss topics related to research, advocacy, and policy. While participants remained at the same tables, members of the Pathways to Equity Working Group rotated among the groups as facilitators to guide the discussions, while notetakers documented insights at each table. The specific questions that were assigned to each table follow:

1. Who (single parents, youth, elders, people with disabilities, Indigenous people, immigrant communities, veterans, unemployed/ underemployed, etc.) are most impacted by failures to protect and promote housing security and neighborhoods safety?

2. How does the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act (SCAN) strengthen or weaken housing security and neighbourhood safety?
3. What are important actions (policy or program investments, research, public education) that communities can take to promote and protect housing security and neighbourhood safety? Which communities need to be engaged?
4. What information/data/research will help enable practical, effective solutions?

Six common themes were raised through the discussion about current challenges, including systemic marginalization and inequalities, systemic failures in housing policy and public services, disempowerment and lack of agency, trauma and instability, lack of community engagement and support, data gaps and resource management.



### ***Systemic Marginalization and Inequities***

Housing insecurity disproportionately impacts marginalized populations, such as Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, low-income individuals, immigrants, refugees, single parents, children, seniors, and those struggling with mental health or addiction. These groups face an array of systemic barriers, such as discrimination, lack of access to resources, and historical trauma. Structural inequities such as illiteracy, social stigma, and racism exacerbate housing instability, leaving vulnerable populations even more at risk. The growing affordability gap, where housing costs rise faster than wages or other income, further intensifies this issue. The financialization of housing and the increasing rent costs push already marginalized groups out of stable housing, exacerbating inequality and creating cycles of displacement.

### ***Systemic Failures in Housing Policy and Public Services***

Despite the presence of policies intended to address housing insecurity, many are underfunded, outdated, and poorly implemented. A lack of coordination between housing, healthcare, justice, and social services results in fragmented interventions that fail to address the multifaceted nature of housing instability. Policies often lack cultural sensitivity, equity-focused approaches, and transparency, making it difficult for vulnerable populations to navigate or benefit from existing systems.

“SCAN is based on outdated policy on drugs and substance users. Its use of traffic in and out of the house is also a biased and inaccurate method of investigation. For example, people with disabilities or with certain types of needs have lots of support people or family coming and going from their residence.”

“High traffic does not necessarily translate to proof of allegation!”

Additionally, some policies—such as the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act (SCAN)—are criticized for being punitive rather than supportive, prioritizing eviction over meaningful social intervention.

“The question is does it provide a follow up process for their housing support?! (If not, it is actually increasing homelessness).”

The reliance on eviction as a quick fix exacerbates instability, leading to homelessness, poverty, and family disintegration. The absence of clear tenant protections, combined with opaque processes, disproportionately benefits landlords while leaving tenants struggling to assert their rights.

### ***Disempowerment and Lack of Agency***

Vulnerable populations often face significant barriers to accessing housing resources due to a lack of information, literacy, and advocacy skills. Disempowerment is compounded by a lack of accessible resources such as tenant education on their rights and responsibilities, translation services, and proper support structures. The imbalance of power between tenants and landlords is a central issue, as tenants often have limited rights and little recourse in housing disputes. The SCAN Act, in particular, disproportionately favours landlords, further reinforcing the power imbalance. Racial and socioeconomic profiling within housing systems adds to the isolation and

“It is harsh and adds insecurity and decreasing safety and instilling a feeling of insecurity like being under surveillance.”

“Why would someone intervene to check what I am doing in my house?”

criminalization of marginalized communities, particularly those affected by biased policing and surveillance practices.

### ***Trauma and Instability***

The mental health toll of housing insecurity cannot be overstated. The instability and stress associated with housing insecurity contribute to ongoing trauma, exacerbating mental health struggles. Individuals facing housing instability often feel unsafe, powerless, and disconnected from their communities, which leads to further mental health challenges and family disintegration. The inability to find secure housing or access supportive services creates a vicious cycle of instability, which further undermines individual and community well-being. Evictions and displacement worsen this dynamic, making it more difficult for individuals and families to regain stability and improving the likelihood of prolonged housing insecurity.

