



Systems Of Cross-sector Integration and Action across the Lifespan (SOCIAL) Framework Research Brief

Housing Sector

Summer 2024

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The Housing Sector and the Role it Plays in Addressing Social Isolation, Loneliness, and Connection (SILC)

Housing refers to the provision of living spaces or accommodation for individuals, families, or groups and encompasses a wide variety of dwelling types (E.g., houses, apartments, condos). It is both the physical structures where people live and the broader context of community planning, accessibility, affordability, and the infrastructure that supports residential living.

Where we live matters because the physical, social, and economic conditions of our living environments profoundly influence our health, opportunities, and overall quality of life. Research indicates that gentrification can disrupt established communities, displacing residents who can no longer afford to remain and severing social and cultural ties, exacerbating social isolation.^(60,61,62) Therefore, housing stability is essential for maintaining social ties and support networks, as it allows individuals and families to build lasting relationships, participate in community activities, and access local resources that contribute to their overall well-being and sense of security. Research has also shown that integrating arts and culture through placemaking can mitigate displacement effects by preserving cultural connections and fostering a sense of place.⁽⁶²⁾

By designing and implementing housing models that prioritize social interaction and well-designed communal spaces, the sector can create environments that encourage residents to engage with one another. Additionally, ensuring that housing developments are inclusive and accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds promotes diverse interactions and support networks. This includes providing stable housing for unhoused or previously unhoused individuals, which when accompanied by appropriate support, can help them build social capital and gain better access to community resources.^(63, 53, 52) By fostering stable and inclusive housing environments that increase community resilience, communities can enhance social cohesion and support networks, ultimately improving the overall quality of life for all residents.



The housing sector plays a crucial role in addressing social isolation, loneliness, and fostering connections (SILC) by creating affordable and accessible living spaces, designing communal areas that encourage interaction, and implementing programs that support community engagement and social integration.



Scope and Objectives

This research brief delves into the housing sector, building on the findings of the recently published SOCIAL Framework Built Environment Report, to further explore promising strategies for addressing social isolation, loneliness, and connection (SILC). It explores the specific relationship between housing and SILC by investigating how housing design, accessibility, and community integration can foster social connections, reduce loneliness, and create supportive living environments.

The strategies presented on the following pages offer further exploration and additional insights into related concepts discussed in the full report, enhancing understanding and application within the housing sector. Strategies listed below come from the original report, and readers are encouraged to refer to it for additional context.

- Design places to support comfort and connection (pg. 15)
- Build intergenerational and age-friendly communities (pg. 16)
- Use and encourage shared community-based housing models (pg. 17)
- Expand accessibility, reliability, and affordability for broadband connectivity (pg. 19)
- Collective impact strategies that can be applied within the context of the housing sector, such as co-creating solutions in partnership with community members, facilitating cross-boundary collaboration and investments, driving systemic change, addressing multifaceted issues collectively, and more (pg. 20-22)

It is also important to recognize that different strategies will be more effective in various contexts, such as urban versus rural settings. In the SOCIAL Framework Built Environment Report, page 11 introduces cross-cutting considerations aimed at ensuring inclusivity when developing, researching, and implementing these strategies. Additionally, page 20 outlines the significance of collaborating with community members, creating multi-solving solutions, and generating collective impact for lasting and equitable change across different populations and settings.

After reading this research brief, you will be able to:

- *Identify how the design, planning, policy, and use of the housing sector can negatively or positively influence social connection.*
- *Share promising strategies for increasing social connectedness through the design, planning, policy, and use of the housing sector across levels of influence for various stakeholders.*

[Read the SOCIAL Framework Built Environment Report](#)

Addressing SILC Across Levels of Influence

The SOCIAL Framework identifies five levels of influence that should be considered when developing a systems-based approach to promoting social connection and addressing social isolation and loneliness. This table names the key stakeholders best positioned to take action and provides a definition of each level of influence.

Key Stakeholders Poised to Influence the Built Environment
















Level of Influence	Key Stakeholders
 <p>Individual Individuals who have the ability to influence individual behavior and/or provide SILC resources that can be used by others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaged community members City planners/ regional planners/ economic development leaders Architects and designers Policymakers Funders
 <p>Interpersonal Interpersonal relationships that may influence behavior in the context of social networks and support systems.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community member with community member (e.g., friends, families, neighbors for grassroots/ local efforts) Sector leaders with sector leaders (e.g., collaboration and cross-sectoral partnerships for creation and operation of spaces) Sector leaders with community members (e.g., co-creation of spaces)
 <p>Organizational/ Institutional Entities with the power to influence organizational culture through the designing of policies, practices, and structures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Second places (e.g., educational institutions, workplaces) Community organizations/ nonprofits and third places (including arts, culture, and faith-based organizations, libraries) Healthcare facilities (e.g., clinics/ hospitals, dialysis/infusion spaces) Social service organizations (including mental health and addiction services) Municipal services departments (including those who oversee and fund public infrastructure, housing policy, and community services, transportation, parks and recreations, housing authorities, zoning and coding officials) Local businesses (e.g., grocery stores, restaurants, shops)
 <p>Community Entities that can collaborate to bring groups of individuals together outside of any one specific organization and foster social connection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local government (e.g., elected officials, councils, parks and recreation) Indigenous communities & councils Infrastructure committees (including those focused on the development and maintenance of transit, utilities, public works) Community/ neighborhood associations and advocacy groups (including groups that advocate for residents' needs and interests, serve specific priority populations; e.g., youth, older adults, racialized populations, individuals with disabilities)
 <p>Societal Organizations, agencies, and departments with the ability to set or shift industry standards in ways that prioritize taking action to reduce SIL and foster connection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State and federal government (e.g., legislators, regulatory agencies) Indigenous nations Professional associations & organizations with aligned mandates National/ international organizations (e.g., World Health Organization) Philanthropic organizations Researchers Media

Table 1: Key Influences & Stakeholders in the Built Environment

Promising Strategies for Addressing SILC Through Housing

This table presents strategies for addressing SILC through transportation, the levels of influence for each strategy, and the associated social connection outcomes it addresses. Read more about each strategy and examples of community implementation, beginning on the next page.

