

# 1 | about the study

toronto social housing & health study



## What difference is the revitalization of Regent Park making to the health of tenants?

That's the question the Toronto Social Housing & Health study is trying to answer.

What we find out will help Toronto Community Housing and other agencies in Toronto and beyond plan projects and deliver services in the best way possible.

Contact us if you have questions or want more information about the study. For more info on the Regent Park revitalization, see [torontohousing.ca/regentpark](http://torontohousing.ca/regentpark)

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## community report no.1

**A bold new initiative is underway in Regent Park**, a social housing community built in 1948 in downtown Toronto that is being revitalized into a mixed-income, mixed-use neighbourhood.

When the 15-year project is complete, Regent Park will have grown from 2,083 households to more than 5,000 households with new parks, stores, services and community facilities. All 2,083 of the rent-g geared-to-income units will be replaced, 700 new affordable rental units will be added and there will be more than 3,000 new condominium units. The new units are being built in a mix of townhomes, mid-rise and high-rise buildings, with some of the rental units near Regent Park in the east downtown.

One of the main goals of the revitalization is to build healthy communities. Our research team, based at St. Michael's Hospital and led by Dr. Jim Dunn, is studying how revitalization is improving the health and well-being of social housing tenants.

This report presents the results from the 39 people who participated in phase one of our multi-year study. We interviewed them twice: first in 2008-2009, after they'd moved out of their old home in Regent Park and into their relocation unit, and again two years later, after they'd moved into their new unit and had been living there for a year. (We're repeating this process with a second group of 153 participants right now— results will be ready in 2013.)

We asked the 39 participants the same questions both times we interviewed them to see if things had changed. Questions focused on things that affect health and well-being, such as safety, social relationships, stress, the neighbourhood, their home and health problems.

This report summarizes some of the changes that these 39 participants experienced.

**The good news?** Participants experienced positive changes in areas that can be directly connected to improvements in housing and neighbourhood. After a year in their new unit, people felt...

- more satisfied with their home,
- more satisfied with their neighbourhood,
- better about their community, and
- safer in their neighbourhood.

Mental health, physical health, access to services and social supports didn't seem to improve for the 39 participants following their return to their revitalized unit...but they didn't get worse, either. We aren't surprised by the lack of improvement in these areas, since health is determined by a large number of factors and housing is only one of them.

# 2 | who we talked to

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# 3 | what changed?

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**2005**

We didn't interview anyone while they were living in their original unit in Regent Park.

