

Keeping Families Together: Addressing Father Absence in Supportive Family Housing in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside

**by
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Bachelor of Social Work (Child Welfare), University of Victoria, 2019

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Public Policy

in the
School of Public Policy
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Spring 2024

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Ethics Statement

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Abstract

This paper explores fathers' exclusion from supportive family housing programs in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). Despite the established benefits of supportive housing for families, recent studies reveal a trend of restricting services to mothers and children. Through an environmental scan and expert interviews, this research identified three key barriers to fathers' inclusion: societal gender norms, concerns for women's safety, and inadequate funding. The absence of fathers in programs strains parental relationships, disproportionately places child-rearing responsibilities on the mothers, and increases the risk of child apprehension. Three policy options are proposed and analyzed using a multi-criteria analysis. Recommendations include establishing new gender-inclusive housing units in the DTES and creating a working group to formulate best practices in supportive family housing that ensure women's safety while promoting inclusivity. These initiatives aim to challenge gender norms, support equitable division of parenting, and enhance the effectiveness of family preservation in supportive family housing programs.

Keywords: supportive housing; child welfare; family services; Downtown Eastside fathering; housing policy

To ensure every family in the Downtown Eastside has the necessary support to flourish. May the recommendations in this report serve as a catalyst for positive change, fostering opportunities for every family to stay together.

Acknowledgements

I would like to first honour and recognize the traditional and unceded territory of the Səlilwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tseil-Waututh), the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), and the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) nations of the Coast Salish peoples, on whose lands the research and writing of this capstone have taken place, and where I live, work, and play as an uninvited guest.

With gratitude, I would also like to acknowledge the generous Graduate Fellowship funding Community Housing Canada (CHC) provided to me to support this capstone project.

I want to extend my sincere appreciation to my supervisor, Yushu Zhu, for your unwavering guidance and support throughout this report. Your insights and constructive feedback have been truly invaluable in shaping this report.

I am deeply thankful to all those who participated in this study. Despite the demanding nature of your work, you graciously spared time to share your perspectives and insights with me. Thank you for giving voice to this research.

Finally, I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to my family and partner, Evan Thomas. Your unwavering love and support have been my rock throughout this journey. Evan, thank you for always listening and encouraging me to stay focused and follow my dreams.

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Executive Summary

Despite the significant presence of fathers within Canadian families and a growing body of research highlighting their distinct and vital role in child development, fathers remain overlooked and unseen in parenting policies, service delivery, and family-centered interventions, which instead predominantly target mothers. This paper examines the exclusion of fathers from supportive family housing in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES), a community grappling with high levels of poverty, mental illness, and substance use. While supportive housing facilities in the area aim to provide essential services to families at risk of or involved in the child welfare system, recent studies have revealed a concerning trend of restricting services exclusively to mothers or women-led families, effectively marginalizing fathers. This research delves into the reasons behind fathers' exclusion and its impact on families to determine policy options to enhance the effectiveness of these programs for all family members, thereby fostering family preservation.

An environmental scan and eight semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the landscape of supportive family housing in the DTES. The scan uncovered a severe shortage of accessible units for fathers across Vancouver, mirroring broader trends in father representation across family-centered services. Interviews identified three primary barriers to father inclusion: societal gender norms shaping service provision, concerns for women's safety leading to the separation of fathers from families, and inadequate funding hindering program development.

While acknowledging the importance of programs for mothers and children, the interviews stressed the significant challenges of fathers' consistent absence from these programs. Research findings highlighted that fathers' absence in programs harms children's development and attachment, restricts fathers' ability to access support services, strains parental relationships, and places additional parenting responsibilities on mothers, often jeopardizing their recovery and ability to be successful in programs. Interviews also revealed impacts for single-father households, including instances where children faced entry into foster care or required costly private interventions to prevent apprehension due to a lack of housing opportunities for fathers. As such, there is an urgent need to improve supportive housing to enhance outcomes for all family members.

Based on the qualitative analysis of the interview data and the environmental scan, three policy options were formulated and assessed based on criteria, including family preservation, stakeholder acceptance, cost, and administrative complexity. Given the concerns raised by interviewees regarding women's safety due to gender-based violence disparities, an overarching recommendation emerged to directly address these concerns within gender-inclusive programs rather than evaluating the policies' ability to ensure women's safety in the multi-criteria analysis.

This study puts forth two recommendations to the British Columbia Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Children and Family Development, given their responsibilities and current provincial service plan goals of enhancing family preservation and coordination of services in the DTES. First, the study recommends establishing 90 new gender-inclusive supportive family housing units in the DTES. These units would cater to fathers as program residents and independent applicants and accommodate various family structures in the DTES. Given the prevalence of single mothers in the community, the study recommends designating a portion of the 90 units for a small-scale pilot program tailored for fathers with children to ensure equitable access to support for single fathers or two-father households.

Second, this study recommends the establishment of a working group to formulate best practices in supportive family housing that focus on strategies to ensure women's safety while promoting inclusivity. These best practices should encompass program architecture, development, design, policy and protocols, and support service delivery. By creating such best practices, the province can bridge the gap in provincial guidelines regarding strategies to uphold women's safety while accommodating male residents in programs. This initiative will aid service providers in crafting programs that prioritize women's safety while fostering an inclusive environment supportive of family preservation, thus effectively catering to the needs of all family members in the DTES community and beyond.

Addressing fathers' exclusion from supportive family housing programs can yield extensive benefits. By broadening housing access for fathers, these recommendations challenge gender norms to promote equitable parenting roles and mitigate the burden of parenting responsibilities on women. Additionally, they can aim to reshape the narrative surrounding absent fathers and move away from an "all men are perpetrators"

framework. While further research is encouraged, implementing these recommendations is crucial for achieving the overarching goal of supportive family housing programs in the DTES—keeping families together and ensuring the well-being of all members, including fathers.

Chapter 1. Introduction

In the heart of Vancouver, British Columbia (BC), lies the Downtown Eastside (DTES), a community with high concentrations of poverty, mental illness, and substance use. Located on the traditional and unceded territory of the Səlilwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh), the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), and the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) nations, the DTES is home to many families facing imminent risk of homelessness. Supportive housing facilities in the area offer a lifeline for families with or at risk of child welfare involvement, keeping these families together while providing essential services to ensure child safety and improve family functioning (Pergamit et al., 2019).