[Find these terms in the Glossary](#)

Strategies for Addressing SILC within the Housing Sector		
Strategy	Level(s) of Influence	Social Connection Outcomes
Develop mixed-use housing that integrate residential, commercial, and recreational spaces.		Social interactions, sense of community belonging, social ties Reduced social isolation
Ensure affordable housing options that address population level, and structural housing disparities to prevent economic isolation and foster diverse communities.		Social inclusion, social capital, social connectedness, Reduced social isolation
Develop intergenerational housing that encourages interactions between different age groups.		Social interaction, social connectedness, social capital Reduced social isolation, reduced loneliness
Increase and build awareness of different types of community led housing models.		Sense of belonging, trust, social capital, social connectedness, social cohesion, Reduced social isolation, reduced loneliness
Design housing with adaptable spaces that support comfort and connection and can be used for various social functions.		Social interaction, social connectedness
Integrate public transportation access into housing projects to improve connectivity with the broader community.		Social connectedness Reduced social isolation, reduced loneliness
Promote and support policies that advocate for tenure security to strengthen residents' sense of community belonging and reduce social isolation from displacement.		Social connectedness, sense of community, trust, social ties Reduced social isolation
Establish networks within housing complexes that offer support services and implement regular neighborhood social events and gatherings to strengthen community bonds and social capital.		Social capital, social cohesion, sense of community belonging, social interaction, social connectedness Reduced social isolation
Promote resident-led initiatives and participatory design processes to give resident a sense of ownership and involvement in their communities.		Sense of community belonging, social inclusion
Promote programs that support individuals who are unhouse or transitioning out of homelessness.		Social connectedness, social capital, sense of belonging, trust Reduced social isolation, reduced loneliness

Develop mixed-use housing that integrate residential, commercial, and recreational spaces.



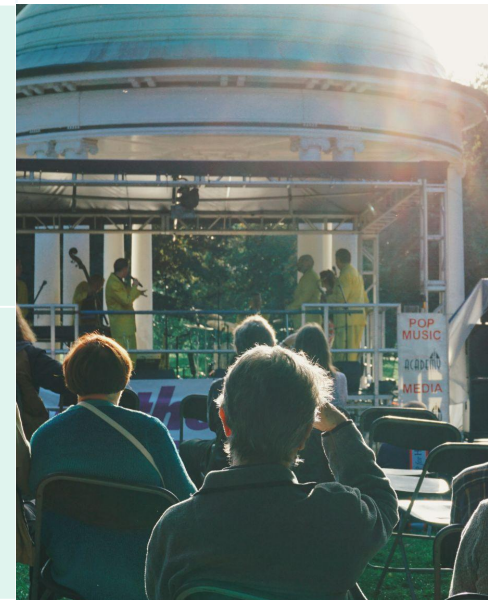
Urban development can be used to create housing developments and neighborhoods that integrate commercial and recreational spaces with the residences. Including these facilities in mixed-use developments enhances socialization opportunities and a neighborhood's sense of community belonging.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Mixed-use development creates space for urban facilities, like cafes and shops, to be within walking distances of homes. Proximity to social spaces not only increases the overall value and enjoyability of a neighborhood, but it also plays a role in reducing social isolation when these spaces are accessible to diverse members of the community.^(1, 66) Research on the benefits of mixed-use land highlights the importance of open spaces in neighborhoods that can be adapted for a variety of uses including areas for children's play, recreation and exercise, and community events. Neighbors can socialize in open spaces and form social ties which help to foster a sense of community belonging.⁽²⁾ Using pedestrian-oriented design to scatter these spaces across a neighborhood encourages walking or biking throughout the area, generating greater neighborhood trust.^(3, 4, 66)

Master-planned estates (MPE) are an emerging form of utilizing urban development to cater to diverse populations, like younger households or immigrant families. These residential developments construct community through incorporating resident opinions and cultural resources to create inclusive and representative spaces. MPEs are great options for residents who seek a participatory community and have intentions to make social connections with their neighbors. Particularly, MPEs were found to facilitate in generating strong social networks among populations who may feel socially isolated from other communities.⁽⁵⁾

Learn more about mixed-use developments and the role they play in advancing social connection on page 19 of the [Built Environment SOCIAL Framework Report](#).

[Fort Collins, Colorado](#): The Jessup Farm Artisan Village is located in the center of a suburban neighborhood in Fort Collins. The village is within walking distance from homes and offers attractive amenities like a farmhouse restaurant, a yoga studio, a doula care center, and a brewery with a space for live, outdoor concerts. This community center has become a vibrant hub for neighbors to meet one another and socially interact with children and pets.

[London, UK](#): Kings Cross was formerly used for industrial use and has been revitalized into a flourishing mixed-use development area that offers a variety of residences, shops, restaurants, and 26 acres of parks. The space is full of life, culture, and community, and its many facilities foster social engagement.