**2008-9**

**interview #1**

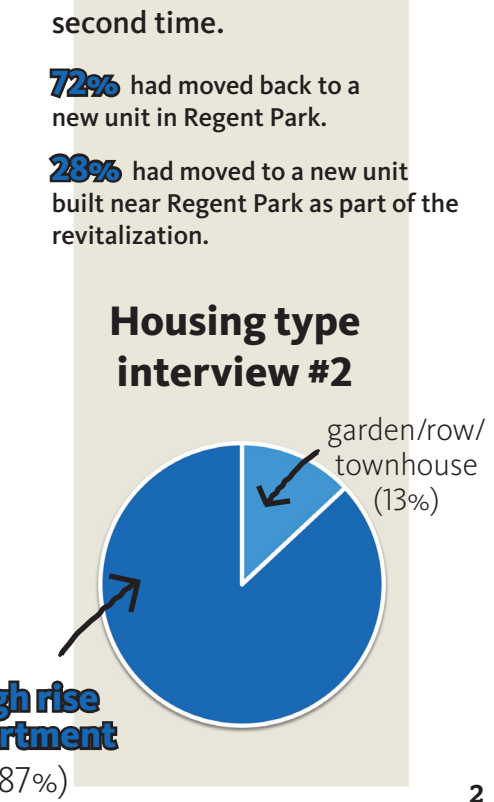
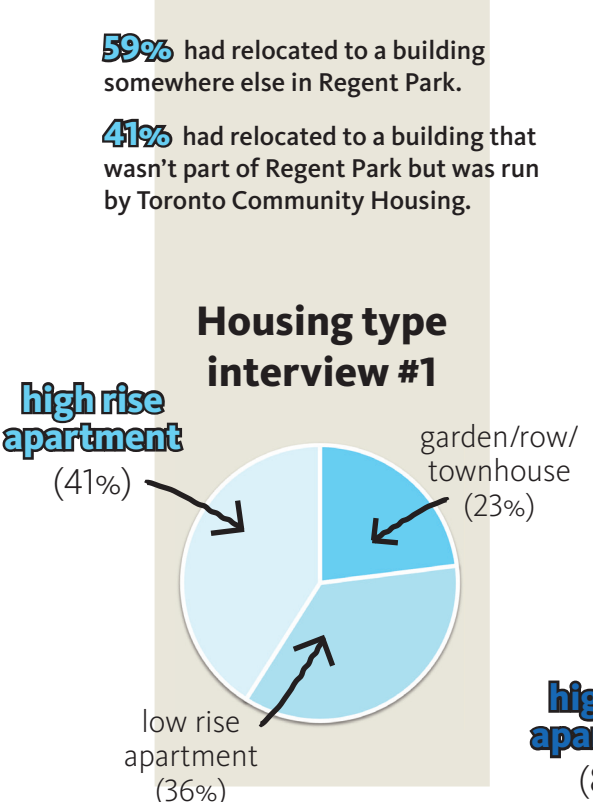
All 39 participants were living in their relocation unit when we interviewed them for the first time.

**2010-11**

**interview #2**

All 39 participants had been living in their new unit for at least one year when we interviewed them for the second time.

- Study participants were...**
- ▶ Female . . . . . **69%**
  - ▶ 20 to 44 years old . . . . . **46%**
  - ▶ 45 to 65 years old . . . . . **46%**
  - ▶ Born in Canada . . . . . **26%**
  - ▶ Married . . . . . **62%**
  - ▶ Educated beyond high school . . . . . **39%**
  - ▶ Living in a household with a combined income of \$20,000 a year + . . . . . **46%**



usually we asked several questions on each topic

## Summary of results

TOPICS	Improved	Got worse	No change
Satisfied with their neighbourhood	X		
Satisfied with their home	X		
Felt good about their neighbourhood	X		
Felt good about their home	X		
Felt a strong sense of community	X		
Said they need services, such as recreation facilities, libraries, grocery stores, banks			X
Said services are accessible			X*
Felt they had social supports inside or outside their neighbourhood			X*
Felt safe in their neighbourhood	X		
Took steps to protect themselves from crime			X
Someone in their household was a victim of crime in the 12 months prior to the interview			X
Had less life stress			X
Felt anxious during the week before the interview	X		
Felt depressed during the week before the interview			X*
Felt bothered by physical or emotional issues during the four weeks before the interview			X
Felt satisfied with their life			X**
Rated their health as fair or poor			X
Needed health care but didn't receive it			X

\* 1 or 2 questions improved, but the overall trend was no change  
\*\* 2 questions got worse, but the overall trend was no change



## WHAT IS "HEALTH"?

Health is complex. It's more than the absence of physical aches, pains and diseases—it's about feeling good emotionally, psychologically and even spiritually. You've probably heard the phrase "social determinants of health." These are aspects of our lives, such as social supports, economic conditions, education and our social and physical environments, that can influence our health, too.

To help us put together a full picture of how the revitalization of Regent Park impacts health, we asked our study participants about:

- satisfaction with their home and neighbourhood,
- services in the neighbourhood,
- sense of community,
- feelings about neighbours,
- thoughts on safety,
- stress at work and home,
- mental health, including anxiety and depression,
- sense of wellbeing, and
- physical health.