Despite the well-established benefits of supportive family housing, families face a pressing issue. Organizations providing family-centered services in the DTES, including various supportive housing programs, inadvertently perpetuate policies that uphold damaging discourses of masculinity (Webb et al., 2023). These policies often restrict services exclusively to mothers or women-led families, marginalizing fathers and denying them the independent support they may require (Webb et al., 2023).

Although minimal research exists about fathers' absence in supportive family housing, more research has examined the representation of fathers in other societal contexts. Within the research, scholars frequently relay fathers as 'invisible,' a 'shadow' or 'ghost,' a result of being largely ignored and unseen in parenting policies, service delivery, and family-centered interventions that involve children, which predominantly focus on mothers (Brown et al., 2009; Dozois et al., 2016; Haines et al., 2022). The failure to acknowledge fathers' roles within families in service delivery and policies has been documented globally, including in countries such as Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia (Barker et al., 2011; Critchley, 2022; Lero et al., 2006; Philip et al., 2019). While evidence over the last few decades demonstrating the positive impact of fathers' involvement in parenting on the well-being of mothers and children has inspired more reforms across these countries to support fathers' inclusion in parenting, such as with parental leave policies or targeted parenting interventions, challenges remain (Barker et al., 2011; Panter-Brick et al., 2014; Lero et al., 2006). Fathers remain overlooked in services and policies, with slow progress toward change in

services and gaps in funding, data, and program evaluation, particularly in Canada, due to the influence of traditional ideologies of gender roles (Ball, 2010; Dozois et al., 2016).

The absence of father-inclusive policies in supportive family housing programs is particularly important as their absence creates many family challenges. Research indicates that such policies tend to separate families, undermining the very purpose of these programs – to keep families together (Darroch et al., 2023). They also perpetuate traditional gender norms, suggesting that fathers are not equal parental figures (Darroch et al., 2023; Webb et al., 2023). Most critically, these policies limit fathers' opportunities for self-improvement, preventing them from engaging in services aimed at substance use recovery, mental health support, and improving their parenting skills (Darroch et al., 2023; Haines et al., 2022; Webb et al., 2023). Therefore, scholars argue that a comprehensive investigation into the systems contributing to the exclusion of fathers is imperative to develop concrete solutions that recognize the needs of fathers and better support families (Barker et al., 2011). This study aims to do this in the context of supportive housing, contributing to the ongoing dialogue on family well-being in the DTES and beyond.

1.1. Research Scope

Existing research has examined the lack of father representation in family-centered services in various countries in the global north, with two prominent studies focusing on the DTES community. However, there is an evident gap in the literature about fathers' absence in supportive housing programs, subsequent consequences, and feasible solutions for change. This study aims to bridge the gap in the current scholarly discourse in light of the distinctive role played by supportive family housing in mitigating homelessness, ensuring child safety, averting foster care placements, and delaying family reunification.

Specifically, this research seeks to understand fathers' representation in supportive family housing programs, the underlying reasons for fathers' exclusion and its impacts on families from the perspective of various service providers serving families in the DTES community. In pursuit of this goal, the study will pinpoint policy options to enhance the outcomes of programs for fathers, mothers, and their children, thereby

fostering family preservation. The objectives of the study translate to the following research questions:

1. Why do supportive family housing programs exclude fathers in their policies in the Downtown Eastside?
2. How does the exclusion of fathers in supportive family housing programs impact families?

Chapter 2. Fathers and Parenting

Statistics Canada (2017) reported that 8.6 million fathers were living in Canada in 2011, with 3.8 million of them living with children under 18. Despite comprising half of the parental dyad in most households, fathers have historically received less attention in parenting research and interventions than mothers (Hansen et al., 2022). Nevertheless, an increasingly growing body of research has highlighted the positive benefits of fathers engaging in parenting for children, mothers, and fathers themselves (Hoffman, 2011; Webb et al., 2023). When fathers are involved in their children's care, the research finds that children experience improved development outcomes. For example, Allen et al. (2012) highlight how children of involved fathers are likelier to demonstrate higher economic and educational achievement levels, greater emotional control, less emotional distress, and positive peer relations. Fathers' involvement in the family also reduces postpartum depression and contributes to mothers' health and well-being as fathers can offer their partners emotional support (Allen & Daly, 2007; Webb et al., 2023, as cited by Goodman et al., 2014; McClain & Brown, 2017). As for fathers, Ferguson and Morley (2011) discuss how the father-child interaction and the occupancy of the father's role benefits the fathers' well-being through psychological growth and social connection.

The benefits of fathers' involvement are less clear in cases when there are concerns involving child maltreatment. However, research indicates that when children are subject to abuse and neglect, they are at an elevated risk for various detrimental developmental, health, and mental health outcomes (Institute of Medicine & National Research Council, 2014). These can encompass learning difficulties, problems in peer relationships, internalizing symptoms (such as depression and anxiety), externalizing symptoms (including oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, and aggression), and posttraumatic stress disorder (Institute of Medicine et al., 2014; World Health Organization, 2022). The repercussions of maltreatment can also extend into adulthood, contributing to increased susceptibility to psychiatric disorders, substance abuse, severe medical illnesses, and diminished economic productivity (Institute of Medicine & National Research Council, 2014).

Notably, the detrimental effects of child maltreatment are not limited to direct harm but extend to situations where children witness violence. Multiple meta-analysis

studies from Evans et al. (2008), Kimball (2016), and Vu et al. (2016) highlight the extensive negative psychological, developmental, and health impacts on children exposed to domestic violence. Thompson-Walsh et al. (2021) discuss the profound adverse effects, including increased risks of internalizing symptoms (e.g., depression, anxiety, eating disorders), externalizing symptoms (e.g., substance abuse, conduct disorders, delinquency), cognitive challenges, relational difficulties, and physical health problems in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Kertesz et al. (2021) further highlight that when violence and abuse directed at mothers impede their ability to care for their children's physical and emotional well-being, it profoundly affects the mother-child relationship crucial to children's safety and well-being, especially for younger children.

The negative impacts stemming from child maltreatment are crucial to acknowledge, considering scholars like Lee et al. (2009) emphasize the disproportionate representation of fathers as perpetrators of child maltreatment, particularly in severe forms. However, it is equally important to emphasize that not all fathers are violent, and fathers are not the only perpetrators of child maltreatment. Thus, the positive benefits of fathers' involvement with children should not be overshadowed by these statistics and adverse effects on children when fathers are not violent, pose risks to their children's safety, and want to parent.