### ***Lack of Community Engagement and Support***

Addressing housing insecurity requires strong community involvement and engagement. Communities must work together to build supportive networks, share resources, and ensure that local voices are included in decision-making processes. The emphasis should be on fostering social cohesion and collective responsibility.

“Part of the issue is that it’s easy for people to say that’s not my issue, or that’s not directly impacting me or my family.”

Public education plays a crucial role in tackling stigma and increasing awareness of tenant rights, the underlying causes of housing insecurity, and the broader social issues that contribute to housing instability. This can help combat the negative perceptions that surround housing insecurity and empower communities to advocate for better solutions.

“They don’t teach you how to do laundry, how to wash the floor, how to do your dishes, how to cook, how to shower. It’s not taught when you’re in jail or you’re in a foster system. You’re not taught anything like that.”

“The system takes care of you, everything for you, and then all of a sudden, you’re out of there and you don’t know nothing.”

### ***Data Gaps and Resource Management***

One of the key barriers to effective policy development and intervention is the lack of accurate, reliable data on homelessness, vulnerable populations, and housing needs. This data deficiency makes it difficult to craft targeted and effective policies or programs. In addition, existing data are often misused, misunderstood, or not shared across relevant sectors, further limiting their potential to inform evidence-based decision-making.

“The way data are being interpreted and spoken about by decision makers is not necessarily representative of the actual issue.”

“It is very possible today to cherry pick information that confirms any person’s own beliefs or biases.”



Better data management, sharing, and transparency are essential to ensure that interventions are aligned with real needs. Additionally, the ineffective management of available housing and support services further compounds the problem. There is a need for more efficient tracking and allocation of resources, ensuring that they are effectively utilized and accessible to those who need them the most, in a sustainable manner.

## Panel Discussion # 2



Isobel Findlay discussed a study funded by Research Junction on Downtown Safety showing how systemic issues such as colonial legacies, housing inequities or “housing divides,” and neoliberal disinvestment have contributed to both the perception and reality of insecurity. Those “housing divides” are associated with “the politics of exclusion,” entailing a bad image for affordable housing, fears about impacts on “property values and the invasion of the poor”—despite the right to housing recognized under international convention (including 1948 Universal

Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) and the 2019 National Housing Strategy Act. The study emphasizes that public safety is not merely about crime prevention and protection of property but also about access to basic needs like housing, healthcare, and inclusive public spaces. The study notes the reorienting of policing and protective services, preventing crime through environmental design, but calls for an end to blame games that often target the most marginalized and a shift toward a more holistic, human rights-based understanding of safety that includes social supports and community well-being.

Findings revealed a complex picture of public safety perceptions. While many respondents feel safe during the day, concerns increase at night, particularly in areas associated with homelessness or substance use. Respondents identified poverty, mental health challenges, and intergenerational trauma as root causes of behaviours perceived as unsafe. There is a tension between valuing vibrant, populated public spaces and fearing certain groups within them. Respondents also expressed mixed views on policing, with some calling for more presence and others criticizing over-policing and systemic bias.

Isobel Findlay concluded by discussing how ideas of public safety are changing and sometimes conflicting. She highlighted that more people now recognize the deep problems in our systems, especially the importance of fair access to public spaces and services that support health and well-being. She also noted that efforts are increasingly focused on improving public safety through human rights, public health, and social justice. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and

worsened existing injustices, showing the need to invest in services that were often overlooked. It also led to new partnerships between different groups, encouraged more inclusive thinking, and strengthened commitments to Reconciliation. These changes are helping people imagine what a truly safe and caring community could look like.

Natalie Tai then presented a study on “The Impacts of Developmental Disabilities on Income and Housing Opportunity,” conducted in collaboration with Andrea Kotlar and Dr. Keith Da Silva and funded by Pathways to Equity. This study focused on the significant challenges individuals with developmental disabilities (DD) face in securing income and housing. Developmental disabilities, which include conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down Syndrome, and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, often result in long-term physical, cognitive, and intellectual impairments. These individuals frequently encounter systemic barriers that hinder their ability to live independently, particularly due to the lack of affordable, accessible housing and limited employment opportunities. Although there has been a gradual shift from institutional care to community-based living, this transition is hampered by funding shortages, staffing issues, and restrictive zoning laws that exclude group homes from residential neighbourhoods.