Ensure affordable housing options that address population level, and structural housing disparities to prevent economic isolation and foster diverse communities.

Rising housing costs pose threats to communities and exacerbate structural housing disparities. To prevent displacement and social isolation, affordable housing options must be ensured and protected. Housing has a notorious history of segregating communities, and the effects of redlining can still be seen.⁽¹²⁻¹³⁾ Developing affordable housing in quality, desirable locations can work to rectify housing disparities while increasing social inclusion and preserving communities. Well-designed low-income housing developments can revitalize high-poverty neighborhoods to reduce concentrated disadvantage and housing insecurity. Living in designated, affordable housing units is correlated to increased social networks, which can be leveraged to achieve better individual outcomes.⁽⁶⁾ Mixed-income developments support the formation of diverse communities that foster social inclusion as long as the design and maintenance of properties are consistent across income groups and do not appear visibly distinct or inferior.⁽⁶⁶⁾ However, research shows that mixed housing often doesn't lead to mixed income connections, especially when there is a visible difference—or differences in organized maintenance programs or services—between the types of housing, which can create stigma and perceived separation between cohorts.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Additionally, these neighborhoods create space for residents to form relationships across income divides, which has been linked to better upward mobility and positive social capital.⁽⁷⁾ The U.S. Federal government is incentivizing developers to pursue mixed-income neighborhoods through the Choice Neighborhood Initiative, which provides grants to increase the quantity and quality of affordable housing options.⁽⁸⁾ While bolstering affordable housing options can support low-income individuals, housing affordability can still be problematic for middle-income folks who do not meet the income requirements for affordable housing.⁽⁵⁹⁾ The term missing middle housing, coined in 2010, refers to smaller multi-unit housing options like duplexes and fourplexes, which have been driven out of the market by exclusionary single-family home zoning laws.⁽⁶⁰⁾ While often overlooked, these options can alleviate strain for middle income households and have been shown to strengthen community through shared spaces and improve neighborhood cohesion.⁽⁶¹⁾ Ensuring affordable housing not only refers to the physical address but also includes all the essential amenities to leading a healthy, connected life, like access to clean water and broadband connection. Internet connection is integrated into nearly every aspect of our daily lives, and it is essential for pursuing employment and education options, telehealth, and fostering our social connections.⁽⁹⁾ The federal Affordable Connectivity Program, which provided financial assistance to 23 million U.S. households, was recently discontinued. Users are encouraged to look into other federal programs that can assist with affording internet access, such as the FCC Lifeline, so that they can stay connected.⁽¹⁰⁾

Flint, Michigan: The Atherton East neighborhood in Flint is being redeveloped into a modern, affordable housing development, using the Choice Neighborhood Initiative to repair Black and immigrant neighborhoods that were displaced and segregated in the past. Improvement efforts include rehabilitation of building exteriors, repurposing empty parking lots, enhancements to parks and the Grand Traverse Greenway Trail, and creating safe and complete streets, all of which are anticipated to revitalize this neighborhood into a vibrant, cultural hub. Discover more success stories of Choice Neighborhoods [here](#).

Washington, DC: The Barry Farm neighborhood is a public housing project that was originally built in 1943 with strong African American roots and is preserved today as an affordable housing neighborhood. The Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH) is partnering with this community under the New Communities Initiative to redevelop the site to incorporate mixed-use land and mixed-income units. The goal of POAH is to preserve the original resident community while increasing economic opportunities, family support services, adding a mix of unit types, and a 2.4 acre community park. The plan includes refurbishing 480 existing affordable housing units, as well as adding 620 new units and 40K square feet of new retail services and public infrastructure.



Related Concept

Redlining

Redlining referred to the practice of denying people access to credit if they lived in predominantly minority neighborhoods. While the 1968 Fair Housing Act outlawed racially motivated redlining, its legacies still exist in racial discrimination in the housing sector.^(13, 14)

Related Concept

Choice Neighborhood Initiative (CNI)

A federal fund championed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to provide grants for the development of new mixed income neighborhoods.⁽⁸⁾



Develop intergenerational housing that encourages interactions between different age groups.



Aging in place is the process of maintaining one's independence and community participation while remaining in one's residence throughout various stages of life.⁽¹⁹⁾ Creating housing that co-locates residents of different age groups facilitates intergenerational support and combats ageism while allowing older adults to maintain social connections and independence.⁽⁹⁾ Aging is often accompanied by a loss of independence, which can be a socially isolating experience.⁽¹⁵⁾ However, intergenerational housing communities can support socially inclusive aging in place by surrounding older adults with neighbors of other age groups and resources. Both building design and programming need to be considered when developing successful intergenerational housing. Design components that encourage interactions between age groups include communal gardens, game tables, green, public spaces with walkable routes, and lounging furniture.⁽¹⁶⁻¹⁷⁾ Activity programming directly facilitates opportunities for intergenerational bonding, and it is essential for fostering social connections in age-friendly communities. Programming examples include co-locating childcare centers with older adult care facilities, forming community discussions and support groups, and initiating a resident-run newsletter.^(17, 29)

Learn more about intergenerational communities and the role they play in advancing social connection on page 16 of the [Built Environment SOCIAL Framework Report](#).