2.1. Barriers to Fathering

Nevertheless, Alemann et al. (2020) discuss how fathers' potential contributions to parenting remain under-realized due to barriers such as gender norms and societal expectations. These barriers influence the exclusion of services for fathers and prevent fathers from sharing caregiver roles with mothers and taking more responsibility as parents (Alemann et al., 2020). Traditional gender ideologies have long depicted men as the primary "breadwinners" and "providers" of the family unit, as women caregivers (Ferguson & Morley, 2011; Sillence, 2020; Webb et al., 2023). Embedded within these ideologies is the assumption that fathers are secondary parents and must adhere to traits of dominant norms of masculinity such as emotional restraint, control, and violence (Alemanne et al., 2020; Allen et al., 2012). Alemanne et al. (2020) describe how these ideologies have become normalized among individuals and society. For example, Ball and Daly (2012) discuss how popular media in Canada often portray fathers as less

competent in caring for children than mothers and more likely to be violent. They further state that the media frequently shows fathers as "deadbeat dads" (Ball & Daly, 2021, p. 5).

As a result of the ongoing public portrayal and normalization of these norms among households, scholars have determined that many parenting support services and policies have become inherently mother-oriented (Alemann et al., 2020; Darroch et al., 2023; Panter-Brick et al., 2014; Sicouri et al., 2018; Webb et al., 2023). For instance, Hoffman (2011) points out that many Canadian organizations have family-friendly policies; however, even then, they are gendered, with policies tailored toward mothers. The gendered nature of programs and policies inadvertently creates a significant obstacle for fathers to engage with these services (Alemann et al., 2020; Darroch et al., 2023; Panter-Brick et al., 2014; Sicouri et al., 2018; Webb et al., 2023). Research has further illuminated the issue by revealing how men often face stigma when seeking help, as it can be perceived as a sign of weakness or an indication that they are not conforming to societal expectations of masculinity (Sicouri et al., 2018). This dominant discourse surrounding men's reluctance to seek help has thus likely hindered the development and availability of services tailored to fathers (Oliffe et al., 2020).

Gender norms and the prevalence of fathers as perpetrators of child maltreatment and violence against women also appear to play a role in service provision. Haines et al. (2022) point out that the prevailing focus on separating fathers from mothers and children characterizes many programs and service responses. Current services addressing domestic violence target mothers and their children, with father-inclusive interventions being notably scarce (Pruett et al., 2019; Stover, 2013). Likewise, Featherstone and Peckover (2007) report a lack of interventions available to respond to fathers who use violence. While Haines et al. (2022) acknowledge the necessity of parental separation in certain safety-critical situations, they also contend that father-inclusive interventions can significantly support the family unit. This perspective gains importance, particularly considering that family separation is not a reality for all families. Many choose to remain together or maintain contact (Humphreys & Campo, 2017), and deciding to separate involves multifaceted considerations (Gatfield et al., 2022).

The gendered separation of domestic violence services is understood to be the result of multiple overlapping factors also owing to societal gender norms. Strega et al.

(2009) state that mothers have always been the primary focus of child welfare intervention. In domestic violence cases, for example, Strega et al. discuss how social workers place the onus on mothers to protect their children from the effects of abuse rather than intervening directly with the perpetrator. Cultural and societal gender norms, including the role of mothering as primary parents and the perception of fathers as risky and dangerous, are a few examples of the influences impacting social workers' beliefs and assessments that lead to the tendency for workers to place such responsibility on mothers for their children's safety and ignore fathers (Eriksson & Hester, 2001; Strega et al., 2009). The response to support women from these well-established attitudes embedded within systems like child welfare has led to women-serving agencies developing to protect women and children (MacPherson, 2010; Moles, 2008). However, Haines et al. (2022) explain that in doing so, services continue to be gendered, inadvertently preserving the narrative of absent fathers and preventing men from taking accountability for their actions and engaging in responsibility-orientated solutions.

Ultimately, the barriers that gender ideologies pose to fathers' participation in families are noted to constrain and discourage fathers from engaging in parenting but also perpetuate the divide in gender roles and reinforce the narrative that fathers are not equal caregivers (Alemann et al., 2020). This promotes harmful norms of masculinity that underpin a patriarchal society that justifies men's violence and power over women and children (Alemann et al., 2020; Heise et al., 2019). Therefore, the constant absence of fathers within support services has detrimental impacts on advancing gender equity as they continue to preserve these norms. Hansen et al. (2022) report that engaging men in fatherhood and normalizing their role in childcare can disrupt traditional gender ideologies associated with harmful definitions of masculinity and replace them with healthier understandings of masculinity that shift society towards gender equality (Alemann et al., 2020). This highlights the urgency of adapting services to include fathers for fostering positive father involvement that will support in addressing harmful norms of masculinity and traditional division of labour.

2.2. Responses to Increase Fathers' Involvement

There is a growing momentum among researchers and community practitioners to address the exclusion of fathers based on the research highlighting the benefits of fathers' involvement in families and in contributing to gender equality (Ball, 2010;

Hansen et al., 2022). According to Hansen et al. (2022), strategic policy interventions serve as mechanisms to address fathers' absence, offering increased opportunities for men to engage in parenting and challenge traditional gender norms. One of the most prominent policy responses to increase father's involvement in parenting is through reforms and enhancements to paternal leave, with many countries extending parental leave eligibility to fathers (Wray, 2020). McKay et al. (2012) state that supporting fathers in taking paternal leave has a significant role in increasing their involvement in caregiving as it enables fathers to take paid time off to engage in caregiving.

Aside from parental leave amendments, Ball (2010) discusses how national, regional, and community initiatives to promote father involvement have continued to grow in Canada. Although no longer established, The Father Involvement Research Alliance (FIRA), formed in 2002, served as the most significant national initiative in Canada that brought together various scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to advance research, provide evidence-based strategies for policy development and make policy recommendations to government stakeholders on father involvement (Ball, 2010; Ball & Daly, 2012). Now, most initiatives appear at the regional and community initiatives. Ball (2010) notes that these initiatives include various organizations with a father focus. Nevertheless, Ball (2010) notes that Canada lags in addressing the invisibility of fathers in Canadian policy and research. Ball (2010) also states that "government initiatives that are specifically mandated to support positive father involvement are virtually nonexistent in Canada" (p. 117).