During her presentation, Natalie noted that the study aimed to explore how a developmental disability diagnosis affects an individual’s ability to earn income and access appropriate housing. The literature indicated that individuals with developmental disabilities face significant barriers in both areas, with recurring themes including a lack of affordable and accessible housing, insufficient support systems that perpetuate disadvantage, and limited employment and income

opportunities. Natalie presented findings highlighting that many individuals with developmental disabilities continue to live with family due to the absence of suitable housing options. Proximity to community resources was identified as essential for fostering independence and social integration. Additionally, the lack of training among service providers in both the homelessness and disability sectors further exacerbates the challenges faced by this population. Employment opportunities are also limited, with post-secondary education emerging as a critical factor in improving income and housing outcomes. The interplay between housing and income was emphasized, showing that one cannot be achieved without the other.

Natalie also discussed several recommendations, including the development of affordable, community-based housing, the creation of inclusive employment policies, and enhanced collaboration between the housing and disability sectors. As she mentioned, these measures are essential to dismantle the structural barriers that prevent individuals with developmental disabilities from achieving equitable access to income and housing, ultimately supporting their right to live independently and with dignity.



## Breakout Session # 2 – Opportunities



Following the second panel discussion, the second breakout session was held in the same format as the first, with participants remaining at their tables while members of the Pathways to Equity Working Group rotated among the groups as facilitators to guide the discussions, and notetakers documented insights at each table. The specific questions that were assigned to each table follow:

1. What expertise or whose knowledges does the Saskatchewan community most need to address housing security and neighbourhood safety?
2. What work has been done, or is currently underway among community organizations and researchers that we need to learn from and build on?
3. How can we make our voices count as housing advocates?
4. How do we nourish inclusive, strong, safe, and sustainable neighbourhoods and communities?

While challenges in the current system were acknowledged, participants highlighted numerous opportunities for fostering change and improvement. During the discussions, several recurring themes emerged as critical opportunities for advancing housing security and neighbourhood safety in Saskatoon. These included centring lived experience and knowledge, fostering cross-sector and multilevel collaboration, sustaining holistic care through strategic investment, mobilizing resources and funding innovation, and implementing data-driven policies and practices. Additional priorities identified by participants included building capacity through education and awareness, promoting policy innovation and structural reform, enhancing strategic communication and advocacy, supporting community empowerment and localized action, and advancing inclusion, equity, and cultural safety across all levels of planning and implementation.

### ***Centring Lived Experience and Knowledge***

A consistent theme across all responses is the recognition of people with lived experience as critical experts in addressing housing insecurity and neighbourhood safety. They are viewed as central participants who must be directly included in planning, advocacy, and decision-making processes—not spoken for by intermediaries. Respondents emphasized that these individuals should be compensated, trained, and provided with structural supports such as health benefits and fair wages. Their insights are seen not only as valid evidence for policy development and service design but also as essential for grassroots organizing where institutional support may be lacking.

### ***Cross-Sector and Multilevel Collaboration***

The need for multi-agency, cross-sector collaboration is strongly emphasized, highlighting an opportunity to reduce fragmentation and burnout in the sector. Respondents advocated for breaking down silos across government, community organizations, NGOs, researchers, builders, landlords, Indigenous groups, and others. The creation of shared goals and collective action is seen as a way to build momentum and prevent duplication of efforts.

### ***Sustaining Holistic Care Through Strategic Investment***

Respondents consistently emphasized the importance of wraparound care models that integrate housing with mental health services, income support, and other essential resources—particularly for vulnerable populations such as those transitioning from foster care or health facilities. These holistic, person-centred approaches are seen as more effective than rigid, rule-based systems and are foundational to building inclusive, resilient communities.

“Continuum of care – Focus not only on recovery and treatment, but also prevention.”

However, the success of these models is repeatedly undermined by a lack of sustainable and sufficient funding. Underfunding leads to burnout, reduced services, and organizational instability, threatening the continuity of care. Participants identified a need for innovative funding strategies—such as social impact investing, philanthropic engagement, and social enterprises—to ensure long-term viability. Proper investment is not only critical for housing but also for the broader infrastructure and supports that contribute to overall community well-being.

