

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.

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community report no. 2

A bold new initiative is underway in Regent Park, a social housing community built in the 1940s and 50s in downtown Toronto that is being revitalized by Toronto Community Housing into a mixed-income, mixed-use neighbourhood.

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 wellbeing of social housing tenants.

After revitalization is complete...

Regent Park will have grown from over 2,000 households to more than 7,000 households with new parks, stores, services and community facilities. All 2,083 of the rent-geared-to-income units will be replaced, new affordable rental units will be added and there will be more than 5,000 new condominium units. The new units are being built in a mix of townhomes, mid-rise and high-rise buildings, with some of the new rental units near Regent Park in the east downtown.

What has the research study found so far?

Participants experienced some significant positive changes after spending a year in their new unit:

- greater satisfaction with their home,
- greater satisfaction with their neighbourhood,
- increased safety in their neighbourhood, and
- lower levels of distress (or mild depression)

There was no significant change over that first year in other aspects of their lives. More details are on pages 4 and 8.

2 | about the study

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OLD REGENT PARK

132 people interviewed
2009-2010



NEW REGENT PARK

59 people
interviewed
2011-2012



RELOCATION HOUSING

73 people interviewed
2011-2012



In 2009-2010, we sent a letter to everyone living in Regent Park who was going to be affected by Phase 2 of the revitalization. One hundred and thirty-two people agreed to do a survey with us. Two years later we used the same survey to interview them again, because we wanted to see what had changed. Seventy-three of the participants had moved to relocation housing in other parts of Regent Park or elsewhere in the city. Fifty-nine had moved into a new unit built as part of the revitalization.

This report is about the 59 participants who moved directly to a new unit. We'll report our findings from the 73 people we interviewed while they were living in relocation housing after they've moved into their own new unit and we've had a chance to speak with them again.

3 | who we talked to

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We interviewed 59 people,

once when they were living in old Regent Park and again after they'd moved into their new unit.

Here's some info about them.

- 54%** 20 to 44 years old
- 42%** 45 to 65 years old
- 31%** Born in Canada
- 32%** Speak English at home
- 54%** Have more than a high school education
- 45%** Live in a household that makes \$20,000+ a year
- 47%** Married
- 61%** Female

2009-10

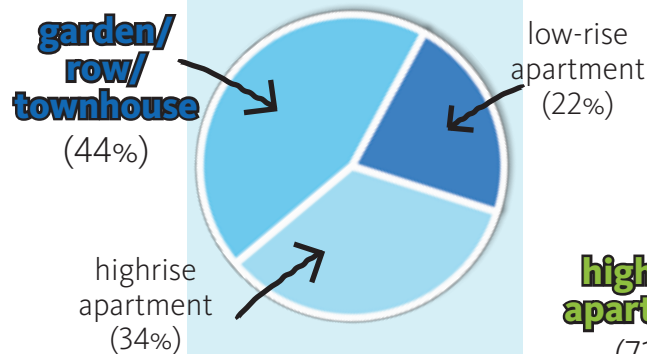


interview #1

We interviewed 64 participants who were going to move from their old unit in Regent Park right into a new unit. This first interview took place when they were living in their old unit.

100% were living within the Regent Park footprint.

Their old unit was a ...



2011-12



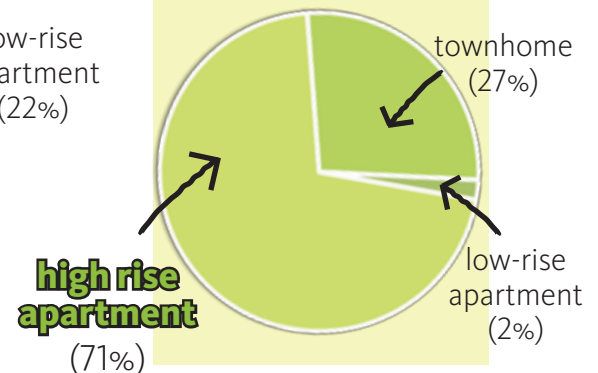
interview #2

We were able to contact 59 of the original 64 participants after they had been living in their new unit for at least one year. We interviewed them again.

42% had moved directly to a new unit in Regent Park.

58% had moved to a new unit that was built as part of the revitalization but was off the Regent Park footprint nearby in the east downtown.

Their new unit was a ...



4 | what changed?