Age-friendly community housing schemes have been shown to alleviate isolation and loneliness in older adults, with a variety of models like retirement villages, continuing care communities, and cohousing communities. These models are based on seniors who are searching for a sense of community, mutual help, and social relationships. Similarly to intergenerational communities, age-friendly communities rely on activity programming to generate a strong sense of community belonging. Popular activities in senior cohousing schemes are cooking together, bingo nights, and organizing events.⁽¹⁸⁾

Aarhus, Denmark: The House of Generations is an intergenerational housing project that aims to reduce loneliness through designing building spaces that foster social connection. A variety of demographics are represented in the community, including seniors, students, families, and people with disabilities. The community creates a reciprocal relationship between younger and older adults and encourages interactions like assisting with technology and childcare. The housing project design and ideals support aging in place and intergenerational bonding.⁽²⁰⁾

Portland, Oregon: The Bridge Meadows development in Portland is designed to encourage social interactions between seniors, foster youth, and their families. The building design includes sociable common areas, as well as planned activities, group meals, and other support services that are designed to facilitate connection and mutual support among residents. The community aims to interrupt cycles of instability and isolation experienced by foster children through intergenerational community support with elders serving as mentors, friends, and caregivers to the children and each other.



Increase and build awareness of different types of community-led housing models.



Related Concept

The Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA)

[The Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act \(TOPA\)](#) gives tenants in Washington, D.C. the right to purchase their rental building if the owner decides to sell it. This law allows tenants to form tenant associations and negotiate collectively or assign their purchase rights to a third party, potentially preserving affordable housing in the process. The Office of the Tenant Advocate provides support, including classes and technical assistance, to help tenants understand and navigate the TOPA process.

Building awareness of different types of community led housing (CLH) models will highlight their benefits and encourage developing intentional housing communities that foster social connection. By distinguishing different models of CLH, users can determine which model may best fit their needs. While exact definitions of each model may have slight regional variations, the biggest distinction between CLH models is whether they are market or non-market housing. Market housing is for profit, meaning that the resident pays full price, market rates for their rent or mortgages.⁽²¹⁾ On the other hand, non-market housing is owned/controlled by a government or non-profit agency and is rented or sold at levels below the market rate, meaning is more accessible for low and moderate income households.⁽²²⁾ While non-market rental housing models are designated for affordable, secure housing, residents may not always have a say in development and practices of the unit depending on the model of it. Cohousing is a market model of CLH that is typically composed of 10-40 private households surrounding a shared space. In this model, residents decide when and how much they want to interact with the housing community.⁽²³⁾ Community land trusts are non-market models where the land is acquired and protected as a legal asset for developing affordable and secure housing. This model is developed and led by community members who are looking to create intentional communities.⁽²⁴⁾ Housing co-operatives are another form of non-market housing, where a democratic process incorporates resident opinions in management of the community.⁽²⁵⁾

Regardless of the model, the key to community led housing is the intentionality of residents to create a shared-value based space and social cohesion.⁽²⁶⁾ The process of developing a CLH model facilitates building trust and social capital while establishing a sense of belonging. Many studies point out that the level of time and collaborative commitment required to initiate and maintain CLH reduces loneliness.⁽²⁷⁾ Depending on the level of community engagement, living in CLH models can foster social connections through shared meals, group activities, and communal spaces that help to prevent social isolation.⁽²⁸⁾ These models are designed around inclusivity, and they can be particularly supportive for marginalized groups such as LGBTQIA+ individuals, low-income households, individuals struggling with mental health or drug misuse, or other groups who face social exclusion.⁽²⁷⁾

[North Vancouver, Canada:](#) The Driftwood Village is a cohousing development in North Vancouver where residents own individual units and have access to a variety of shared amenity spaces. In addition to designing and managing the community together, the residents of this cohousing development organize ongoing community activities. This intentional community fosters social connection through design elements, like green space, social corridors, and co-located amenity spaces, and resident-organized social activities, like weekly meals and intergenerational bonding between seniors and children.⁽²⁰⁾

[Edinburgh, Scotland:](#) The Edinburgh Student Housing Co-op is the largest student-run housing co-op in the UK, and its members pride themselves on their affordable housing models that protect students against isolating rent increases. During the 10 years of operation, rent has only increased by 69 pounds which is equivalent to around \$90. The community is run democratically by students who manage the day-to-day operations of management. They plan events, host parties, and prioritize equal participation by all of their members.



Design housing with adaptable spaces that support comfort and connection and can be used for various social functions.

Physical housing design plays a role in structuring community interactions and connections through the inclusion of adaptable spaces that can be used for a variety of social activities. Depending on building context, adaptable spaces can range from open courtyards in multi-family housing units to small, public spaces within high rise buildings. Community gardens are a popular addition to multi-family housing, providing a space for residents of different ages and cultures to interact while fostering shared responsibilities. This community management aspect helps facilitate the formation of bonds among residents.⁽²⁹⁾ Comfort levels of a space mediate the frequency of use, and spaces that offer natural lighting, shelter from the sun, and lounging areas encourage social interactions in a welcoming environment.⁽⁶⁷⁾ Explore more recommendations for design elements for various spaces here.

