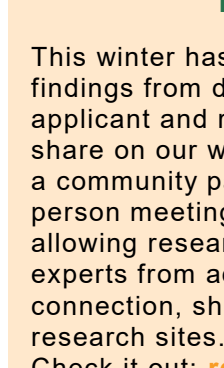
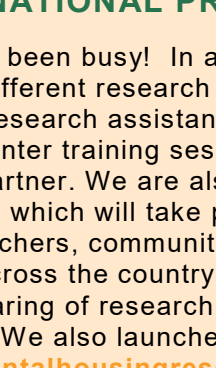




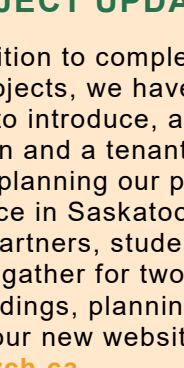
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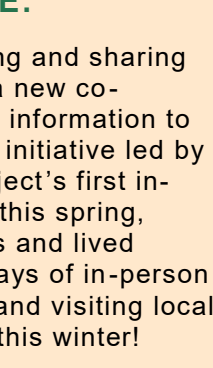
New Research on the Canada Housing Benefit



Upcoming Conference Presentations



Community Partner Updates



New Team Member Profiles

### NATIONAL PROJECT UPDATE:

This winter has been busy! In addition to completing and sharing findings from different research projects, we have a new co-applicant and research assistants to introduce, and information to share on our winter training session and a tenants' initiative led by a community partner. We are also planning our project's first in-person meeting which will take place in Saskatoon this spring, allowing researchers, community partners, students and lived experts from across the country to gather for two days of in-person connection, sharing of research findings, planning and visiting local research sites. We also launched our new website this winter! Check it out: [rentalhousingresearch.ca](http://rentalhousingresearch.ca).

### New Research from our Partnership Grant:

**"It's the difference between barely making it and not making it at all": Housing as a human right, neoliberalism, and the new Canada Housing Benefit**

By Catherine Leviten-Reid, Migan Digou and Jacqueline Kennelly

This winter, one of our research teams completed a project on the new Canada Housing Benefit as it has rolled out in Nova Scotia during its first two years. We have been sharing findings in different ways, including through a webinar with Nova Scotia Equity Watch which is [available online](#), and a presentation to the Cape Breton Coalition for Social Justice. Jacqueline Kennelly will be presenting this research at the Canadian Sociology Association's conference session on *Current Issues and Recent Findings in Canadian Poverty Research* coming up in May, and a summary has been prepared for the [Social Housing and Human Rights](#) event taking place in Winnipeg this spring.

Our focus was to explore whether demand-side approaches, and the new Canada Housing Benefit (CHB) in particular, can fulfill government obligations under a rights-based approach to housing. To answer this question, we conducted interviews with tenants receiving rent subsidies and staff of a non-profit organization which supports them. Research took place in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM, population 94,000). Five of the tenants who participated in this research are receiving a rent supplement as the organization (and province) is transitioning to the new CHB allowance; nine are receiving the new CHB allowance. Most tenants interviewed were female identifying and lived alone, with the average age being 37 and average household income equaling \$15,900.

All those we interviewed emphasized how helpful it was to receive financial assistance with rent every month. Participants noted that it helped them to pay for housing, and that the extra funds they had available from the rental subsidy allowed them to buy other necessities, especially food. Despite the subsidy provided, tenants continued to face significant financial struggles. One of the significant shelter-related expenses emphasized was energy costs.

Results were mixed with respect to housing condition. Some tenants we interviewed spoke positively about their units and buildings. Others, in receipt of both the CHB allowance and the rent supplement, noted rodent infestations and problems adequately heating or cooling their apartments. Some tenants, and in particular, some in receipt of the CHB allowance, also reported living in housing in need of major repair.

Tenants also reported mixed experiences with their landlords. Some described landlords as responsive to problems they reported, making repairs quickly and taking care of property maintenance, while others reported concerns about possible eviction and lack of landlord response to requests for major repairs.

Unexpectedly, tenants with rent supplements were receiving greater financial support than those with CHB allowances. One reason for this is because utility costs are treated differently by the two subsidy types, with a partial credit available in the supplement program, versus no consideration given in the CHB calculation. There is also a rent cap set at Average Market Rent (AMR) for the CHB allowance, in contrast to providing a subsidy amount which bridges the gap between the tenant's portion of the rent and what is charged by the landlord, as used in the supplement program.

For those nine research participants receiving the new CHB allowance, only three had units which were below or equal to the rent ceiling utilized. This means they were responsible for covering rental costs above AMR on their own. Housing workers noted that the AMRs used in the allowance calculation were not updated regularly enough by the province to reflect changes in the housing market, nor did they reflect the rents of vacant units. The result is a rent cap which greatly underestimates actual rental costs in the community, with many CHB allowance participants paying at least 50% of their income on shelter costs.

