

HOME SHARE **BLUEPRINT**

Transforming Underutilized Housing into a Scalable,
Community-Powered Housing Solution.

PROBLEM

SOLVING

**A BLUEPRINT FOR
COMMUNITY
POWERED HOUSING
SOLUTIONS**



Case for Home Sharing

Housing solutions are often centred on construction, yet there is another path to consider: using existing housing supply more efficiently through home-sharing. With nearly one-third of bedrooms in Canada sitting empty, the potential is vast, but tapping into it requires structure, safeguards, and community support. Home-sharing is not a substitute for new builds but a parallel path that delivers outcomes construction alone cannot. It is fast, cost-effective, and uniquely capable of producing social benefits: enabling older adults to age in place, helping students and newcomers find safe housing, and fostering the friendships and community bonds that strengthen the social fabric. To test this approach, Nova Scotia launched a province-wide pilot with Happipad from 2023 to 2025, creating valuable lessons and a blueprint for future programs.

Effective Program Elements

The Nova Scotia pilot showed that home-sharing can succeed when delivered through a scalable, centralized system. The platform enabled participation across every region of the province and ensured consistent controls, monitoring, and oversight. Standardized processes allowed the team to manage hundreds of daily interactions reliably, while providing the flexibility to scale staffing levels up or down as demand shifted.

Public education and participant support were essential to the program's success. Many people were unfamiliar with how home-sharing worked, and older adults in particular required more time and guidance before committing. In some communities, uncertainty about trust and circulating misinformation created additional barriers. A dedicated support team addressed these issues directly by providing clear information, correcting misunderstandings, and offering reassurance, making education a core requirement for participation at scale.

Background checks, integrated insurance, and tailored home-share agreements gave homeowners the peace of mind needed for security and legitimacy, while creating a straightforward, low-barrier process for renters. At the same time, the centralized hub generated valuable data on behaviours and adoption patterns, giving government its first detailed picture of how home-sharing functions in practice and where future resources should be focused.

Lessons and Improvements

1. Adoption Takes Time

Building trust in home-sharing is a gradual process. Older adults need more time before committing, which creates early “chicken-and-egg” challenges. Programs should start with education and awareness, then grow participation through targeted audiences like schools, settlement agencies, or workforce partners. People want a good match, not a random one, and focusing on defined groups helps adoption take root.

2. Policy Alignment is Essential

Barriers such as Halifax’s rental registry, maintenance log requirements, and taxation fears discouraged many homeowners. Some worried about being “documented” or facing extra costs. For home-sharing to succeed, participation must be low-barrier and financially worthwhile. Clear tax exemptions, simplified municipal requirements, and flexibility on rules like strata bylaws are critical. The UK’s Rent a Room Scheme provides a strong model.

3. Dedicated Funding, Not Fee Recovery

Attempting to fund these programs by charging service fees on already low rents is counterproductive and undermines affordability. The most vulnerable participants need the most support yet can pay the least. What works is dedicated public funding for staffing, outreach, and education, paired with modest cost recovery for things like insurance or screening. Programs should be treated as public service infrastructure that grows more efficient over time.

4. Infrastructure Through Partnerships

Standalone delivery is inefficient. The pilot showed that demand for support, education, and reassurance far exceeded expectations, especially among older adults. Home visits, for example, were valuable but resource-intensive. The better path is to embed home-sharing within existing community networks. A centralized platform can serve as the backbone, while local nonprofits act as “nodes” supporting their own clients. This distributed model lowers costs, speeds adoption, and builds on trusted relationships already in place.

5. Flexibility with Safeguards

Many participants preferred to take arrangements “off-platform” once matched, showing that strict, ongoing requirements can be a burden. Flexibility reduces operating costs while still giving people the core supports they value most: education, background checks, tailored agreements, and mediation if needed. Safeguards remain essential, both to protect renters from unfair treatment and to address discrimination or misinformation that can arise in communities.

6. A Social Impact Program, Not a Marketplace

Home-sharing must be seen through a social impact lens. The program generates meaningful income for homeowners, helping seniors age in place and households cover costs, while keeping dollars in the community instead of flowing to institutional landlords. The broader cost-benefit picture includes healthcare savings, improved social inclusion, and stronger workforce stability. Evaluating programs on their social return on investment, not just financial sustainability, is key.

Why It Matters for Your Community

Home-sharing is more than a housing program, it is an investment in the kind of communities we want to build for the future. It activates space that already exists, turning empty bedrooms into opportunities for connection, belonging, and support. It is not for everyone, but for those who need it and choose it, the impact is profound.

For older adults, it means the difference between aging in place surrounded by friends and companions, or facing isolation behind closed doors. For students and newcomers, it offers safe, welcoming homes where they can plant roots, form friendships, and integrate into the community. For families, it provides income that helps cover rising costs while contributing to the solution.

The benefits ripple outward. Home-sharing strengthens neighbourhoods by weaving intergenerational and intercultural ties. It saves people money, reduces pressure on construction and gentrification, and lowers environmental impact by using housing more efficiently. It ensures dollars stay local, enriching households instead of leaving communities.

This is not a small project or a temporary fix. Home-sharing is a long-term solution that can grow, scale, and transform how we think about housing. It builds a shared housing economy that balances affordability with human connection, creating communities that are resilient, compassionate, and sustainable.

From Blueprint to Movement

The blueprint is built—what comes next is collective leadership to bring it to life. With aligned policies, modest investment, and partnerships with trusted organizations, home-sharing programs can launch in months, not years.

This is not a small project but an infrastructure initiative. Building a network that unlocks underutilized housing at scale takes time, effort, and the support of many stakeholders. As the saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child—and in the same way, it takes a network to make home-sharing flourish.

Home-sharing is both a solution for today and an investment in the future. It addresses immediate housing needs while reshaping how communities connect, creating social bonds that strengthen resilience and belonging for generations to come.

Blueprint for Implementation

1. Define the Audience

Be clear on who the program is designed to serve: seniors, students, newcomers, or workforce housing. Targeted channels are far more effective than a generic approach. Home-sharing should be positioned as a complementary housing option within existing sectors, not as a stand-alone solution.

2. Align Policies

Municipal, provincial, and federal policies must be compatible. Barriers like Halifax's rental registry showed how rules can unintentionally discourage participation. Clear, low-barrier policies are essential to support adoption.

3. Build Partnerships and Networks

Map out the stakeholders who will benefit from home-sharing and create networks with their organizations. Partnering with nonprofits, student groups, seniors' organizations, and settlement agencies integrates the program into trusted community channels. Operating in isolation is inefficient and risks failure.

4. Allow Time and Support for Growth

Adoption takes time. Education and trust-building, especially with older adults, cannot be rushed. Programs should be designed for multi-year cycles and supported with dedicated outreach staff. To scale faster, add more community organizations as program "nodes" that connect into the central platform.

5. Measure the Full Impact

Evaluation should go beyond housing matches to include healthcare outcomes, social inclusion, family income gains, rent savings, and quality-of-life benefits such as help around the home. These impacts demonstrate the unique value of home-sharing and justify continued investment.

6. Enable a Connected Network

Consistency and collaboration are essential. Shared agreements, screening processes, and safeguards ensure fairness and trust across all participants. A unified platform, such as Happipad, enables organizations to work together as part of a connected network rather than operating in silos, making the program scalable and easier to manage.

Want to learn more?

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The logo for Happipad, featuring the word "happipad" in a lowercase, rounded, sans-serif font. The "i" in "happi" has a small heart shape above it.