### ***Resource Mobilization and Funding Innovation***

Building on the common concerns about the lack of sustainable and sufficient funding and their consequences for individuals and organizations, participants pointed to an opportunity to explore social impact investing, involve philanthropists, and use innovative fundraising strategies such as social enterprises or social media campaigns. These approaches can support long-term solutions and reduce reliance on inconsistent grants. However, while the concept of social return on investment is compelling, convincing stakeholders remains a challenge. Building trust and encouraging risk-taking in community investment is often a slow and difficult process. Proper investment is necessary not only for housing projects but also for infrastructure, education, and wraparound supports that contribute to overall community well-being.

### ***Data-Driven Policies and Practices***

A major opportunity lies in improving the use and sharing of data. Participants highlighted the importance of centralized, accessible data platforms such as Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) and CUISR's support for community-based research, funding applications, and coordinated action. Data are viewed as a powerful tool for informing decisions and building collaborative plans, but there are also concerns about privacy and the need for safeguards when sharing information across agencies. This focus on data integration is linked to improving accountability, informing innovative housing models, and helping frontline organizations demonstrate impact.



### ***Building Capacity Through Education and Awareness***

There is a strong call to use education and media to shift public perceptions about housing insecurity and related issues. Respondents mentioned the importance of anti-racism training, public education on poverty and addiction, and school-level initiatives to reduce stigma.

Informed journalists and high-engagement media platforms were proposed as vehicles for informing the public, humanizing affected individuals, and influencing public discourse.

Education was also described as necessary for empowering policymakers and community leaders to better understand systemic issues and take informed action.

### ***Policy Innovation and Structural Reform***

Many responses critiqued current policies as being out of step with community needs. There were frustrations over age restrictions, punitive eviction policies, and disconnected or disengaged stakeholders. Respondents called for flexibility in eligibility criteria and a shift from treatment-only approaches to preventative, holistic strategies. The opportunity lies in improving policy coordination—for example, by aligning with the National Building Code or the Accessibility Act—and ensuring policies are inclusive, culturally safe, and informed by community voices.

Policy innovation was also linked to supporting housing models such as co-ops, hubs, and transitional housing.

## ***Strategic Communication and Advocacy***

Respondents identified unified, mindful messaging as an opportunity to strengthen advocacy efforts. Suggestions included building coalitions, streamlining communication, and engaging people through accessible and engaging formats. Terminology that might alienate stakeholders—such as the word “advocacy”—should be reconsidered.

“We should consider a direct approach that focuses on solutions that favour all stakeholders and not just the vulnerable groups. This would allow broader buy-in as people would believe the solutions would benefit them as well.”

There is a push for storytelling, petitions, and media strategies that raise awareness, influence public opinion, and hold policymakers accountable. Some respondents also emphasized the importance of encouraging public figures to engage with the realities of living on social assistance budgets, as a way to deepen their understanding and strengthen the impact of public messaging. The goal is to ensure that those affected by housing insecurity are heard and represented in a way that builds public support and influences system-level change.

## ***Community Empowerment and Localized Action***

Community-led efforts were highlighted as essential for fostering resilient, inclusive, and safe neighbourhoods. This strategy includes shared decision-making, community events, and mutual support networks that build trust and social cohesion. The phrase “Nothing about us without us,” cited by a participant, captures the emphasis on involving community members, especially those with lived experience, in identifying and implementing solutions.

“Helping one another without judgment and approaching community work from the heart, rather than focusing solely on financial incentives. . . .”

Local organizing was promoted as especially important in areas where government support is lacking. Community empowerment is a strategy for both immediate safety and long-term sustainability in neighbourhoods.

“There should be investment in infrastructure – parks, streetlights, 24/7 youth centre, bathrooms, etc.”