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we usually asked several questions on each topic

What changed for the participants?

TOPICS	Improved	No change	Got worse
Satisfied with their neighbourhood	X		
Satisfied with their home	X		
Felt a strong sense of community	X		
Felt good about/proud of their home	X		
Felt good about their neighbours		X*	
Said they need services, such as recreation facilities, libraries, grocery stores, banks		X*	
Said services are accessible		X*	
Felt they had others they could depend on		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 past month		X*	
Felt stressed most days		X	
Felt anxious in the past week		X**	
Felt depressed in the past week		X	
Felt distressed in the past week	X		
Felt bothered by physical or emotional issues in the past month		X	
Felt satisfied with their life		X	
Rated their health as fair or poor		X	
Needed health care but didn't receive it		X	
Diagnosed with high blood pressure			X
Diagnosed with heart disease			X
Had a regular doctor		X	

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

** out of 20 questions, 3 questions got worse, 1 improved



HIGHLIGHTS

Health is complex. Being healthy is partly about being free of aches, pains and diseases, but it's also about feeling good emotionally, psychologically and even spiritually.

When we have people we can rely on, enough money to pay the bills, a satisfying job and a neighbourhood that is attractive and safe, we're probably healthier than if we don't have those things.

Overall, we found improvements in how participants felt about their home, neighbourhood and community. Participants felt less distressed (another word for mild depression).

We found the self-reported rate of physician-diagnosed heart disease and high blood pressure rose in the people that we talked to between the first and second interviews. This was related to age. It's also possible that participants were getting better medical care after moving into their new unit and were simply being diagnosed with conditions that they had previously.

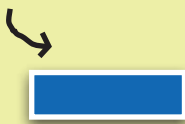
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feelings about housing

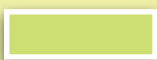
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READING THE CHARTS

old housing



what participants said the first time they were interviewed, when they were living in their old unit in "old Regent Park"

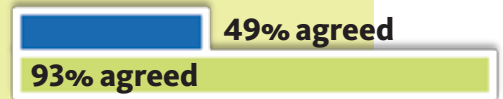


what participants said the second time they were interviewed, after they'd moved to a new unit inside or outside the Regent Park footprint