The growing need for housing is leading to the creation of high density apartment buildings to maximize the number of residents they can house. However, recent research highlights that living in high-density neighborhoods, especially in apartment blocks, can increase loneliness for some individuals, emphasizing that more people in a space does not necessarily mean more connections. This underscores the importance of designing spaces that offer both privacy and opportunities for social interaction, giving residents the choice of when and how to engage with others.⁽⁷⁰⁾ Research shows that the greater quantity of residents in a building is correlated to reduced social interactions and connections, highlighting the need to consider socially conducive design.⁽³⁰⁾ To avoid social exclusion, small spaces in high rises should be maximized to allow for socialization, such as “vertical social pockets” which are like mini elevator lobbies on each floor. These pockets can contain elements like benches, magazine racks, potted plants that create a border, and outlets, all to promote increased use.⁽³¹⁾ Social pockets are important for preserving the transition from private to public space, which helps foster a sense of belonging. The ideal social pocket should include around 6-8 households to encourage social interaction. Additional design recommendations for supporting sociable design in high rise buildings can be found in this [Design Guideline Report](#) developed in Toronto, Canada. Resident interviews in apartment buildings also call out the need for spaces separate from common circulation areas for social interaction; they noted that crowding in circulation areas discouraged casual interactions between neighbors and led to social annoyance.⁽³²⁾ However, sociably designed circulation areas increase the likeliness of spontaneous, positive interactions with neighbors that can lead to longer-term relationships within a housing complex, which encourages the use of separate amenities between neighbors who have built connections with one another.⁽⁵⁸⁾

[Vancouver, British Columbia](#): Human Studio designed the 800 Commercial Drive Affordable Housing units by reimagining a typical high-rise structure to prioritize social connection. With city approval for construction, the building will feature “front porches” for each unit, creating a transition from private to public space that encourages neighborly interactions. These front porches are spacious enough for residents to step out and see their neighbors without fully entering public areas. An added benefit of this design is that it bypasses zoning restrictions on square footage for social spaces, as balconies are not included in those limitations.

[San Francisco, California](#): The Casa Adelante housing project was designed with a community architecture approach that prioritizes community participation and engagement amongst its residents. The project consists of 143 affordable apartments, a childcare center, an art gallery, a community room, and multiple spaces for residents to grow their own produce. Design features include colorful murals, vast natural light, and an open and interconnected ground floor that facilitates interaction and engagement among families. The community room offers a transition between private and open space as it opens to a large courtyard with space for children to play. The entire building is designed to offer a sense of belonging, and it has created a vibrant community for vulnerable populations in an area largely populated by families of Latin American descent.



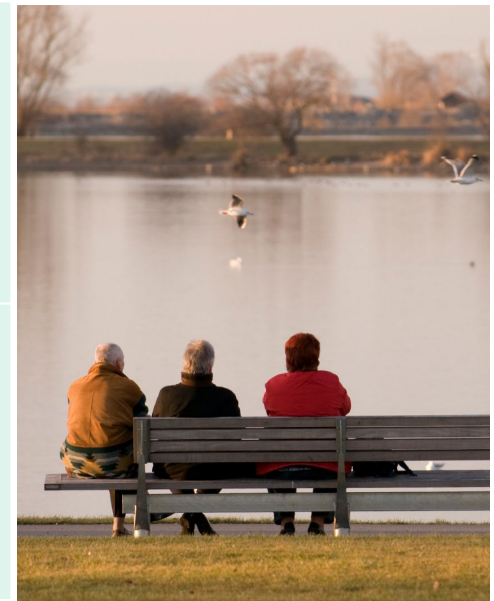
Learn more about the PANACHE design principles (sense of place, accessibility, nature, activation, choice, and human scale) and the role they play in advancing social connection on page 15 of the [Built Environment SOCIAL Framework Report](#).



Related Concept

Nurturing Well-Being in Multi-Unit Housing

The [Building Social Connections Toolbox](#), developed by Happy Cities and Hey Neighbour Collective, offers practical design strategies to enhance social well-being in multi-unit housing. It focuses on creating shared spaces that foster interaction and community resilience, with tools for policymakers and designers to address social isolation and housing challenges. The toolkit supports building more connected, inclusive communities across various housing types and tenures.



Integrate public transportation access into housing projects to improve connectivity with the broader community.



Integrating transit oriented design (TOD) into housing projects considers resident proximity to the transportation services that provide them access to employment, health services, social gatherings, etc. TOD is a grid-like pattern with diverse land use, high density, and well-connected street networks with residences that are within a 10 minute walking distance from a transit station.^(37, 38) With proximal public transit, residents are enabled to travel efficiently while discouraging car dependence. Social connection declines more with longer commute times than it does with geographic distance; placing public transit stations within a walking distance from neighborhoods increases the likelihood that residents will travel to access social interactions.⁽³³⁾ On the contrary, inequalities in proximity to public transportation discourages neighborhoods from accessing community resources,⁽³⁴⁾ as does community transport that does not adequately cater for the transport needs of those with limited mobility (e.g., the elderly or those with disabilities).⁽⁶⁶⁾

There are a multitude of benefits from progressing away from car dependence. Promoting public transit increases travel sustainability via reducing car emissions and traffic. It also increases disposable income when people do not have to pay the cost for owning and operating a vehicle. Additionally, it increases transportation access for individuals who cannot drive, like youth, older adults, or people with disabilities.⁽³⁵⁾ A strategy to encourage equitable transit-oriented design involves pursuing mixed use developments that are near existing transportation infrastructure, like developing a housing project near a bus station. To discourage car dependence, planners can reduce the number of parking spaces for new developments. It is important to consider transit equity, and existing low-income neighborhoods that experience transit disadvantage. The Rebuilding America's Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant is a federal investment program dedicated to rebuilding critical transportation infrastructure in historically disadvantaged regions or areas of persistent poverty.⁽³⁶⁾

 Related Concept

Transit Oriented Design (TOD)

A grid-like pattern with diverse land use, high density, and well-connected street networks with residences that are within a 10 minute walking distance from a transit station.⁽³⁷⁻³⁸⁾

 Related Concept

NOFO for the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE)

A federal grant program that aims to integrate mixed use development and affordable housing with multimodal transportation to reduce associated housing/transportation cost burdens. This grant can be applied for by state and local governments, Tribal governments, transit agencies, and port authorities.⁽³⁶⁾

Learn more about public transit and the role it plays in advancing social connection on page 17 of the [Built Environment SOCIAL Framework Report](#).