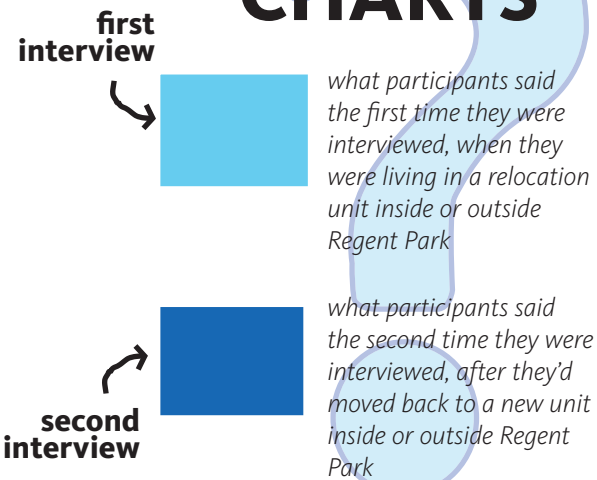
# 4 feelings about housing

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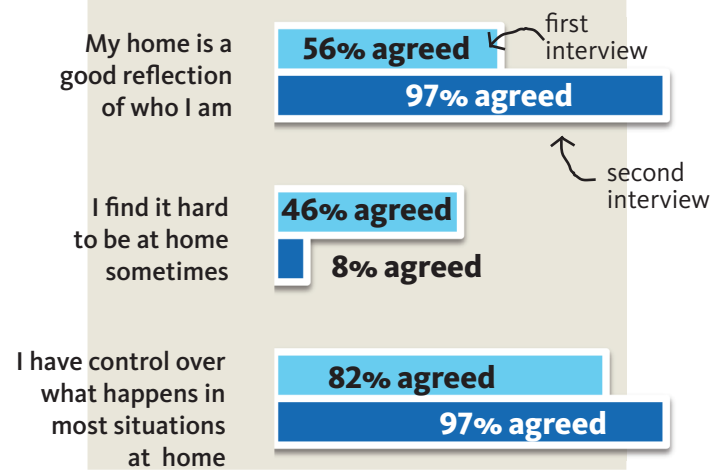
# 5 the neighbourhood

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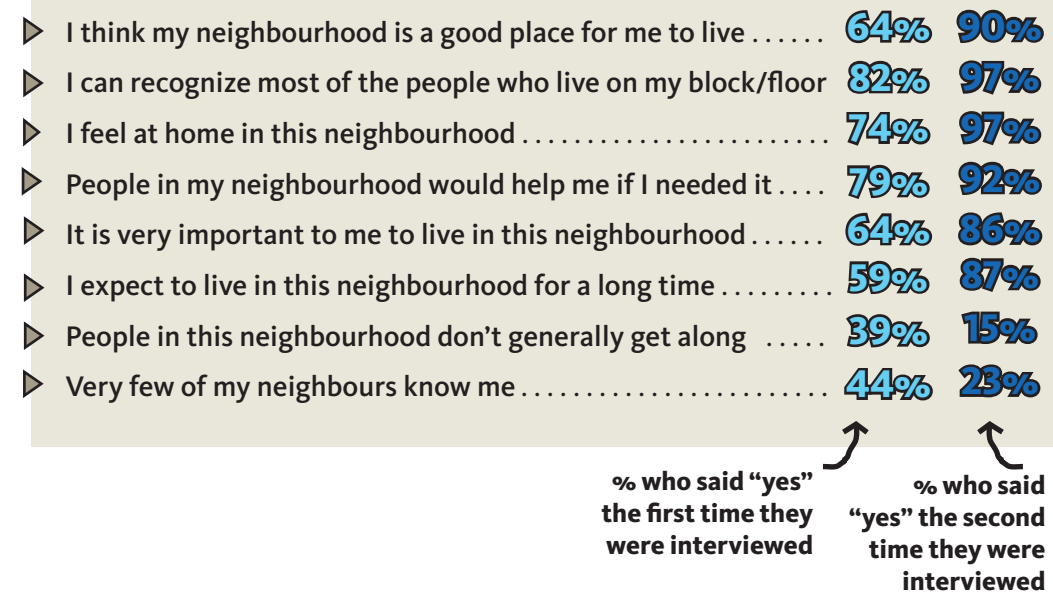
## READING THE CHARTS



## They feel better about their home



## They feel better about their neighbourhood



## HIGHLIGHTS

By far the greatest improvements were in how participants felt about their housing and neighbourhood—only six of 22 questions on these topics didn't show significant improvement.