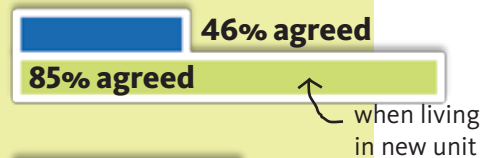
new housing

They feel better about their home

I'm proud to show my home to visitors



My home is a good reflection of who I am



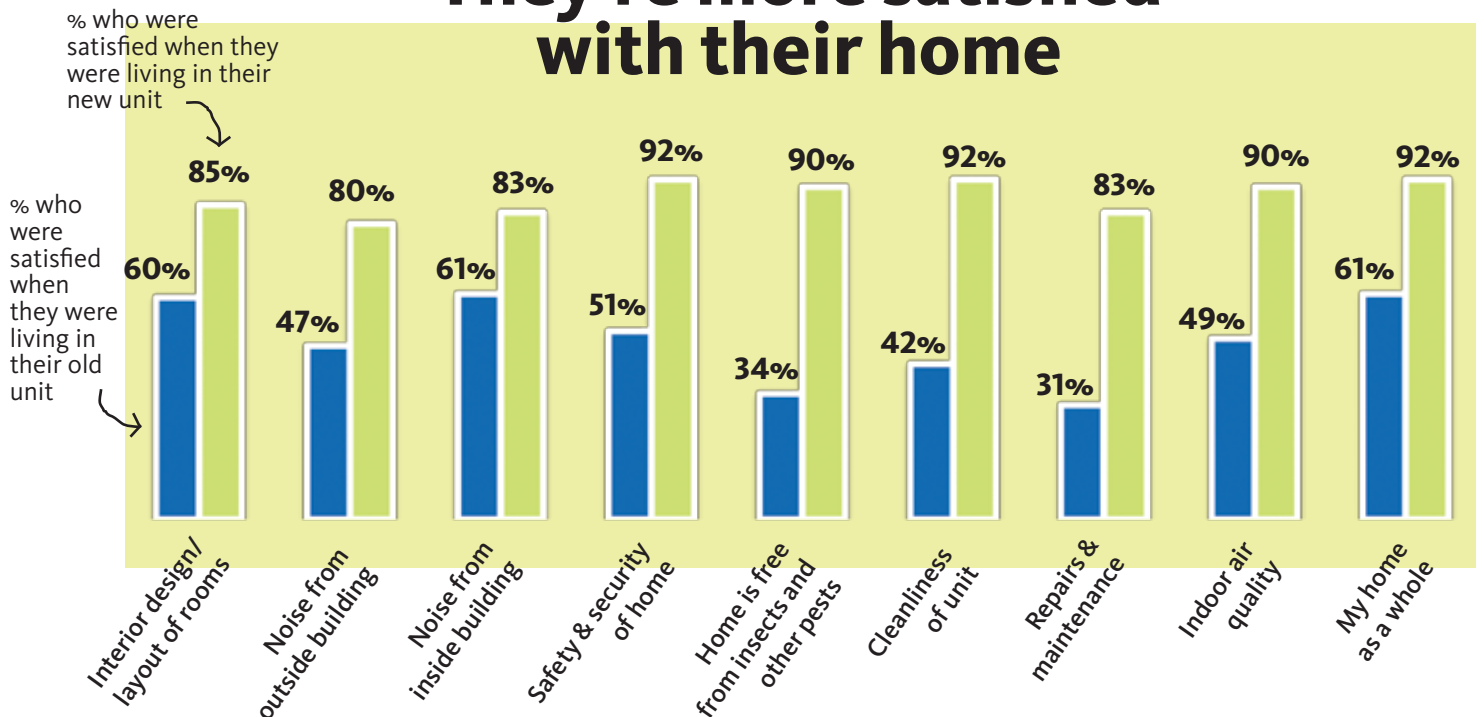
I find it hard to be at home sometimes



My home is a good place to live my life



They're more satisfied with their home



6

the neighbourhood

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They feel better about their neighbourhood

▶ I think my neighbourhood is a good place for me to live	69%	92%
▶ I feel at home in this neighbourhood	71%	86%
▶ It is very important to me to live in this neighbourhood	49%	71%
▶ I expect to live in this neighbourhood for a long time	54%	79%
▶ People generally get along	34%	58%
▶ I have access to a grocery store in my neighbourhood	85%	97%

% who said "yes" when they were living in their old unit

% who said "yes" when they were living in their new unit



HIGHLIGHTS

By far the greatest improvements shown by the study were in how participants felt about their housing.

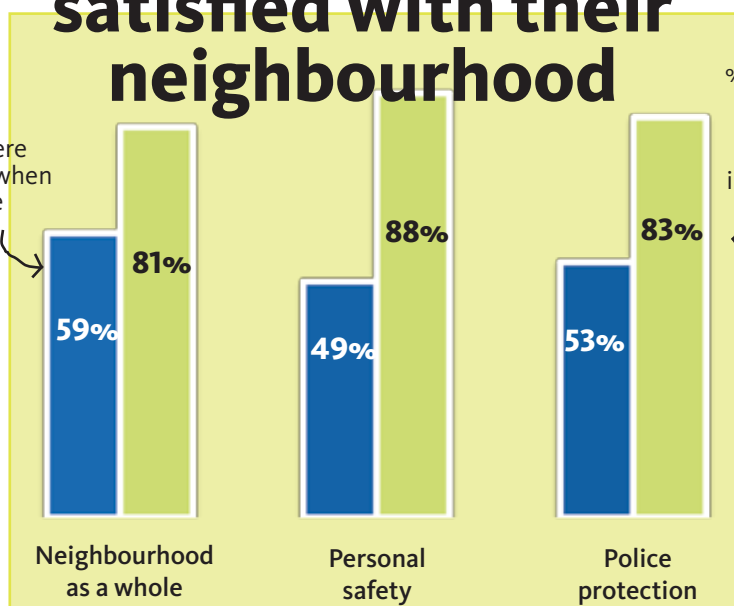
Participants were more satisfied with their neighbourhood as a whole after they were living in their new unit, but feelings about most other aspects of the neighbourhood didn't seem to change. For example, participants had the same need for services in the neighbourhood after moving into their new unit with one exception—they had less need for child care. Access to services stayed the same except for grocery stores (this improved after moving to a new unit) and parks (this got worse, probably because the new park on Dundas St. wasn't open yet).

