

COMMON HOUSING AND SUPPORTS OPTIONS

Sometimes people ask us about the types of “housing models” available for adults on the autism spectrum. We prefer the term “housing and supports options” because there are so many different ways that housing and supports can come together. It is helpful to understand some of the common housing terms and options available in Alberta, but it is also important to know that there are also many variations.

Ideally, housing and supports options come together based on the unique needs of each person, the type and amount of support they require, the availability of specific types of housing, and the persons’ financial resources. You may have a model in mind, but not all models or options are easy to find, may not be available in certain areas of the province or if they are, they may have a waiting list.

Housing and supports options may look different in various settings depending on:

- The number of autistic adults living together (one individual or several)
- The type of structure (detached home, condominium, apartment, townhome)
- The location of the home (urban, suburban, rural)
- The ownership structure of the home (rented, sole ownership, shared ownership)
- The sources of income available (government income support, government disability supports funding, private/family funding)
- Formal and/or natural supports available (paid and unpaid)

Housing and Supports options will typically fall into one of the following four categories:

- 1. Group Home:** Individuals in Alberta who need higher levels of support and are funded by Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) may live in group homes. The traditional group home usually houses up to three people in the same home who are typically supported by staff from a PDD approved agency. In some cases, non-PDD approved agencies provide the support, but only with an authorized exemption from PDD.

The agency schedules and oversees the support offered in the home, which is often a 24/7 level of staffing. The staff do not live in the group home but come into the home during their assigned shifts. Typically, each person living in the home has their own bedroom and they share common spaces, like the kitchen, living room and bathrooms. Group homes can be located in urban, suburban, rural or remote locations.

If more than three people live in the home, different building codes and standards apply. In Alberta, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (SLALA) legislation directs the maximum number of individuals who can live together and outlines the corresponding standards that are required to be met.

Examples of variations on the group home option could include:

- One family owns the group home where 3 people live (2 of whom are renters) and together they contract an agency to provide support.
- Several families co-own a home and contract an agency to provide support.



- A builder owns the home and the support agency leases from the builder. The agency then decides who will live in the group home.
- A group home is created by an agency in a larger building by customizing space for separate bedrooms and shared spaces. Again the agency decides who will live in the group home.
- Homes that house more than four people where individuals have their own unit and spaces like kitchens and common areas are shared. Standards and codes for larger home settings are required.

2. Supported Independent Living: Individuals in this option tend to have lower support needs, but still require some degree of support. The support is provided in or near the person's home which could be a detached home, apartment or townhouse. Support may be provided by an agency, or a paid or unpaid supportive roommate depending on the nature of support needed. If minimal support is required, natural networks of support may be sufficient on an as needed basis.

Examples of variations on supported independent living options could include:

- A supportive roommate hired by an agency and funded by PDD to assist an individual during the hours they need specific help.
- A supportive roommate hired by a family privately or as part of the PDD family managed contract to assist the individual as needed.
- An agency that offers light support for an agreed upon fee for service.
- A friend or sibling living in an apartment with an individual who is providing unpaid support or provides support in exchange for free accommodation that is negotiated in advance with the individual or the family.
- A community in proximity where others (e.g. seniors, students) offer "good neighbor" support as a natural extension of living there.

3. Community Living Supports: Co-housing is an example of a community living model where individuals are part of a larger community that usually has a shared mission and values. These are often larger settings, where families or individuals live in their own units using shared space (gardens, game rooms, kitchens), with or without external agency support, but with the benefit of the co-housing community members who act as committed natural supports. Usually, people with and without disabilities live together.

Examples of variations on community living supports options include:

- A co-housing setting where the community shares religious values.
- Farmsteads where individuals with and without disabilities live and work together on a farm.

4. Home Sharing: Some families open their homes to those with disabilities, often providing 24/7 support in an inclusive and welcoming environment with a family who is paid to provide the support. In this situation, the individual who requires support lives in the home of the home sharing family. Typically, the family is recruited and then trained by an agency. This option is popular in British Columbia.