In comparison, Canada's southern neighbour shows to have increasingly more research and progress, with a clear investment from the U.S. government with federal, state, and local initiatives to ensure programs reflect fathers dealing with children and families (Pearson, 2018). For example, Pearson (2018) highlights the New Pathways for Fathers and Families Programs, a federally funded program authorized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that awards 39 organizations annually for organizations serving fathers transitioning from incarceration to families and the community. Additionally, the U.S. hosts several statewide legislatively established fatherhood commissions that engage in policy work, education, fatherhood services and promotional events to ensure father involvement (Pearson, 2018). However, Pearson notes that despite these initiatives' ability to drive change, many lack sustainable funding from the government, impacting their potential to advance more meaningful change.

These examples demonstrate a few changes that have been happening to develop more recognition for fathers. However, the reality is that fathers continue to be largely invisible in areas of public policy and overlooked in services, as progress in changing services is slow and gaps remain (Ball, 2010; Barker et al., 2011). Thus, more work must be done to create pathways to promote fatherhood.

2.3. Promising Practices for Increasing Fathering

Scholars and advocates across the globe have proposed several promising practices and policies for increasing fathers' involvement based on the current evidence base. These policies and practice recommendations include action at program, organization, and system levels. Although these changes at various levels can occur independently, Selekman and Holcomb (2021) emphasize that when efforts occur at all three levels, there is a stronger likelihood to promote fathers' involvement in parenting.

Scholars emphasize the importance of adjusting service environments to include fathers at the program level, as the current service atmosphere is primarily tailored toward mothers and children (Hansen et al., 2022; Selekman & Holcomb, 2021). Services should also consider material that uses gender-neutral language (Selekman & Holcomb, 2021) and content that resonates with fathers, as research by Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2012) found that fathers experience better outcomes when programs provide contextually relevant content to fathers.

At the organization level, Selekman and Holcomb (2021), Hansen et al. (2022), and Dozois et al. (2015) suggest that organizations review and assess their policies to ensure they promote and commit to equitable service provision. Additionally, Dozois et al. (2015) propose that organizations evaluate their staffing models and provide training. As the social services sector is predominately women-staffed, organizations should ensure staff have the skills to engage and support fathers and increase male staff representation to make programs more encouraging for fathers to participate (Dozois et al., 2015; Selekman & Holcomb, 2021).

Lastly, Selekman and Holcomb (2021) discuss the importance of changes from system-level actors. System-level actors can play a crucial role in dismantling system barriers to challenge gender biases related to parenting and in supporting organizations

make changes that foster fathers' involvement (Selekman & Holcomb, 2021). Building on this, Hansen et al. (2022) advocate that governments implement legislation and policies that support fathers' involvement and alter existing policies like paternal leave to enhance fathers' involvement. However, it is noteworthy that changes to paternal leave are insufficient on their own despite the evidence showing its potential to increase fathers' time with children (Dozois et al., 2015). There is a clear need to alter other system public policies in tandem, such as social protection policies, gender-wage parity policies, and childcare policies, to help promote men taking on more involved roles in parenting (Hansen et al., 2022). Therefore, Hansen et al. and Dozois et al. (2015) recommend that governments apply a gendered-based analysis lens to policy, acknowledging the critical roles of both mothers and fathers in children's success and ensuring inclusivity for fathers and sexually diverse parents.

In alignment with these insights, Selekman and Holcomb (2021) also propose a thorough review of government program policies that may inadvertently exclude fathers. For example, they highlight how child welfare agencies, often government-operated, might consider the extent to which institutional norms lead to the exclusion of fathers and develop policies and partnerships that ensure the active inclusion of fathers in services.

Finally, to address the absence of fathers in family-centered programs, scholars advocate for a government commitment to increase funding for such programs and ensure organizations and programs have the resources necessary to engage fathers. Specifically, Dozois et al. (2015) recommend that governments assist in funding organizational changes so that existing agencies can take action to become more father-friendly. For example, Selekman and Holcomb (2021) suggest that system-level entities provide grant funding for training or other available resources to aid their work.

Additionally, Dozois et al. (2015) recommend that governments support scaling fatherhood programs and develop funding agreements with organizations that support father involvement, including reporting guidelines. Given the clear lack of father-inclusive services and fathers being poorly represented in available research evidence, there is a strong demand for more research that explores the differences between parent roles to better understand program outcomes for fathers (Alemann et al., 2020; Dozois et al., 2015; Hansen et al., 2022). Thus, government intervention through reporting requirements and investment in data collection is a promising practice to support

continuous improvement and evidence-based decision-making (Dozois et al., 2015; Hansen et al., 2022; Selekman & Holcomb, 2021).

These policy recommendations provide promising routes to increase fathers' involvement. However, the existing recommendations lack specific insights into addressing fathers' absence in housing programs and the potential challenges integrating these recommendations within these unique programs. Although many of these recommendations appear adaptable to the supportive family housing context, a deeper understanding of the supportive housing landscape in British Columbia and Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) and the various stakeholders involved in development is needed to pinpoint policy interventions that support father inclusivity, thereby fostering family preservation.

Chapter 3. Background

The following section offers an overview of supportive housing, emphasizing its advantages for families involved with child welfare. It then delves into the specific landscape of supportive housing in British Columbia and Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). Finally, the section explores potential reasons for the absence of father-inclusive supportive family housing programs in the DTES, drawing on insights from existing literature.

3.1. Supportive Housing

Supportive housing programs represent a housing model that integrates essential services with affordable, subsidized housing, often aligning with a Housing First approach where individuals can secure housing without imposed conditions or restrictions upon admission (McDaniel et al., 2019). These housing programs exhibit variations in their implementation, but fundamentally, they strive to "[combine] affordable housing with intensive wrap-around services" (Cunningham et al., 2014, p.1). The overarching goal of these programs is to enhance outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness or facing the risk of homelessness (Parsell et al., 2017). However, extensive research reveals that supportive housing addresses housing insecurity and is a highly effective intervention for individuals grappling with "intersecting social and health problems in addition to housing exclusion" (Parsell et al., 2017, p. 1537). These multifaceted challenges include mental health issues, disabilities, substance use, and chronic illnesses (Dohler et al., 2016; Pergamit et al., 2019).