We measured sense of community with 12 questions—four indicated improvement and eight showed no change. We asked participants about their social supports inside and outside the neighbourhood, and these didn't change after moving to a new unit.

They're more satisfied with their neighbourhood

% who were satisfied when they were living in their old unit

% who were satisfied when they were living in their new unit



7 | 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 every day
- felt worried about using public transit after dark
- would walk alone more often after dark if they felt safer from crime
- 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)
- themselves or someone in their household had been a victim of crime in the 12 months before the interview—except for a decrease in property damage
- felt weapons, harassment, bullying, discrimination, hate, violent crime, and death or injury to youth had a high impact on community safety.

They feel safer in their neighbourhood

73% of the 59 participants said they felt “somewhat” or “very” safe in their neighbourhood when we first interviewed them, while they were living in their original unit in Regent Park.

95% of the 59 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.

Life after dark...

	% who said “yes” when living in “old Regent Park”	
▶ I feel safe being at home alone after dark	67%	83%
▶ I feel safe from crime when I'm walking alone after dark	48%	79%
▶ I stay home at night because I'm afraid to go out alone	31%	17%
▶ I feel worried about being at home in the evening or night . . .	33%	17%
▶ I would use public transit alone after dark more often if I felt safer from crime	63%	33%

Property damage...

▶ In the past 12 months, someone in my household had property deliberately damaged or destroyed	22%	7%
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Feelings about community safety...

▶ Gang activity has a high impact on community safety	34%	14%
▶ Drug activity has a high impact on community safety	47%	19%
▶ Police treatment of youth has a high impact on community safety	29%	7%
▶ Discrimination has a high impact on community safety	22%	8%

% who said “yes” after they moved into their new unit

8 conclusions

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WHAT'S NEXT?

We're sharing these results widely within Regent Park, Toronto Community Housing, the City of Toronto and the provincial government.

The research is happening in phases over several years. Phase 1 took place from 2008 to 2011 (we presented those results in 2012). This report presents results from Phase 2. In the future we'll be interviewing the participants who were in relocation housing after they've spent a year in their new unit. We may also follow up with all the participants again, including those we interviewed in Phase 1 and 2, to see if there are any longer term impacts of the revitalization of Regent Park.

Download results from the first phase of this study, published in 2012, from www.crunch.mcmaster.ca

Participants experienced positive changes in four areas.

First, they were more satisfied with their home (noise, cleanliness, pests, etc) and felt like their home was a good “fit” for them (a good place to live and a place they were proud to show others). Second, participants felt better about their neighbourhood and more connected to the community. Third, they felt safer, particularly after dark. And finally, participants felt less “distress” (another word for mild depression) after a year in their new unit. There was an increase in participants with physician-diagnosed heart disease and blood pressure. This was related to age. It may also mean people were being diagnosed with conditions they had prior to moving into their new unit.

But many other aspects of their lives hadn't changed, including their feelings about neighbours, access to social support, opinions on the need for services in the neighbourhood and physical health. Most aspects of participants' mental health didn't change either.

We aren't surprised by these results. A brand new housing unit in a neighbourhood that is being revitalized *should* make a difference to how people feel about their home and community. It's much harder for those changes to have a positive impact on physical and mental health, employment and social support—especially after only one year. The fact that participants didn't see an improvement in neighbourhood services such as a grocery store, bank, library, healthcare, parks and schools could be because these aspects of the community had already improved while they were still living in their old unit... or they were still waiting for them to improve after moving into their new unit (as was the case for the recreation centre and parks).

These results are very similar to the results from Phase 1 of our study, where we found improvements in housing and neighbourhood satisfaction, safety and neighbourhood relationships, with small improvements in anxiety.

A heartfelt thanks to our participants for their dedication to the study and for sharing their experiences. Thanks also to our funders, including the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the MacArthur Foundation. A big thank you to our partners: Toronto Community Housing, Housing Services Corporation, Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation, Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, City of Toronto, Regent Park Community Health Centre, Regent Park Neighbourhood Initiatives, The Centre for Research on Inner City Health of the Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute in the Keenan Research Centre at St. Michael's Hospital, and the Toronto Christian Resource Centre.

MacArthur
Foundation


CIHR IRSC
Canadian Institutes of Health Research / Institut de recherches en santé du Canada

CRICH
Centre for Research on Inner City Health
Survey Research Unit

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