### ***Inclusion, Equity, and Cultural Safety***

Across all themes, there is a clear opportunity to apply equity-focused and culturally safe approaches to both policy and practice. These approaches mean actively engaging historically marginalized groups—such as Indigenous communities, newcomers, 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, single parents, and youth—in all aspects of the work. Respondents called for more inclusive engagement strategies that reflect diverse realities and foster empathy, respect, and compassion. Equity was understood not as a secondary concern but as a foundational principle for building inclusive, strong, and sustainable communities.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Pathways to Equity Working Group brought together a diverse group of community members, organizational leaders, students, and researchers for a day of learning, connection, and dialogue focused on housing security and neighbourhood safety in Saskatoon. The discussions highlighted the disproportionate impact of current housing policies on marginalized populations and underscored the limitations of punitive frameworks such as the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods (SCAN) Act. The importance of centring lived experience in policy development, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and investing in holistic, wraparound care models that integrate housing with mental health, income, and legal supports was consistently emphasized as essential to advancing meaningful change. Additionally, the need for sustainable funding, improved data governance, and public education was identified as critical to reducing stigma and informing equitable policy reform.

These insights reflect a strong commitment to dignity, equity, and community well-being. The following recommendations are grounded in the collective knowledge and lived realities shared throughout the workshop and are intended to guide actionable, community-informed change.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Key recommendations emerging from the workshop discussions aimed at supporting the development of strong, safe, inclusive, and sustainable neighbourhoods and housing systems.

## **Centre Lived Experience and Community Voice**

Communities must include people with lived experience in all areas of housing and development. They should be fairly paid, trained if needed, and respected for their insights. Representation must reflect community diversity—Indigenous peoples, 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, youth, people with disabilities, and those with low incomes. Services should be based on need, not strict rules, and reconciliation must guide support for marginalized groups.

## **Build Connected, Safe, and Inclusive Communities**

Invest in public infrastructure—parks, libraries, youth centers, and wellness hubs—that build connection. Replace over-policing with community-led safety focused on trust and inclusion. Public education campaigns should address misconceptions about poverty, mental health, and addiction, helping to create a culture of compassion and understanding.

## **Strengthen Collaboration and Cross-Sector Coordination**

To prevent duplication and burnout, community organizations need support to collaborate in coordinated networks. A central body can align efforts across health, education, housing, justice, and social services. Government must clarify roles and stop dismissing housing as “not their mandate.” True progress requires a unified, multi-agency approach that centres community needs.

## **Expand Education, Awareness, and Public Engagement**

Schools should integrate social determinants of health into curricula, and workplaces should implement mandatory anti-racism and sensitivity training. Public campaigns—via media, culture, and events—should uplift underrepresented voices and share real stories. Messaging should be

accessible, engaging, and rooted in lived experience. Creating opportunities for public figures and decision-makers to engage with the lived realities of those on social assistance can further foster empathy and more informed, compassionate policies.

### **Advance Policy Reform and Government Accountability**

Policy change must be driven by direct engagement between communities and decision-makers. Policymakers should be trained to listen without bias and to co-create solutions with those affected. Advocacy should be reframed as collaborative problem-solving, avoiding language that triggers defensiveness. Housing must be prioritized with economic development, and conflicting policies must be fixed.

### **Ensure Sustainable Funding and Support for Innovation**

Long-term investment is essential to sustain community programs and housing initiatives. Governments must increase funding for holistic support services, eviction prevention, renovations, and semi-independent living. Philanthropy and social impact investing should be encouraged, and startup grants should support community-led enterprises. Housing should be recognized and funded as a human right rather than a market commodity. Funding decisions must be guided by metrics such as Social Return on Investment (SROI) that prioritize measurable, long-term benefits for communities.

### **Leverage Data and Evidence for Action**

Data must be used to inform decisions, not just collect statistics. Privacy-protected data-sharing platforms should be expanded to help organizations coordinate care and track outcomes. Community-based research, grounded in lived experience, should guide funding and policy. A

centralized, accessible database of housing programs and services would empower both providers and residents.

### **Deliver Holistic, Wraparound, and Preventative Care**

Housing stability cannot be achieved without addressing the broader needs of individuals and families. Wraparound services must include mental health care, addiction support, income help, legal aid, and financial literacy. Discharge from hospitals, shelters, and foster care must not lead to homelessness. Community hubs should link housing with key services, and prevention must be a core focus.

### **Promote Accessibility, Equity, and Digital Inclusion**

Accessibility must be embedded in all housing and community planning. This includes enforcing building codes, supporting legislation like the Accessibility Act, and ensuring that people with disabilities and those on fixed incomes can access safe, affordable housing. Administrative barriers—such as complex application processes—must be reduced. Investing in digital tools—like free Wi-Fi and online services—will improve access to support and information.