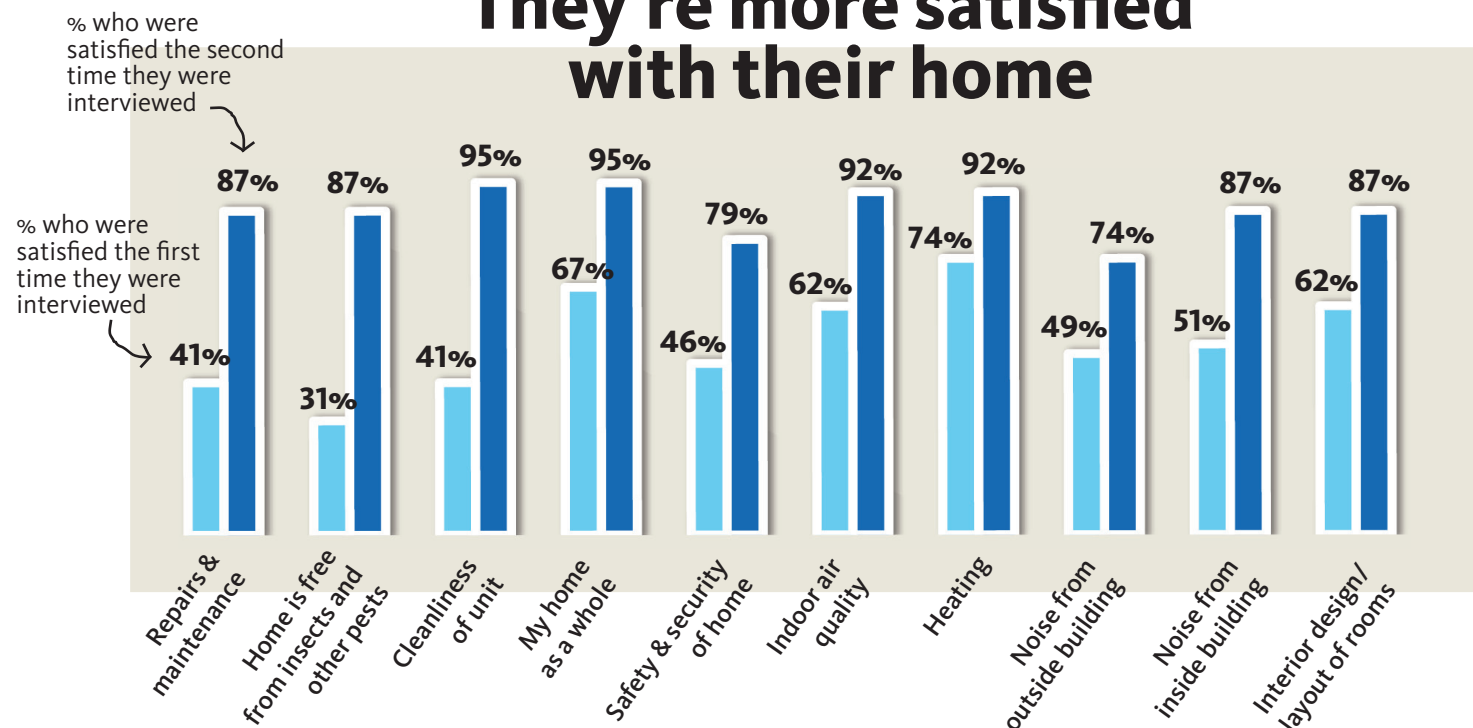
Participants felt the same need for services in the neighbourhood as before relocation but, after moving to their new unit, they said access to banks had improved. This isn't surprising because most new community facilities that are being added as part of phase two of revitalization are still under construction, but a new bank was added in 2010.

