

The Right Fit Pilot Project: - *Lessons from our first year*



Project Overview

The Right Fit Pilot Project (RFPP) is a multi-partner initiative to address challenges facing wheelchair users who need affordable, wheelchair-accessible homes and independent living supports in Metro Vancouver.

People who use wheelchairs often wait years to find affordable, accessible housing. Challenges include high demand and limited supply of accessible, affordable housing, timelines for securing independent living supports and the lack of a centralized marketplace or standards for matching accessible housing features and needs.

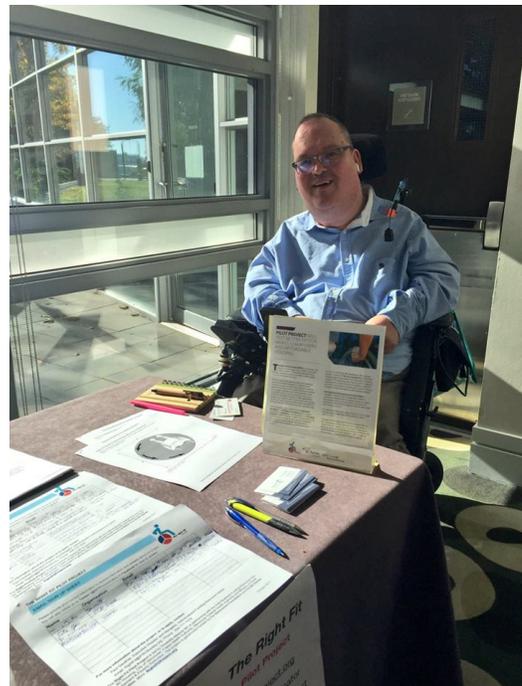
Our 3-year pilot is working to remove barriers and test streamlined models to help connect wheelchair users with affordable housing that meets their needs in Metro Vancouver, though the intent is to develop solutions that can be shared more broadly.

RFPP is led by Disability Alliance BC in partnership with the Individualized Funding Resource Centre, BC Housing, City of Vancouver, Fraser Health Authority, Vancouver Coastal Health Authority and the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. The project is generously funded by Vancouver Foundation and BC Rehab Foundation.

Year One: Activities

Following an initial planning stage, a Phase One “mini-pilot” was launched in summer 2017, focussed on a subset of wheelchair users who receive PWD benefits and social housing providers that work with BC Housing through The Housing Registry. This narrower focus allowed BC Housing and the Ministry for Social Development and Poverty Reduction (MSDPR) to implement and test key systemic changes to support our project objectives from the outset.

A major challenge has been the extremely tight supply and low turnover rates of subsidized accessible rental units in Metro Vancouver, which severely limits the pace at which we can match participating wheelchair users with suitable vacancies. We also quickly realized that we needed a larger pool of pre-screened applicants to ensure a potential fit was ready for any new vacancy, so we expanded our case



IFRC's Case Management lead Paul Gauthier promoting RFPP to housing providers at the Co-op Housing Federation of BC fall learning event.

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management team capacity accordingly.

Following extensive outreach, we secured support from many of the largest providers of subsidized accessible housing in the region, including BC Housing, Metro Vancouver Housing, Affordable Housing Societies, City of Vancouver, Brightside Community Homes, More Than A Roof Housing and Vancouver Native Housing.

RFPP has also received excellent support from other housing sector leaders, including BC Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA), Co-op Housing Federation of BC (CHF-BC), BC Housing Minister Selina Robinson, Inclusion BC and GF Strong.

Year Two: Next steps

As the pilot enters its second year, we will continue to focus on housing provider engagement, participant intake and housing placements, as vacancies permit.

Other Year Two priorities include:

- Refining case management and partner collaboration protocols as we learn more about what works well.
- Research to improve understanding of demand demographics.
- Documenting subsidized accessible housing inventory, using our standardized Accessibility Checklist.
- Exploring options for a new hub to collect and share information on housing inventory and demand (basis for central registry).
- Developing resource packages for wheelchair users and housing providers.
- Sharing our learning through community and policymaker outreach



Navigators Dalton and Chris (centre and right) working with a wheelchair user participating in the pilot at IFRC's Vancouver office.

Year One: Successes

Key achievements in our first year included implementing and testing systemic changes, a new accessibility checklist to standardize supply/demand data sharing, and establishing our new case management team/model to help connect wheelchair users with housing and service providers.

1. **Systemic change:** *New pre-approval process that streamlines provision of Ministry-funded medical equipment for wheelchair users moving to a new home.*

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MSDPR developed the new process and is now working with the Vancouver and Fraser Health Authorities and RFPP case managers to test it with pilot participants who receive Persons With Disabilities (PWD) benefits. The hope is to expand this streamlined process once it's fine-tuned, thus reducing delays that could force wheelchair users to miss out on suitable vacancies.

2. **Accessibility Checklist:** Foundational tool for standardized data collection and to help housing providers and prospective tenants more easily identify suitable housing matches.

We adapted, tested and refined a draft developed by accessible housing advocates and are now using it to collect and share details of subsidized accessible housing provided by our housing partners, such as Metro Vancouver Housing and City of Vancouver Housing.

