

Ask Each Other Anything: COVID-19 Response (4th session) August 26, 2020
Q&A from Webinar Discussion amongst MNPHA Members

Current Operations

Re-opening Common Spaces: What are you doing about re-opening common rooms and tenant activities?

Old Grace Housing Co-op: we stopped renting out our common rooms until the last month, and now we are renting out only to small groups. Sometimes people don't always keep it to that.

Lindholm: common room has been shut down since March. We have been thinking about reopening them for mental health reasons because tenants have struggled during the initial lockdown. In the winter people won't be able to go outside, and mental health will be a serious issue. A safe and controlled manner to reopen would be allowing one small group a day in the room, physically distanced. And a log of who's been in the room and sign-up. No drop in. We can have the room sanitized every day. We are not allowing outside guests, also. We are not renting it out to anyone for bride or baby showers.

Western MB Seniors Housing Co-op: we are not renting out our common room. Morning coffee session is limited to 10 residents and they must wear masks. No other activities are happening.

Bethel Place: opened up only for residents as well. We hope to add a bit more programming.

Steinbach Housing and Winkler Central Station: we have opened the rooms up for small controlled activities run by our staff; no outside rentals. We have opened our guest room and are allowing families to use it. (Winkler Central Station: Our buildings are only open to support people.)

Eden: we are big on hand hygiene. Our community rooms are smaller which limits what can be done. We have events outside in the park rather than indoor. We are going day by day, week to week to figure out best practices.

Arms of the Cross: our common room is for the tenants only and will continue until further notice. No outside people allowed to enter the common room. We have used masking tape to separate tables and chairs for social distances. Lunches are pick up only and bingo limited to one table per person to provide the social distance. Pool table is sanitized and hand sanitizer provided. We clean all the table after each Bingo session.

Community Wellness Initiative: our groups shut down as soon as COVID hit. We have no idea when our in-person group programming will start again, with all of the cases, and the difficulty with policing common areas with more than one entrance/exit.

Mandating Masks: will you be requiring the wearing of masks in common areas?

Westman lions Manor (Brandon): all staff are required to wear masks to be a model for tenants.

CHRA: the city of Ottawa has passed a by-law mandating that masks being worn in indoor common areas in multi-residential buildings. So it's not a choice anymore - it's mandated by the city now.

Western MB Seniors Co-op: Brandon is now under orange restrictions. Masks are mandatory in all common areas in the building. Residents and staff and limited visitors are wearing masks due to the orange restrictions.

Winkler Central Station: We are giving the option of masks but it is not required. Our staff is required to use masks indoors.

Steinbach housing: No staff or tenants are wearing masks.

Enforcing Masks: how do we enforce residents to wear masks?

MNPHA: Generally, it will be difficult to evict someone for not following mask requirements – you would have to demonstrate a safety risk. According to RTB, this will be challenging, even if people aren't following distancing requirement or rules around self-isolation. Encouraging positive behaviour is the way to go. Fines and enforcement are possible for those who are required to self-isolate, but education may be more effective.

Western MB Seniors Co-op: people have been very compliant. I do stop them and send them back to their apartment to get their mask or I give them one.

Bethel Place: we continue to look to the province for the guidelines and if you explain that your protocol moves with the province's mandate, the tenants seem to be willing to collaborate. I want to avoid this power struggle – I'd rather have a working-together spirit. The hallway is their home. We open up services, and if tenants do want to participate, they will have to wear masks and it has been going well.

Winkler Central Station: we are handing out masks. We have no plans of policing it. Same as Bethel Place we are interested in maintaining healthy relationships. Power struggles are not helpful.

Restricting Guests: Have you closed a seniors independent living facility to the public as numbers continue to rise?

MNPHA: as an independent facility, you cannot ban guests because tenants have the right to let folks into their units. But providers have been putting signs on doors to recommend against guests, especially those who have traveled or been sick. (because it's their home and providers can't restrict it). Some providers have changed their front door from unlocked during office hours to locked, so tenants must always allow their guests in. There are different restrictions for PCH: Long Term Care are able to restrict guests and many have a designated staff to take temperatures, and answer questions regarding if you have left the province, or been in contact with anyone who has left the province as well as in contact with anyone who may have been in contact with COVID.

Steinbach housing: although we are independent living, a lot of our tenants require care. So we ask tenants to designate their primary caregivers and restricted to that initially. We gradually relaxed to 6 people now (and may go back moving forward with increased cases) but we've been quite successful in limiting the number of guests by giving them a number. Regarding screening tool, we have a self-declaration on the door.

Lindenholm: a lawyer suggested that unless it's an order from the government, providers in independent living can't restrict visitors.

Western MB Seniors Co-op: We are allowing guests but each resident had to identify only three guests that they would like to come in. Sign in at front door with sanitizer and masks. As a Co-op, residents voted on this decision.

Winkler Central Station: we had an issue with individuals who were homeless staying with tenants. We have a low building, so people have their windows open and people will jump in at night. It's not a new issue, but it's a bigger issue and extra hard to deal with now. People will come to my office very angry and we had to have police intervention. Overdose deaths have increased, and we haven't been able to pay more attention to the issue, unfortunately.