Concord, Massachusetts: The New Haven-Hartford-Springfield Rail Program successfully implemented sustainable transit-oriented design in the small town of Concord. Planners redesigned the Concord Commons development to include a mix of retail stores, offices, and affordable housing units within a walking distance of the commuter rail station. This allowed residents of various incomes to live closer to a transit hub while enjoying the amenities created from a reduction in parking. The developers negotiated a 15% parking reduction, which opened up space for a landscaped garden and pathway that increased walkability and provided a green buffer between the parking lot and the surrounding neighborhood.

Flagstaff, Arizona: The Mountain Line program works to fill transportation gaps in Flagstaff neighborhoods by providing discounted pass programs and alternative transit options where public transit is not accessible. The program includes a free service that offers rides for individuals experiencing homelessness to connect them to their surrounding community. They also have a paratransit service that facilitates door-to-door services for residents with disabilities to assist with first and last-mile connectivity and transit accessibility.



Promote and support policies that advocate for tenure security to strengthen residents' sense of community belonging and reduce social isolation from displacement.

Tenure security, also referred to as housing stability, is vital to ensure that residents are able to remain in their communities and build long lasting ties and social connections with their neighbors. Without this security, there can be a constant fear of displacement, which discourages neighbors from bonding with one another and enforces social isolation. Tenure security provides protection from eviction, and it is complemented by rent control policies that limit a landlord's ability to raise rent prices that subsequently drive residents out of their homes.⁽³⁹⁾ Residents will make less of an effort to engage in their communities if they're constantly worried about having to relocate because of rising rental prices. This isolating fear of displacement is felt most acutely by older residents, especially those who have lived in a neighborhood for a long time and built a strong sense of community belonging.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Tenure security is particularly important for low-income residents, especially those with families, as these residents are more likely to work increased and longer hours if they are constantly trying to pay higher rent prices, which reduces their time and energy that could be spent forming connections with their neighbors and contributes to school turnover.

In addition to supporting aging in place, tenure security is associated with increased social connections and social ties. Tenure security can also be applied within a community or neighborhood, as opposed to a single dwelling. Combined with diverse housing options, this enables residents to remain in their communities through changing life phases, like adding children to their families or downsizing.⁽¹¹⁾ Security can be reinforced through policies and programs, as well as physical design elements. Policy opportunities explore options like retaining and improving (or 'retrofitting') affordable rental stock, rather than building new units that have higher costs to cover building expenses. Boosting affordable housing funding and protecting publicly owned land for affordable housing purposes can also be effective to maintain and increase secure, affordable units.⁽¹¹⁾ When developing housing with security in mind, planners should include diverse housing forms (houses, apartments, etc.) with a range of bedrooms to accommodate changing family sizes.⁽⁴¹⁾

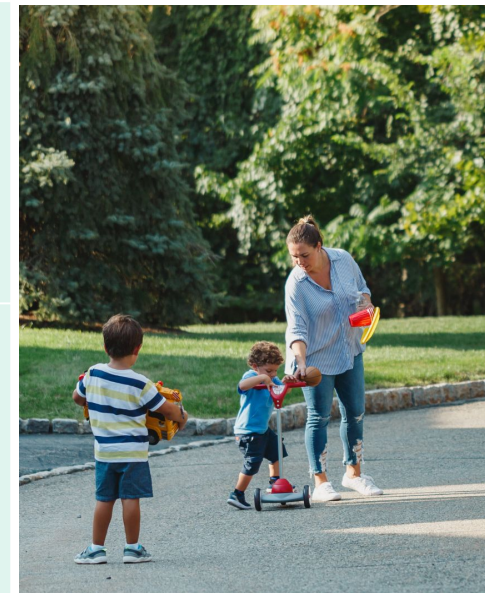
[Burnaby, Canada](#): An example of a policy that supports tenure security is the Tenant Assistance Policy enacted by the City of Burnaby, which enables residents to receive financial compensation if they are displaced from their homes due to renovations and rebuilding projects. This helps to bridge the rent gap between their new and old units and assists with moving costs, as well as provides the right to return to the renovated unit at the previous rental rate.



Related Concept

Purpose Built Communities

[Purpose Built Communities](#) follows a holistic model focused on breaking the cycle of poverty in underserved neighborhoods. Their approach integrates high-quality education, mixed-income housing, and community wellness initiatives to create sustainable, thriving communities. The model centers on long-term partnerships with local leaders and organizations to address interconnected challenges in housing, education, and health, fostering inclusive and resilient neighborhoods.



Establish networks within housing complexes that offer support services and implement regular neighborhood social events and gatherings to strengthen community bonds and social capital.

Networks within housing complexes can support residents by offering services and regular social events that help build social capital and strengthen community cohesion. Support services and social events help foster a sense of belonging within a community and provide more opportunities for neighbors to interact with one another and form bonds.