We are also promoting broader adoption and use of the Checklist by wheelchair users, community agencies and landlords to support standardized description of accessibility needs and housing features in rental markets.

The Checklist will serve as a foundational tool to advance our goal of creating a centralized registry that helps match supply and demand for affordable, accessible housing.

3. **Capacity Building:** Development of new integrated case management model and team.

A significant Year One task involved recruiting and training staff as case management “navigators,” and designing new systems, procedures and protocols to support wheelchair users participating in RFPP. While we expect ongoing refinement of the case management model, key elements for information collection, management and sharing are now in place, along with privacy protection and partner collaboration protocols.

Year One: Challenges

1. **Low supply, very limited turnover of accessible, affordable units:**

Launching the pilot in the midst of a major affordable housing crisis has significantly limited the pace at which we can hope to match individuals to vacancies.

We've responded to this in several ways, including extensive outreach to engage major providers so that we can try to fill available vacancies. BC Housing is offering eligible providers extra subsidies as an incentive to hold units for longer while we work to help place suitable candidates. We also increased case management team capacity to pre-screen more applicants, to avoid missing any opportunities to fill available vacancies.

We're also taking advantage of the slower pace to do more in-depth case studies, exploring the challenges that face both applicants and housing providers trying to match needs to vacancies. And finally, we're documenting supply gaps and other key challenges, which will inform advocacy and outreach efforts to share what we have learned in Year 2 and 3.



The Right Fit @rfppcoordinator Feb 5

What do we mean when we say rental #housing is wheelchair accessible? Our Wheelchair Accessibility Checklist helps landlords explain what they mean by #accessible & helps tenants decide if the unit is the right fit for their needs: disabilityalliancebc.org/wp-content/upl...



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2. Information sharing and privacy protection:

RFPP's case management model requires close collaboration and information sharing with major government agencies, each with its own operating policies. We have had to develop new inter-agency collaboration protocols and security features to permit client information sharing with a non-government partner (IFRC, our case management lead).

While these demands were more complex than expected, this work has strengthened inter-agency understanding and capacity for future collaboration.



IFRC navigators case management team

Year One: Key insights

A deeper understanding of the complexity of matching wheelchair users with affordable, accessible housing:

Supply gaps stemming from an extreme housing affordability crisis are clearly the leading challenge. Accessible housing is provided and managed by a mix of private landlords, small non-profits, co-ops and large social housing providers, each with their own policies, priorities and operating models. In this context, a centralized marketplace to help prospective tenants find the right home (and to help housing providers find the right tenant) is both essential and challenging to accomplish. While these challenges were known before the pilot's launch, our initial work is illuminating further complexities.

We need a more precise understanding of the demographics of accessibility demand, particularly the overlap between accessibility and affordability needs. Governments and providers have typically set broad target ratios for accessible housing. But "accessible housing" describes a wide range of housing features and "accessibility need" can reflect a wide range of mobility challenges. So we need ways to more precisely describe both needs and features.

Our work to date suggests that many wheelchair users have lower than average income. If demand is concentrated at the lower range of affordability, standard accessibility ratios for new construction may create new accessible supply that has no market because it's unaffordable. There may therefore be an argument to focus investments on disproportionate accessibility needs at the lower end of the market. And if wheelchair users are more likely to live in urban areas with better transit access, we may also need more specific geographic targets.

Our early experience has also highlighted the importance of flexibility in the matching process. Wheelchair users and accessible units represent small percentages of the total rental market, with exceptionally low turnover in these prized units. This means the probability of supply and demand meeting at the right place and time, with the right unit configuration and price point, are lower than for the broader market. Even if total supply equalled total de-

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mand, there might still be a need for extra flexibility in the matching process to widen that very narrow window of probability.

What currently occurs is the opposite. In order to access subsidized accessible units, wheelchair users face additional requirements compared to typical tenants, such as demonstrating need and eligibility for subsidized accessible homes, supports and equipment.

This challenge reinforces the value of integrated case management, the need to streamline approvals wherever possible and the need to explore ways to add flexibility to the matching process wherever possible.

Looking ahead

We're excited that our early experience confirms key theories about the challenges that RFPP set out to address. We have also been thrilled by the level of interest and support from the social housing sector, because their buy-in and support is critical to developing, testing and implementing solutions.

Our regional housing crisis will continue to affect the pace at which we can house wheelchair users. But we are cognizant that ours is not an emergency housing pilot and that excellent work is being done by others in this area. With our focus on learning, documenting challenges and testing collaborative solutions for a very specific population, RFPP is in a unique position to support the current interest at all levels of government in housing solutions for vulnerable groups. We are very grateful for the interest in our work to date and will focus on seizing and leveraging these opportunities over the next two years.



CHF BC @chfbc

5 Sep 2017

People w/disabilities who use wheelchairs typically wait years for affordable, accessible housing. @rfppcoordinator will address challenges.

The Right Fit @rfppcoordinator
Metro #Vancouver #affordablehousing providers--Join us & help #wheelchair users find home
[@chfbc](#) [@BCNPHA](#) [@BC_Housing](#)
disabilityalliancebc.org/program/the-right-fit