## APPENDIX A



### **Facilitator Guide for Pathways to Equity Workshop Housing Security and Neighbourhood Safety Station 20 West, March 26, 2025**

**Break-out Sessions: Session One 11:00-12:15 pm/ Session Two 13:00-14:15**

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- **Session One (11:00-12:15 pm):** Participants will rotate through four topic tables related to research, advocacy, and policy. Facilitators and notetakers will move while participants will stay at the same table (1, 2, 3, or 4 X 2). After first round, question 1 facilitators and notetakers will move to 4, then 3, and 2. Question 2 moves to 1, 4, and then 3; Question 3 to 2, 1, and 4; Question 4 to 3, 2, and 1.
- Once in your discussion group, introduce yourself and your notetaker (listed below) and then describe process (see pp. 2-3).
  1. Who (single parents, youth, elders, people with disabilities, Indigenous people, immigrant communities, veterans, unemployed/ underemployed, etc.) are most impacted by failures to protect and promote housing security and neighborhoods safety? [Isobel & Chinenye: 1A // Ehab & Chinwendu: 1B]
  2. How does the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act (SCAN) strengthen or weaken housing security and neighbourhood safety? [Davida & Ifeanyi: 2A // Sarah & Anu: 2B]
  3. What are important actions (policy or program investments, research, public education) that communities can take to promote and protect housing security and neighbourhood safety? Which communities need to be engaged? [Jim & Kenekwuwu: 3A // Remi & Niloofar: 3B]
  4. What information/data/research will help enable practical, effective solutions? [Rosmary & Tina: 4A // James & Emilia: 4B]
- **Session Two (13:00-14:15):** Participants will rotate through four topic tables related to research, advocacy, and policy. Facilitators and notetakers will move while participants will stay at the same table (1, 2, 3, or 4 X 2). After first round, question 1 facilitators and notetakers will move to 4, then 3, and 2. Question 2 moves to 1, 4, and then 3; Question 3 to 2, 1, and 4; Question 4 to 3, 2, and 1.



1. What expertise/ whose knowledges does the Saskatchewan community most need to address housing security and neighbourhood safety? [Davida & Chinenye: 1A// Ehab & Chinwendu: 1B]
2. What work has been done, or is currently underway among community organizations and researchers that we need to learn from and build on? [James & Ifeanyi: 2A // Remi & Anu: 2B]
3. How can we make our voices count as housing advocates? [Rosmary & Niloofar: 3A // Andrea & Kenechukwu: 3B]
4. How do we nourish inclusive, strong, safe, and sustainable neighbourhoods and communities? [Isobel & Tina: 4A // Jim & Emilia: 4B]

- **Facilitation Process:**

1. My role is to guide and animate the discussion, to ensure all voices around the table have equitable opportunities to contribute and to keep us focused on the purpose of this table discussion. Our notetaker will be taking notes and we can help them get an accurate record of discussion.
2. The purpose of this group discussion is to learn and listen to others, to share our own perspectives and experiences related to housing security and neighbourhood safety. Overall, we hope to:
  - a. Identify priority areas for action
  - b. Identify priority research areas
  - c. Discover areas of expertise, interest, and community capacity.
3. Small group discussion guidelines:
  - a. Everyone is welcome to share – their experiences are valid regardless of their background. We encourage everyone to participate as fully as they wish.
  - b. Everyone can introduce a new topic that is relevant to the discussion.
  - c. We appreciate and respect that some people are here to listen and to learn.
  - d. We won't invite you to speak if you signal that you'd rather listen.
  - After the group discussions, notetakers (and facilitators if they choose) will be invited by the Moderator to give a 2–3-minute overview of group priorities to the larger group in a report back session (2:30 pm-3:15 pm).
  - The final session (3:15 pm-3:30 pm) will aim to produce a concluding statement that we can agree to.
4. At the end of the day, we will gather all the flip chart sheets to draft a report of the day's proceedings and findings.

5. Facilitators will encourage the group to fill out the end of workshop survey and indicate their interest in participating in/developing workshops and other action on housing security and neighbourhood safety.
6. Any questions before we begin?







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