3.2. Supportive Family Housing

Supportive housing is not limited to adults; it is also used as an intervention to support families. It is widely recognized that housing challenges and child welfare are closely intertwined. When families, often those with limited income, find themselves experiencing inadequate housing conditions, there is an increased risk of involvement with Child Protective Services (CPS) due to government policies (Font & Warren, 2013). Font and Warren (2013) emphasize how inadequate housing, encompassing issues such as homelessness, the threat of homelessness, or overcrowding, constitutes a

significant portion of CPS cases. These housing challenges can harm children and jeopardize their safety (Font & Warren, 2013).

The severity of housing issues, as determined by CPS regarding the safety of children, can lead to either the placement of children into foster care or hinder the reunification of children with their families if they are already separated (Farrell et al., 2010; Font & Warren, 2013). Recognizing that foster care admission not only divides families but also incurs substantial costs for the government, there is widespread support for family preservation programs among child welfare systems and policymakers. Farrow (2001) reports that these programs are more cost-effective alternatives to foster care and keep families intact.

Supportive family housing is a promising intervention for families grappling with housing issues (Glendening et al., 2020). CPS workers can play a crucial role by referring families to these programs, which concentrate on maintaining families at imminent risk of homelessness while providing supportive services to enhance overall family functioning (Pergamit et al., 2019). Such services may encompass interventions for mental health and substance use issues, transportation assistance, intensive case management, as well as parenting programs and services (Farrell et al., 2010; Pergamit et al., 2019).

This intervention proves particularly valuable for families because housing problems often coincide with other challenges such as substance misuse, mental health issues, and domestic violence—issues of concern to CPS (Font & Warren, 2013). Consistent evidence highlights that families with child welfare involvement engaging in these housing facilities experience improved housing outcomes, receive support for substance use or mental health challenges, alleviate the burden on the child welfare system, promote family reunification, and prevent children from entering government care due to inadequate housing (Pergamit et al., 2019; Glendening et al., 2020).

3.3. Supportive Housing Landscape in British Columbia

In British Columbia, supportive housing stands as one type of social housing. According to the Government of British Columbia (2022), social housing refers to “housing development that government subsidizes and that either government or a non-

profit housing partner owns and/or operates” (para. 1). For supportive housing programs, BC Housing (2023b) reports that non-profit organizations are the primary providers of this type of social housing in British Columbia. While these organizations frequently rely on government funding for their operations, primarily through rental subsidies (Metro Vancouver, 2023; City of Vancouver, 2005), they often require additional revenue streams as government funding is insufficient to meet their needs (Swanson & O’Leary, 2024). For example, financial audit reports from entities engaged in supportive housing programs reveal a multifaceted funding approach, including government funding, donations, private gifts, residential rental income, and various other earned income sources (KPMG LLP, 2022; Manning Elliott LLP, 2022).

Regarding government funding, a significant avenue is through government grants. For instance, the City of Vancouver administers a Supportive Housing Capital Grant (SHG) program, offering a lump-sum payment of up to \$25,000 to assist non-profit supportive housing providers fund capital improvements to enhance existing building and amenities (City of Vancouver, 2024). In addition to grants, contracts represent another crucial channel for government funding to reach supportive housing providers. Many organizations have partnerships with government stakeholders, such as health authorities and ministries, that provide organizations with financing through contractual agreements. A noteworthy example with respect to supportive family housing is the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). The MCFD extends contract funding to various agencies across the province to contribute to the delivery of services to families throughout British Columbia, including Atira Women’s Resource Society—a supportive housing provider for youth, single adults, and families (Government of British Columbia, n.d.-b; Manning Elliot LLP, 2021).

BC Housing is another longstanding and crucial government funder in the supportive housing landscape. As a crown corporation tasked with developing, managing, and administrating a diverse range of subsidized housing options throughout the province, they collaborate closely with provincial health authorities, ministries, other governmental levels, and community groups to support and enhance the efforts of supportive housing providers (BC Housing, 2023a). This collective funding landscape indicates the joint efforts that sustain and enhance the work of these supportive housing providers in addressing housing challenges in British Columbia.

3.3.1. Provincial Supportive Housing Initiatives

Providers of supportive housing programs play a pivotal role in addressing the province's escalating affordable housing crisis, particularly affecting low-income, vulnerable, and marginalized households. Recognizing this role, it is evident that government funders, like BC Housing and the Ministry of Housing, are directing attention toward expanding supportive housing facilities (Bond, 2022), with facilities steadily increasing across BC. For instance, in 2018, British Columbia launched the Building BC Supportive Housing Fund project. Stemming from the success of the Rapid Response to Homelessness fund, this project involves "an investment of \$1.2 billion over 10 years to deliver an additional 2,500 new homes with 24/7 support services for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness" (BC Housing, 2023c, para 1.).

More recently, the Ministry of Housing announced its Home for People action plan in April 2023. This comprehensive plan includes various actions to address the urgent need for housing, such as "providing more homes and supports for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness" (Government of British Columbia, 2023, para. 5). Alongside this plan, the provincial government introduced the Belonging in BC plan, which is "part of a continuum of broader investments by the B.C. government to reduce and prevent homelessness and to build more affordable, secure housing in the immediate and long term" (Government of British Columbia, n.d.-a, p. 5). In the realm of supportive housing, this plan aims to add 3,900 new supportive housing units, supported by investments of \$1.18 billion in Budget 2023 and \$633 million in Budget 2022 (Government of British Columbia, 2023). These initiatives in the province have yielded substantial results, as reported by the Ministry of Housing in the Belonging in BC document, stating that "more than 4,700 people facing homelessness have moved into new supportive housing units the Province has opened in 30-plus communities across B.C. since 2017" (Government of British Columbia, n.d.-a, p. 20).

3.4. The Downtown Eastside

The Downtown Eastside (DTES) is one of Vancouver's oldest neighbourhoods, earning notoriety as the poorest postal code in Canada (Newnham, 2005). The community comprises distinctive areas such as Chinatown, Gastown, Oppenheimer

District, Thornton Park, Strathcona, Victory Square, and the Industrial Lands, as depicted in Figure 1 (City of Vancouver, 2020, p. 5).