Support services, such as food pantries, office spaces, and resource promotion, can reduce social isolation for residents by making these services easily accessible. Additionally, offering these services within housing complexes can promote independence specifically among vulnerable residents like older adults, individuals with disabilities or special needs, and low-income residents.⁽¹⁵⁾ Hosting resident events can help neighborhoods foster a strong sense of a community and trust.⁽⁴²⁾ Examples of event options include seasonal gatherings and holiday celebrations, educational and skills classes, fitness classes, game nights, and outdoor activities.⁽⁴³⁾ Encouraging resident participation can be facilitated through social media and online portals, and communication materials could be translated into other languages to reach all residents.⁽⁴⁴⁾

The Community Preservation and Development Corporation (CPDC) in the US is a non-profit housing development agency that combines affordable real estate development with social support programs to build opportunities for residents to grow and thrive.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The CPDC engages residents through programs such as establishing tenant associations, organizing voter registration, building office skills and employability, and establishing electronic villages, all of which are designed to enable residents to engage in their communities and develop a sense of community belonging.

Boston, Massachusetts: Mission Hill Neighborhood Housing Services is a non-profit organization that focuses on improving the standard of living for lower income, Mission Hill residents. These low-income development sites offer onsite services such as food pantries and resource guides. Additionally, they promote a monthly schedule of free community events and include resident opinions in their planning for onsite events like scavenger hunts and resident-led cooking classes.

Sydney, Australia: *The Little BIG House, a community hub created by the Little BIG Foundation, is designed to foster social connections and reduce loneliness through community-led events. Located in Summer Hill, Australia, this space provides a welcoming environment where residents can gather for activities, share stories, and engage in events aimed at building a sense of belonging. With the support of volunteers, these initiatives have led to a reduction in loneliness and increased reports of new connections. The program emphasizes the importance of creating both fun and meaningful opportunities for interaction, helping to build a kinder, more connected community*



Related Concept

Certified Organization for Resident Engagement and Services (CORES)

The [CORES](#) (Certified Organization for Resident Engagement and Services) program, developed by Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future (SAHF), certifies organizations that provide high-quality resident services coordination in affordable rental housing. This certification recognizes organizations with a robust system for delivering resident services, demonstrating a commitment to resident well-being, data-driven decision-making, and effective service coordination. CORES-certified organizations can unlock funding opportunities, such as through Fannie Mae's Healthy Housing Rewards, which incentivizes enhanced resident services.



Promote resident-led initiatives and participatory design processes to give residents a sense of ownership and involvement in their communities.

Residents understand their neighborhoods more intimately than urban planners; they have insight into the values, beliefs, needs, and priorities of their communities. Participatory design processes integrate resident perspectives through democratization in the design process. Using participatory design can amplify resident voices and empower underserved populations to take ownership of their communities by centering narratives that urban planners do not experience.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Involving residents directly creates an atmosphere of social inclusion and helps prioritize community needs. Multiple studies show that involving residents in redevelopment plans and problem solving efforts for neighborhoods undergoing revitalization can serve as a buffer to avoid negative effects from gentrification.^(47, 48) Planners are often disincentivized from using participatory design processes, as incorporating resident feedback can extend the timeline of development. To overcome this barrier, it is important to highlight positive examples of participatory design that encourage its use.

Certain conditions promote effective resident-led initiatives and participatory design. To ensure equal representation and socially equitable initiatives, urban planners can open visioning meetings to the public that encourage civility and respectful listening. Focusing on including diverse perspectives into design processes generates projects that can foster a sense of belonging among residents and nurture social engagement.^(48, 15) Supporting resident-led initiatives and development requires financial leverage, a resident-led structure, a physical space for meetings, and connections with external agencies.⁽⁴⁹⁾ A pilot study at the Denver Housing Authority Westridge apartments exemplified these conditions during a resident-led project to increase building sustainability. The project was initiated by an engineering team who recruited residents to lead. Through a resident liaison, resident council, and resident leaders, over 60% of the community contributed to the project resulting in sustainability measures that prioritized what the community needed.⁽⁵⁰⁾ This practice guide argues for “resident champions” to become facilitators of community connection and offers ideas for resident-led activities that can foster community involvement.

United States: The national Love Your Block program is implemented in many cities in the U.S. that funds resident-led revitalization projects. Residents take part in improving their communities through activities like spring clean ups, transforming vacant lots into neighborhood gardens, and repairing playground equipment. In 33 states, this program gives neighbors opportunities to meet one another through civic participation, generates a sense of community and trust in neighborhoods, and strengthens social cohesion and social connection.⁽⁵¹⁾

Charlottesville, Virginia: The Kindlewood community, formerly known as Friendship Court, is using resident engagement measures to prevent displacement from redevelopment. The master block previously had strong African-American neighborhood cohesion, which was erased during Urban Renewal. In order to preserve the cultural roots of this community, The Piedmont Housing Alliance coordinated services with community partnerships to support residents during the transition. They also helped establish the Friendship Court Advisory Committee, which represents nine residents of the Kindlewood community who work with planners to ensure a vibrant and inclusive redevelopment of Kindlewood.



Related Concept

Health Action Plans

[Health Action Plans](#) serve as a valuable tool for affordable housing developers to incorporate health-promoting design strategies, tailored to the specific needs of residents. By pairing developers with public health professionals, these plans ensure that housing projects address crucial health concerns such as air quality, social isolation, and access to community resources. In a recent collaboration with Volunteers of America, the implementation of a Health Action Plan led to improved air quality and enhanced communal spaces, fostering stronger social connections among residents. These changes contributed to reduced social isolation, promoting a healthier, more connected living environment.⁽⁶⁹⁾



Promote programs that support individuals who are unhoused or transitioning out of homelessness.



