

Opening Doors to Inclusive Independent Living in Whistler

Assessing Housing Needs for Adults with Developmental Disabilities

Whistler Independent Supported Housing (WISH) Society was established in response to a critical gap in Whistler's housing system: the absence of long-term, inclusive, and supported housing options for adults with developmental disabilities (DD). While Whistler has a strong track record of delivering non-market housing for its workforce, existing eligibility frameworks largely exclude individuals who cannot meet employment-based requirements, including many adults with developmental disabilities (DD).

HOUSING NEED AND DEMAND

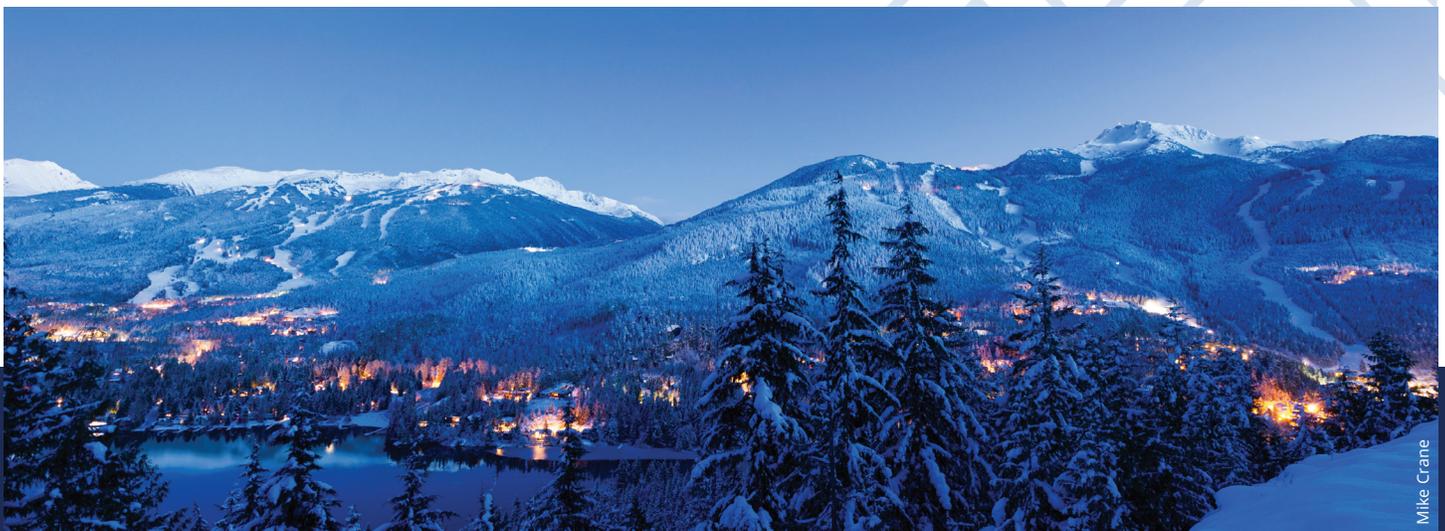
Adults with DD are active members of the Whistler and Sea to Sky communities and should have the same opportunity as others to live safely, independently, and with appropriate supports. National data indicates that **approximately 1.5 per cent of Canadians live with a DD, suggesting that roughly 210 Whistler residents may be affected.**

Local service data demonstrates that **up to 16 individuals in Whistler and up to 122 individuals across the Sea to Sky region** may be eligible for WISH Society's supported housing program.

With only eight staffed residential beds in Squamish, and **no staffed or supported housing units in Whistler for adults with DD**, the supply of appropriate housing is extremely limited. Combined with Whistler's exceptionally high rental costs - far exceeding disability income supports - this mismatch between need and supply creates an urgent housing gap that is currently being absorbed by families, many of whom are aging caregivers.

BEST PRACTICES AND HOUSING MODELS

British Columbia has moved away from institutional care toward community-based housing models that support independence, stability, and meaningful participation in community life, including staffed living, home share or shared living, supported living clusters, independent living with outreach, and family-based arrangements. Research, policy guidance, and sector experience consistently show that adults with developmental disabilities benefit from housing that delivers the same outcomes as for others: safe and affordable homes, strong community connections, and supports that are flexible and responsive over time. WISH's proposed housing model aligns with these best practices by offering a mix of independent and shared living options that match support levels to individual needs, as assessed through Community Living BC's Guide to Support Allocation (GSA), and support long-term housing stability.



Mike Crane

WISH'S PROPOSED HOUSING MODEL

Through a partnership with Whistler Sports Legacy, WISH has secured ten residential units within a new 110-unit rental building at 1080 Legacy Way, scheduled for completion in 2028. This represents a significant and rare opportunity to address the housing gap for adults with DD in Whistler.

WISH is proposing a mixed-model approach:

- **Independent Living with Outreach** for one-bedroom units, supporting individuals with low support needs through scheduled outreach services; and
- **Home Share/Shared Living** for two-bedroom units, where a live-in caregiver provides daily support while sharing housing costs.

These models align with best practices by promoting independence, integration, and long-term housing security. However, analysis confirms a persistent funding gap between what tenants can afford (primarily through Persons with Disabilities benefits) and rental costs. Even with caregiver rent contributions, WISH anticipates an annual operating gap that will require a combination of public funding, partnerships, and sustained fundraising.

WISH's Housing Model: Calculating the Funding Gap

For a typical two-bedroom unit under the proposed home share model, the estimated monthly funding gap is calculated as follows:

- **Rent (two-bedroom unit):** \$2,500 per month
- **Contribution from tenant (PWD shelter portion):** -\$500
- **Contribution from live-in caregiver (50% of rent):** -\$1,250
- **Remaining funding gap: \$750 per month**

Based on this model, WISH anticipates an **annual operating deficit**, which can be addressed through a combination of partnerships, subsidies, and fundraising efforts.

FUNDING ENVIRONMENT

There is no single, dedicated funding stream for supportive housing of this nature. CLBC funds support services (e.g., caregivers and outreach workers) but not housing costs, while BC Housing programs are limited and highly competitive. Individuals may also access disability income assistance or individualized funding options, but these are insufficient to bridge Whistler's rental affordability gap. As a result, WISH must pursue a blended funding strategy that includes service funding, housing partnerships, and philanthropic support.

CONCLUSION

Assessing local housing needs for people with DD confirms both the need and the opportunity for WISH Society to play a leadership role in delivering inclusive, supported housing for adults with DD in Whistler. The absence of existing housing options, combined with rising affordability pressures and growing demand, underscores the urgency of action. With the 1080 Legacy Way project, WISH will deliver a unique housing model that supports independence and meaningful community inclusion.



KEY CHALLENGES

- Demand for housing and supports for adults with DD is present, growing, and under-documented locally.
- Housing supply in Whistler is effectively non-existent for this population.
- Families are currently filling systemic gaps, creating long-term sustainability risks.
- Home share and independent living with outreach models are well-aligned with best practices but require stable operational and funding frameworks.
- Without intervention, affordability pressures will continue to worsen.

NEXT STEPS

In preparation for occupancy at 1080 Legacy Way, and in response to identified housing needs, WISH is considering the following next steps:

1. Assessing demand through an interest registry;
2. Establishing transparent application and tenant selection processes;
3. Supporting smooth transitions for tenants and families;
4. Building internal operational capacity and staffing;
5. Developing a sustainable, long-term funding model;
6. Ensuring continuity and stability of caregiver supports;
7. Pursuing inclusive and accessible design; and
8. Positioning WISH as a sector leader and advocate.

Collectively, these actions provide a clear roadmap for moving from planning to implementation.