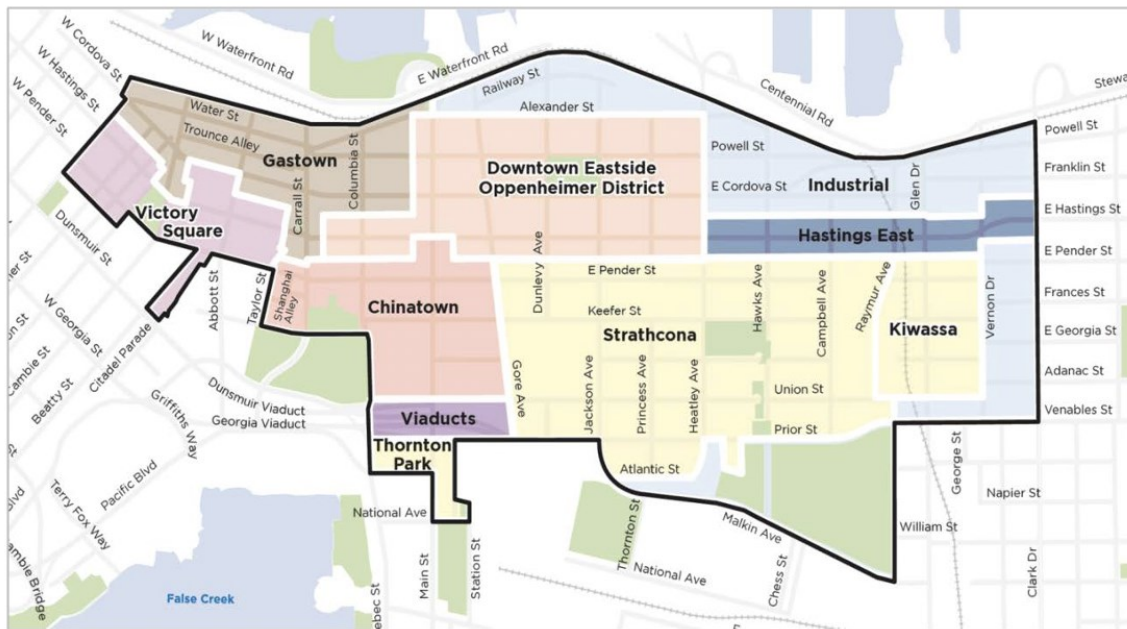


Figure 3.1. Downtown Eastside Community

From City of Vancouver. (2020, September). *Downtown Eastside plan: Three year summary of implementation (2017-2019)*. <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/dtes-plan-implementation-summary-2017-2019.pdf>

The DTES is renowned for its elevated concentration of social issues, encompassing poverty, illicit drug use, and mental health challenges. Many community residents predominantly belong to visible minority groups, with a higher proportion of Indigenous peoples in the area than in the rest of the city (City of Vancouver, 2020). Furthermore, residents in the community face a myriad of challenges, including unemployment, inadequate housing, food insecurity, discrimination, homophobia, transphobia, and racism (City of Vancouver, 2020, p. 7). Thus, the City of Vancouver (2020) reports that residents in the community experience are considered to have more significant risks to health and well-being compared to the general population.

Given the pronounced social problems in the DTES, such as the escalating deaths from the opioid crisis and a growing homeless population, the rise of supportive housing in the city offers promise to DTES residents. The increase in housing is especially critical as numerous low-income families inhabit the DTES community (City of Vancouver, 2013), exposing them to challenges in accessing adequate and affordable

housing. However, the supply is not meeting the demand across the city despite efforts to expand social housing programs, including supportive housing. The Metro Vancouver Housing Data Book reports that BC Housing's social housing waitlist had a 27 percent increase since 2022, with 18,865 households on the waitlist in 2023 (Metro Vancouver, 2023). Notably, family households, defined as those with at least two people, including one dependent, were among the most represented groups (Metro Vancouver, 2023).

Concerning Vancouver, 1,248 family households were on the social housing waitlist in 2023 (Metro Vancouver, 2023). The BC Housing Supportive Housing Registry, a registry specifically for supportive housing, documented 3,728 Vancouver residents on the waitlist as of December 2021 (City of Vancouver, 2022). While the Supportive Housing Registry encompasses all Vancouver residents, including those with and without children, it highlights the evident service gap of this unique housing intervention. Additionally, the number from both waitlists might be even more significant, given that they only account for housing registered with BC Housing, thereby excluding non-profit housing providers with their own waitlists (Metro Vancouver, 2023). The comprehensive nature of the waitlists clearly illustrates an outstanding need, particularly for families, to be adequately addressed.

BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre (2023) also reports a fundamental challenge in Vancouver for low-income families. They report that there are relatively few supportive family housing programs in BC designed for parenting women and individuals in recovery, with existing programs often excluding older children and fathers (BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre, 2023). This is problematic for families in the DTES community who may be experiencing substance use issues and, possibly, other personal challenges and need access to support to safety care for their children. A recent article from October 2023 by DeRosa (2023) in the Vancouver Sun announces 15 new supportive beds in Victoria, Vancouver, and Burnaby for expecting and new parents through three non-profit housing providers. While this indicates a positive step in addressing the limited supply of supportive family housing, the article's title, "B.C. announces new housing options for pregnant women struggling with addiction," suggests that fathers may still be excluded from services.

3.5. Fathers' Absence in Supportive Family Housing

There have yet to be any known studies globally exploring fathers' representation in supportive family housing to date. However, two prominent studies from Darroch et al. (2023) and Webb et al. (2023) analyze fathers' representation in family-centered services in the DTES. In their research, they find a lack of father-focused programs or men-friendly supportive services, with a notable absence of fathers in housing provider programs, as reported in the BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre (2023) report. Instead, they report that most services are oriented toward mothers and younger children. Darroch et al.'s (2023) research involves interviews with fathers, mothers, and service providers in the DTES, revealing fathers' limited access to resources, including housing, due to programs catering exclusively to single women or mandating program agreements to be signed by women, resulting in rejection of single fathers. In the women-only housing programs, Darroch et al. report that fathers can visit their children but must return to single-room occupancies (SROs), shelters, or the streets to sleep. Therefore, their partners are left to care for the children alone throughout the night.

Webb et al.'s (2023) study takes a different approach, examining fathers' representation in 12 family-centered organization policies within the DTES. Among these 12 organizations, several had housing initiatives, including the YWCA Crabtree Corner Housing (CTC), Sorella Housing for women and children, UGM The Sanctuary program, Budzey Building, and YWCA Cause We Care House. Their review revealed that almost all programs targeted women and children, with the Budzey Building being the sole option for mothers wishing to live with their male partners and children. However, it is important to note that Webb et al. report that the Budzey Building remains a housing program for women (Trans, Cis, and Gender Diverse) and women-led families, which means it excludes single fathers from receiving its services. This is noteworthy because, among these organizations, all but one (YWCA Cause We Care House) operate as supportive family housing programs.