When working with housing development, is it important to consider individuals who are unhoused or transitioning out of homelessness, and how programs can support them and connect them to resources. Many people who have experienced homelessness experience social isolation and loneliness, stemming from relationship breakdown, social stigma associated with their homelessness and low-quality and precarious relationships whilst homeless.⁽⁶⁸⁾ Research shows that the presence of housing alone does not fully address the challenges that unhoused individuals face, and that changes in social support systems are often more effective in ending homelessness.⁽⁵²⁾ Supportive programs need to create space for unhoused individuals to re-engage in social relations, reconnect with pre-homeless connections and find new connections to help address the stigma, loneliness, and social isolation that is associated with being unhoused. Even if housing or temporary housing is not an option, nurturing positive social support systems can reduce social isolation and help individuals form social capital.⁽⁵²⁾

Housing First models, supportive rehousing, or transitional housing models that facilitate the transition out of homelessness can promote individual's health and quality of life while rebuilding social infrastructure.⁽⁵³⁾ Transitional housing focuses on providing housing while bundling support services. Successful aspects of these models include case management, life-skills training, employment services, childcare, and mental health and substance-use treatment. Ultimately, these programs aim to increase individual's self efficacy and housing stability by connecting them to resources that promote their transition.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Rapid rehousing is a model that provides short term partial rental assistance, but relies primarily on outside service systems to meet social needs. While rapid rehousing provides a quick solution to transitioning to independent housing, it is more likely to cause a return to homelessness after the rental assistance terminates.⁽⁵⁴⁾ When considering rapid rehousing models, it is vital to ensure a foundation of communication lines and connections between service system agencies and housing agencies so that residents can form social capital to promote continued housing stability following rental assistance termination.^(55, 56)

Related Concept

Trauma-Informed Design

Design that includes adaptations to support a strengths-based framework based in response to the impact of trauma. Elements can include soundproof walls, large corridors with substantial lighting, and exterior fences, as well as other aspects that encourage particular populations to feel safer in their housing situations.⁽⁵⁷⁾ These models are particularly helpful for populations who have been previously unhoused or experienced violence in their homes.

[Vancouver, Canada](#): New Beginnings Neighborhood offers temporary modular housing for individuals experiencing homelessness. There is a specific focus on Indigenous residents to foster cultural connections for wellbeing. Includes programming for social connections and reducing social isolation with events like bbqs, sewing/drum making workshops, community gardening featuring Indigenous plants and a communal teepee that residents helped to build.

[Denver, Colorado](#): Shopworks Architecture in Denver created a series of 14 affordable housing units that use supportive house programs to support individuals in their transition from experiencing homelessness to being housed. They use a model that “meets residents where they are” with trauma-informed design features and population personalization in each unit. These units build on the unique experiences of unhoused populations by adding elements like a common area adjacent to laundry centers so they can watch over their clothes while also socializing with neighbors. These units also include designated smoking areas, so residents can smoke safely together without infringing on non-smoking neighbors.



Gaps and Implications for Future Research

While this research brief begins to shed light on the housing sector's role in advancing social connection and addressing social isolation and loneliness, several gaps remain that merit further investigation. Future investigation should be directed towards examples and policy changes that can bring the strategies proposed in this report to mainstream fruition. During several key informant interviews, many spoke to the need for more concrete examples and case studies of housing that is intentionally designed and/or programmed to foster social connections amongst residents. Shedding light on more community stories could encourage stakeholders at all levels - from architects and planners to funders and government leaders - to expand considerations around the impact of different models (e.g., community led housing, intergenerational housing, and socially designed housing). In order to maximize social benefits, future research should also investigate the impact of housing design versus the impact of programming within housing. While this brief acknowledges the bidirectional relationship between design and programming in reducing social isolation and loneliness, additional research could be used for key stakeholders best positioned to make context-specific decisions for which aspects to include in housing developments. There is also a need for more literature on the role of property managers implementing programming within housing developments versus the role of resident-led programming.

A major challenge in creating a housing sector that fosters social connection is policy barriers, particularly zoning laws. These policies impact mixed-use and transit-oriented developments (TOD), which are key to building community. Zoning laws in TOD areas should reduce parking minimums and improve transit access to promote social interactions.(64, 33) Additionally, zoning dictates land for affordable housing, and future policies should ensure these areas are of high quality to address housing disparities.(11) Current zoning often favors high density over social amenities in multi-unit buildings, with social spaces frequently cut due to budget constraints. Policy should protect and incentivize these spaces, and research should focus on cost-effective innovations that support social connections without financial limitations.



Conclusion

Housing includes both the individual dwellings (physical spaces) we occupy and the larger social, economic, and environmental contexts—such as neighborhoods and communities—in which those homes are located. Both aspects play a crucial role in shaping the overall living experience. Strategies can be employed to foster social connection during every stage of housing, from design to implementation to programming. Sociable design processes impact our ability to build a sense of community with neighbors through mixed land uses and proximity to transit, common spaces that encourage social interactions, and features that enable residents to remain in their communities and build strong ties, like affordability and tenure security. Housing development implementation should consider various models like community-led housing schemes and intergenerational communities that can increase social capital and intergenerational bonding and support. Programming measures within housing communities can strengthen resident relationships and engagement through social events and resident-led initiatives while reducing social isolation through support services and supportive housing models. The housing sector has profound impacts on social connection, and implementing social strategies in each step of the development process shows great promise in creating flourishing, connected communities.

SOCIAL Framework in Action

We hope that the SOCIAL Framework, the report on the Built Environment, and this supplemental research brief on the housing sector serve as helpful resources for the existing evidence, approaches, and policies and that they spark ideas for new evidence-based approaches, policies, and future areas of investigation. We would love to learn about how you may take action based on the information reviewed in this report. Please share more by completing this brief form.

[Provide Feedback](#)



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