Cancelling Fire Drills: Is anyone going ahead with resident fire drills this year?

Any building of six-story or higher is generally mandated to have an annual fire drill. We are planning to do just staff and appointed volunteers this year but not with tenants – the city didn't recommend.

Contact at the City of Winnipeg: Leigh Gruener at LGruener@winnipeg.ca

Group meals: What are you doing about meal preparation for clients?

Group meals are still limited. But door to door delivery is still common.

Winkler Central Station: we have set up a tent beside our building with tables that allow for social distancing. Our Community Meal has resumed. We started with booking spots for tables. Now people are spreading their arrival time. We follow the Provincial Health Guidelines and we have invited them to come do inspections.

Staff and Volunteers

Staff shortage and burnout: what are organizations doing to prepare for potential staff shortages with return to school, sick leave, and plain exhaustion?

Bethel Place: over summer we utilized the Canada Summer Job program. We have shortened our workday on Fridays because we are all exhausted. I am thinking of continuing it to the fall.

Eden: with staff coming back from holidays, and upcoming flu season, we are anticipating sick leave. Our leadership has been discussing HR policies and communications with staff is key. Prepare for the worst and hope for the best.

Steinbach housing: we have small production kitchen for meals and with the duty to accommodate parents caring for sick children, we won't be able to open the kitchen. What do people do with backup plans?

Bethel Place: we will modify our offering such as having 1 feature rather than 2 features. You can also plan staff on call basis. In this year, in reference to the flu shot, we plan to encourage flu shot for staff as well.

- Note: would there be interest in a workshop on Accommodation and a policy template for it? The cost is \$1,200 and if we can get 12 people paying \$100 each, we would be able to share the cost. Only Bonnie B and Joanne S voted yes.

Notifying tenants regarding staff potential exposure: usually when someone has an exposure the person should immediately start working from home until receiving negative results. But our onsite superintendent might have a potential exposure and he couldn't leave his suite. We don't want to scare people unnecessarily, but people couldn't call him and they need to know why. Are you letting tenants know if a staff had a potential exposure?

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MNPHA: in the past calls we've discussed what to do when *a tenant* tests positive or has a potential exposure. RTB let us know that privacy law was quite clear that you can't identify the individual without their consent. But RTB suggests a broad notification put under the door saying that "there's someone in the building potentially test positive, so be extra careful; wear masks; this is what we are doing as a landlord to deal with it (such as extra cleaning)." Let other tenants know there's potential exposure but don't identify individuals or units. These privacy restrictions would likely apply to employees.

Steinbach Housing: one of our staff had a potential exposure and we provided as much information as that person was comfortable with to tenants.

Tenant Resources/Needs

What are folks doing to support tenants with isolation, stress, and other challenges?

Bethel Place: we held 2 successful outdoor concerts. One from Salvation Army which was nice and loud. We continue to write to our tenants weekly, a letter from myself or one of our staff - a brief recap of currently COVID status, and news within our building.

Arm of the Cross: now we are playing bingo with prizes which we haven't done in the past.

Lindenholm: we update our website regularly, so the family members of our tenants have been kept informed. At the beginning of the lockdown, we had our sweetest, most compassionate staff calling each tenant to do mental health check-in, which we've also logged. We found out there are tenants who have no outside contacts and the staff continues to check in with those who have been struggling weekly by phone. Recreation wise we held a bocce ball tournament.

- Note: New Journey Housing has raised some **caution with calling** – MB housing had their staff call tenants, and the staff weren't necessarily trained to engage with tenants, especially many of whom face language barriers. Some people then went to resource centre because they didn't understand the nature of the call, and worried about eviction. So make sure to be conscious about good communications and language barriers.
- "these efforts are what makes community housing special and caring!"

Community Wellness Initiative: we developed a bi-weekly newsletter – with information/news/a biweekly recipe, and a brain booster, trivia/mazes/cross words, etc.

Old Grace Housing Co-op: we are totally dependent on our member resident volunteers. We have a large number of folks who look after our grounds and gardens. One of our refugee families has a large market garden (outside the co-op area) twice a week and they set up a farmer's market in our courtyard. We also have a resident google group that keeps us in touch with each other in an ongoing way.

Planning for Future Operations/Sector Needs

What are some grant programs available?

CHRA: there are grants currently underspent and available. Four programs are, in fact, looking for applicants to apply:



- Community Housing Transformation Centre provides funds for local and sector-wide transformative initiatives.
- The new FCM Green Municipal Funds have funding for energy retrofits or new developments
- Shared Equity Mortgage Program (SEMP) with – to support affordable home ownership models - \$100 m over 5 years to spend.
- The National Co-investment Fund for new construction and renovation have billions of dollars needed to spend.

(On Sept. 8th, CHRA is hosting a national housing updates webinar at 12pm which Jeff will also cover these programs in detail.)

I know I want to apply - I just don't have the time. Could we get some support to retain consultant or grant writers?

CHRA: we are planning to offer our members the opportunities to book one-on-one meeting with CMHC specialist for challenging areas, such as grant writing – you are not alone! If you have trouble with grant writing, the program will match you with a grant writing specialist within CMHC. The application will open up soon.