The exclusion of fathers in supportive family housing programs, as discussed in Chapter 1, is problematic for families and contradicts the very purpose of these programs—to keep families together. However, the exclusion can pose additional implications for fathers' involvement in child welfare. Despite compelling evidence showcasing fathers' potential significant contributions to families and the overall well-

being of children within the CPS framework (Coakley, 2013; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008), CPS disproportionately engages with mothers and often sidelines fathers (Brown et al., 2009).

Although policies from the Ministry of Children and Family Development (2023), BC's ministry responsible for overseeing CPS, do not suggest that a parent should be excluded in interventions when they are not living with the child, the longstanding history of excluding fathers may suggest otherwise. Thus, if programs prevent fathers from remaining with their families, fathers may face further challenges in participating in addressing safety concerns and planning for their children as they no longer reside with them.

3.6. Explanations for Fathers' Absence

Drawing from existing literature and publicly available documents, various factors can elucidate the absence of fathers in supportive family housing policies. These factors include institutionalized gender norms, responses to gender-based violence, and organizational policies and funding structures.

3.6.1. Institutionalized Gender Norms

Institutionalized gender norms are pivotal in explaining the absence of father-inclusive supportive family housing programs. As discussed in Chapter 2, the positioning of women as the central caregivers within traditional gender ideologies has led many support services to be inherently mother-oriented (Darroch et al., 2023; Panter-Brick et al., 2014; Sicouri et al., 2018; Webb et al., 2023). While the intention of focusing on mothers is to provide them with the necessary support, scholars highlight how it inadvertently creates a significant obstacle for fathers to engage with these services (Darroch et al., 2023; Sicouri et al., 2018). Considering this existing evidence, the influence of gender norms within societal institutions appears to be a central cause for the lack of father-inclusive supportive family housing programs.

3.6.2. Responses to Intimate Partner Violence

Gender-based discrimination is a fundamental factor contributing to a wide range of social challenges that disproportionately affect women and girls worldwide. Among these issues, one prominent concern is violence, where women face significantly higher rates of intimate partner violence. As emphasized earlier by Haines et al. (2022), many programs and service responses to intimate partner violence tend to focus on separating fathers from mothers and children. While Haines et al. (2022) acknowledge the necessity of parental separation in certain safety-critical situations, they also contend that father-inclusive interventions can significantly support the family unit. Nevertheless, current intimate partner violence services primarily target mothers and their children, with interventions involving fathers being notably rare (Pruett et al., 2019; Stover, 2013).

When examining family-centered programs in the DTES, Webb et al. (2023) identified a notable emphasis on women's safety within program policies. This emphasis was particularly evident in housing programs, where organizations prioritize establishing a safe environment for women to raise their children, as reflected in their program language (Webb et al., 2023). Webb et al. underline how this language implicitly portrays women as needing protection from men, resulting in the exclusion of fathers from program policies. The emphasis on women's safety in housing programs was also highlighted in Darroch et al.'s (2023) research. In a housing program for women and children in the DTES, Darroch et al. report the existence of specific visitation hours for fathers within the program policies if fathers are clean, sober, and safe. These conditions further highlight the program's intention to prioritize women's safety. Thus, these examples demonstrate how service responses to ensure women's safety may act as an additional barrier to developing housing services that include fathers.

3.6.3. Funding and Program Mandates

Darroch et al. (2023) noted that the strong emphasis on safety within program responses appears to originate from program mandates and higher-level policies. Their research shares a case from a service provider in DTES, indicating that the program prioritizes the safety of women and children due to its mandate to primarily serve women. Consequently, the services and resources offered are primarily designed to protect and support women and children, resulting in a prioritization of their well-being

over men. The service provider further explains that this prioritization results from funding structures overseeing the allocation of resources, which directs resources towards women in response to the evident disparities and challenges women face (Darroch et al., 2023).

Supportive Housing Program Framework

The January 2024 Supportive Housing Program Framework, available on BC Housing's website, is among the few publicly accessible documents that shed light on supportive housing program development between one of BC's central provincial funders, BC Housing and housing providers. The framework provides possible explanations for how high-level policies favour women-first organizations that can inadvertently result in the exclusion of men.

For example, one principle outlined within the program framework focuses on housing providers' awareness of "the nature, dynamics, and impact of violence against women" and their commitment to creating a safe and secure environment (BC Housing, 2024, p. 3). While this principle does not explicitly advocate for excluding men from program eligibility, it may inadvertently act as a barrier for housing providers to adopt father-inclusive housing policies. Given the well-documented higher rates of violence against women, housing providers might be inclined to design programs exclusively for women and their children under the assumption that they require protection from potential violence involving fathers.

The framework also articulates criteria for determining resident eligibility under Key Program Elements. It specifies that "Adults (aged 19 and older) are the primary target population, but families and youth may also be served, provided that appropriate approvals, accommodation, and support services are established and align with the housing provider's mandate" (BC Housing, 2024, p. 5). The requirement to align supportive housing programs for families with the housing provider's mandate raises concerns. Webb et al.'s (2023) study found that many resources for families in the DTES, especially housing providers, tend to be women-oriented. Organizations like the Atira Women's Resource Society have numerous programs in the DTES, including supportive housing programs centered around women (Atira, 2024). Consequently, service providers such as Atira Women's Resource Society may encounter challenges in

accommodating men within their programs, given their organizational mandate to primarily serve women.

While the discussed examples illuminate possible explanations for how high-level policies may contribute to the absence of fathers in these programs, the Supportive Housing Program Framework, along with its guiding principles and eligibility criteria, warrants further examination to understand its role in shaping the development of housing provider eligibility policies for supportive family housing programs.

Chapter 4. Methodology

This study utilized an environmental scan and semi-structured interviews to answer the research questions.

4.1. Environmental Scan

An initial environmental scan was undertaken to gain insights into existing supportive family housing programs in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. The primary objective was to identify both available and unavailable programs for fathers and develop a deeper understanding of the policies and factors influencing their inclusion and exclusion.