Participants didn't report a change in social supports inside or outside the neighbourhood from the first to second interview.

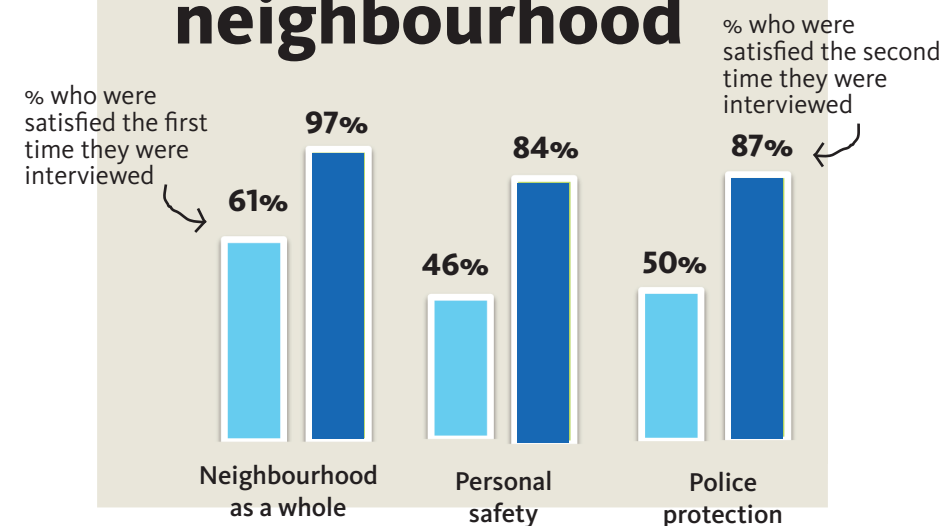
We measured sense of community with 12 questions—7 indicated improvement and 5 showed no change.

Stress levels, physical activity, smoking, life satisfaction, anxiety, depression, emotional health and physical health didn't improve or decline between the first and second interview.

## They're more satisfied with their home



## They're more satisfied with their neighbourhood



# 6

# crime & safety

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## HIGHLIGHTS

Participants said they felt safer in their neighbourhood when we interviewed them a second time.

We didn't find a significant change in participants who:

- walked or took transit alone after dark
- were worried about being outside alone after dark
- took precautions to protect themselves or their property from crime (e.g. installing an alarm, changing their routine, getting a dog)
- had been a victim of a crime (or someone in their household had been a victim of crime) in the 12 months before the interview
- felt weapons, harassment, bullying, discrimination, hate, violent crime, death or injury to youth, or police treatment of youth had a high impact on community safety.

## They feel safer in their neighbourhood

**68%** of the 39 participants said they felt “somewhat” or “very” safe in their neighbourhood when we first interviewed them, while they were living in their relocation unit.

**97%** of the 39 participants said they felt “somewhat” or “very” safe in their neighbourhood when we interviewed them a year after they'd moved into their new unit.



## CONCLUSION

Overall, participants saw improvements in areas that are directly affected by housing and neighbourhood revitalization: housing satisfaction and meaning, neighbourhood satisfaction, personal safety and fear of crime. The lack of an effect on general and mental health is understandable, since health is determined by a large number of factors, and housing is just one of them.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Results from our next set of interviews, this time with a new, larger group of Regent Park tenants who moved during phase two of revitalization, will be available in a second community report in 2013.



**RRASP**  
Réseau de recherche sur l'amélioration de la santé des populations

**PHIRN**  
Population Health Improvement Research Network



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