People we interviewed also stressed that finding market units with lower rents was impossible. Different reasons were offered, including increased demand for housing driven by higher enrollment at the local university, and the financialization of housing in the community. The vacancy rate in the municipality, based on fall 2022 data from CMHC, is 1.5%.

### Discussion and Policy Solutions

Our findings demonstrate a clear misalignment between a rights-based approach to housing and the experiences of tenants in receipt of demand-side housing assistance, particularly those receiving the new CHB allowance. We found that tenants in receipt of *both kinds* of financial rent assistance are living in units that fail to meet standards of adequate housing, as defined by the United Nations. Findings also show that the shift from the older rent supplement to the new CHB allowance represented a *step back* for the most vulnerable of individuals and families.

It is possible to correct for some of the flaws in the new CHB allowance program through policy design. Monthly financial support could be provided for utilities. The AMR cap could be removed altogether so it is consistent with public, rent-gear-to-income housing, or it could be raised to, for example, 120% of AMR, with research showing, not surprisingly, that more generous housing subsidies reduce rent burdens. To address the habitability of units, inspections could be conducted by government before and during a tenant's lease agreement.

Beyond specific changes to the CHB design, legislating vacancy control would be a structural mechanism through which to address affordability challenges experienced by CHB allowance recipients (note that Nova Scotia currently only has a temporary rent cap in place, set to expire at the end of 2023). To address habitability, a universal program of landlord licensing and inspections could be used instead of targeted inspections of units in which rent subsidy recipients are living. Such an approach would also address more systemic problems with the housing market. For instance, landlord licensing could prevent rental housing in need of significant repair from being rented in the first place, and stop landlords from opting out of renting to subsidy recipients when repairs during a tenancy are requested. However, political openness to these structural changes is slower.

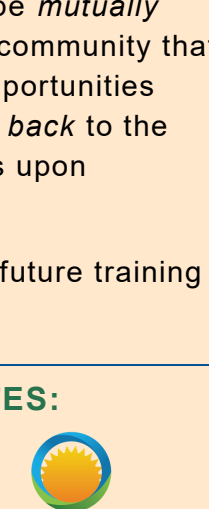
Also relevant is the state of the local rental housing market, which is chronically lacking in affordable units that meet reasonable standards of habitability. This results in constrained choices for tenants and housing workers alike, or no choices at all. Findings suggest that any effort to respond to Canada's chronic lack of affordable housing primarily through demand-side programs is unlikely to succeed without substantial investment in supply-side responses that generate affordable and habitable rental units.

For more information on this project, contact [Jackie Kennelly](#) or [Catherine Leviten-Reid](#).

### UPCOMING EVENTS:

**[Naming a New Era in Housing Policy: Government Subsidized Corporate Capture of Housing, Conference Presentation at Canadian Sociological Association Conference \(May 29—June 2 2023\)](#)**

Researchers Jacqueline Kennelly (from Carleton University), Brenda Parker (from the University of Illinois-Chicago), and Guy Johnson (from RMIT in Melbourne, Australia) will be presenting this in-progress research paper at the upcoming [Canadian Sociological Association Conference in May 2023](#).



The central aim of their paper is to sketch the contours of a distinctive era in housing policy that we see emerging across at least three liberal democracies, namely Canada, the US, and Australia. These three countries share recent histories of ideologically-driven policy transformations, following neoliberal principals, including state retrenchment of social welfare systems, devolution of services to local governments, the privatization of formerly public services, and, most importantly for this paper, substantial cuts to government funding of public and affordable housing in the 1980s and early 1990s. After 30 to 40 years of disinvestment in housing, contributing to significant rises in homelessness and a crisis of affordable housing in each country, all three of our study sites have recently made, or are in the process of making, significant federal government re-investments in the housing sector. A naive reading of this development could see it as a return to a Keynesian welfare state, potentially leading to a new 'golden age' of public housing development, such as emerged after World War II – preferably without the racist and sexist politics that marred government-funded public housing developments of the time. While we might wish this to be the case, we instead outline what we see as a distinct era in the history of housing provision in certain Western liberal democracies. Emerging prior, during, and after the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020-2022, this is an era in which public investment in housing has re-emerged as a policy solution to housing affordability crises in each country, but where government funds are in danger of flowing directly or indirectly into the private sector, *without* significantly improving the prospects of providing sustainable and deeply affordable housing.

### Seminar Presentation

**Ateliers-Midi Quantitatifs du Centre UCS 2022-2023**

**Groupe d'étude en statistique sociale (GESS)**

**April 4th 2023, 12:30—1:30pm (Eastern Time)**

**By Xavier Leloup (INRS)**

**<https://INRS.zoom.us/j/82397844075>**

Xavier Leloup, a Co-Applicant on our research team based in Montreal, will be presenting on findings related to our Canadian Housing Survey analysis as they relate to the economic hardship experienced by tenants living in different types of rental housing.

Tune in via Zoom: <https://INRS.zoom.us/j/82397844075>

### WINTER EVENTS:

**Student Training Session**

**Community Engaged Research (CER)**

In February of this year, Catherine Leviten-Reid led a virtual training session with our project's students and lived experts on the topic of Community Engaged Research (CER). Community engaged research is the process of establishing research questions, collecting data, and disseminating information in partnership with members of the public and community organizations. The session consisted of an open discussion among participants from across the country who had a lot to say about how CER impacts research participants—who, in the case of our research, are largely tenants. We discussed the impacts that CER has had on tenants in the past, addressed examples of CER done poorly, and talked about the important benefits of CER when done well. An important message conveyed by Catherine was that CER functions best for all when done in *meaningful partnership* with the community; CER should be *mutually beneficial* for all involved, should *engage* the community that it intends to serve, should allow *leadership* opportunities among research participants, and should *give back* to the community by sharing results with participants upon completion of the project.

If you are interested in leading or attending a future training session, reach out to our [Project Coordinator](#).

### COMMUNITY PARTNER UPDATES:

**New Dawn Enterprises**

**Tenant Education, Empowerment, and Advocacy**



New Dawn Enterprises, a community partner in the Atlantic Region, is engaging with local tenants in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM) through a new [Tenant Education, Empowerment, and Advocacy](#) project funded by the Community Housing Transformation Centre. Since 2022, this project has conducted community education workshops to inform local tenants and service providers about tenants' rights and responsibilities as well as landlord responsibilities under provincial tenancy law. This winter, the project has begun the work of establishing a novel Tenants' Association in the CBRM that will be tenant-led and used to advocate and organize for and with local tenants. In the spring, the project will be releasing a written CBRM Tenants' Rights Guide that will be distributed within the community—in print and online form—providing tenants' rights information that is geared towards Cape Breton residents. The goal of the Tenants' Rights Guide is to provide a written, easy-to-use handbook with information and resources about rental housing that tenants can keep on their coffee tables for reference throughout their tenancy. The Guide will include a resources section that is translated into four languages to provide a level of accessibility and encourage use of the guide to non-English speakers, including newcomers to Cape Breton, as well as local Indigenous residents. Visit the [Tenant Advocacy and Education](#) website for more information and updates on their project.

### NEW TEAM MEMBER PROFILES:

**Dr. Kristen Desjarlais-DeKlerk**

Dr. Kristen Desjarlais-DeKlerk is an Assistant Professor in the Department of L'n'u, Political, and Social Studies at Cape Breton University and is on the board of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. Kristen joins People, Places, Policies and Prospects this year as a new Co-Applicant on our project grant. Dr. Desjarlais-DeKlerk is a settler-Metis woman and mixed methods community-engaged researcher who studies a diverse range of topics. As a sociologist, her interests centre on inequality and health outcomes for different populations. While the majority of her research has focused on homelessness, housing, social support, health, and harm reduction, she's explored Indigenous culture and wellbeing, sexuality and sexual pleasure, and physicians and health. Her research interests are vast, but focus on community needs.

**Misha Maitreyi**



Misha Maitreyi joined our project this winter as a Research Assistant in the Atlantic Region. Misha's work involves conducting interviews with housing organizations in Atlantic Canada to collect data on the Canada Housing Benefit program.

Misha is currently a doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of New Brunswick, where she is researching memories of collective violence for Indian Sikh and Muslim immigrants and the implications on their post-migration living in Canada. She holds a Bachelor's (Honours) in History and a Master's degree in Sociology from the University of Delhi, India. Misha also pursued another Master's degree in Political Science from Central European University, Hungary. Misha's research experience includes themes of spatial inequities, displacement issues and intimate partner violence.

Misha has a strong interest in conducting qualitative research that focuses on human rights, gender issues, and social justice and comprehending them using an intersectional lens. Furthermore, she also works to contextualize meso and macro level social changes with respect to individual's and community's experiences, and their socio-economic and political standings.

Do you or your organization have an announcement or project you would like shared in an upcoming edition of our newsletter?

Reach out to Claire Maxwell, our National Project Coordinator, at [coordinator@cbru.ca](mailto:coordinator@cbru.ca) to have your article featured. We can help share your news and increase the reach of important work being done in the housing sector by all of our community and academic partners.



This research and its dissemination is made possible by funding from SSHRC and CMHC.



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