In November 2023, I conducted the environmental scan through desk research. This search facilitated the compiling of a comprehensive list of organizations providing supportive family housing in Vancouver. A total of seven organizations were identified, collectively offering 11 programs throughout Vancouver, as shown in Table 4.1 below. As some organizations do not disclose the precise locations of their buildings, the identified programs spanned across the entire city of Vancouver rather than being confined to the DTES neighbourhood. Consequently, this must be recognized as a limitation to the subsequent analysis in the report.

Table 4.1. Supportive Family Housing Programs

Organization	Supportive Family Housing Program	Number of Units
Aboriginal Mothers Centre Society	Aboriginal Mother Centre Transformational Housing Program	16
Atira Women's Resource Society	Miyotehew	14
	New Beginnings	46
	Sorella Housing for Women and Children	108
	Veronica Block	30
McLaren Housing Society of British Columbia	Howe Street	110
PHS Community Services Society	Station Steet	80
Raincity Housing	Budzey Building	41
Union Gospel Mission	Stabilization and Recovery at The Sanctuary	6
	Transitional Program Housing at The Sanctuary	36
YWCA Metro Vancouver	YWCA Crabtree Corner Housing	12

After identifying organizations with supportive housing programs, each organization's website content was thoroughly examined. The purpose was to better understand the number of program units and policies, specifically focusing on determining what programs are accessible to fathers. The examination included an analysis of supportive family housing program descriptions and organizational purpose, mission statements, vision, and any relevant materials on the organization's website outlining its goals. The gathered information was organized into a table, highlighting textual content referencing families, children, women, mothers, men, and fathers or any relevant content to comprehend factors contributing to fathers' inclusion and exclusion.

4.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Following the environmental scan, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide a more nuanced understanding of the reasons surrounding the exclusion of fathers in supportive family housing programs from experts in the field.

4.2.1. Data Collection and Sampling

Data collection comprised eight interviews. The eight interviews included:

- three Child Protection Social Workers,
- two Social Workers working in family-centered agencies in the DTES community,
- two individuals with experience working in supportive family housing programs in the DTES, and
- one individual employed by an agency that funds supportive family housing programs.

These participants were selected based on their experiences working with families in the DTES and knowledge of supportive family housing programs. All participants self-identified as 18 or older and residents of British Columbia.

Initial candidates were identified through known contacts and publicly available information, with recruitment via email invitations or the professional networking platform LinkedIn. Subsequently, a snowball recruitment technique was employed to identify additional eligible participants for inclusion in the study. Interviews were conducted in person in Vancouver or via *Zoom* videoconferencing by the student researcher beginning in November 2023 and concluding in January 2024. Participants received interview questions beforehand. Interviews were between 20 to 60 minutes in length, audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Written and oral consent procedures were used, which ensured three elements: information, comprehension, and voluntariness, as discussed by Guest et al. (2013). Participants were assigned a unique identifier that protects participants' identities to ensure confidentiality. Participants could withdraw from the study at any point.

4.2.2. Data Analysis

An inductive thematic analysis was used to uncover patterns and themes among participant responses. Employing Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis process, the steps used were: (1) familiarizing oneself with the data, noting initial ideas; (2) generating initial codes across the data; (3) sorting codes and identifying potential themes among the codes; (4) reviewing and refining themes to reflect data; (5) further

refining themes, defining the significance of themes, and developing names to capture their essence, and; (6) selecting examples reflecting analysis and reporting findings. NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software, was used to organize and code the data into thematic categories.

Chapter 5. Research Findings

The following section presents the results from the environmental scan and the key themes from the semi-structured interviews.

5.1. Environmental Scan

This study examined the website content of seven organizations offering supportive family housing programs in Vancouver to better understand the existing supply and identify those accessible to fathers. Two key findings emerged from this environmental scan.

5.1.1. Minimal Program Options for Fathers

The primary finding revealed in the environmental scan is the minimal program options accessible to fathers. Out of the 11 identified programs (499 units), only four appear accessible to fathers (267 units). These programs include RainCity Housing's Budzey Building, UGM's Sanctuary Transitional Housing, PHS Community Services Society's Station Street, and McLaren Housing Society's Howe Street. However, it is noteworthy that both the Budzey Building and the Transitional Program Housing at The Sanctuary are seemingly open to women-led families, implying fathers may attend only in the company of their woman-identifying partners. This leaves Station Street and Howe Street (190 units) as the two programs that appear accessible to fathers without gender restrictions. This distinction is drawn from the absence of gendered language in their program descriptions. Nevertheless, Howe Street's 110 units still present barriers to entry for families, as Howe Street applicants are only eligible if HIV+, compared to Station Street, which does not indicate any eligibility requirements. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1. Summary of Programs and Units Accessible to Fathers

Organization	Program	Number of Units	Accessible to Fathers
Aboriginal Mothers Centre Society	Aboriginal Mother Centre Transformational Housing Program	16	No
Atira Women's Resource Society	Miyotehew	14	No
	New Beginnings	46	No
	Sorella Housing for Women and Children	108	No
	Veronica Block	30	No
McLaren Housing Society of British Columbia	Howe Street	110	Yes (HIV+ restriction)
PHS Community Services Society	Station Steet	80	Yes
Raincity Housing	Budzey Building	41	With restrictions
Union Gospel Mission	Stabilization and Recovery at The Sanctuary	6	No
	Transitional Program Housing at The Sanctuary	36	With restrictions
YWCA Metro Vancouver	YWCA Crabtree Corner Housing	12	No

5.1.2. Gendered Language

Another notable finding from the environmental scan is the frequent use of gendered language across program descriptions to describe the program's service population. Most significantly, the scan found an emphasis on program availability for women and mothers, highlighted through the consistent use of the terms "women" and "mothers" in all but two program descriptions. Conversely, the term "father" is notably absent from all textual content, except for in Station Street and Howe Street's descriptions. These two programs are the only programs with program descriptions using gender-neutral language, referring to their service population as individuals, youth, and families rather than specific gender roles.

This trend extends to other organizational materials, such as the organization's purpose, mission, vision statements, and goals. Among the seven total organizations, four were found to incorporate gendered language like "women" and "mothers" in their content. Only one of these four, UGM, made a singular reference to "men." In contrast, PHS Community Services Society and McLaren Housing Society consistently use

gender-neutral language throughout their website content, mirroring their program descriptions. Although Raincity Housing refers to women and women-led families in its program description, the rest of its website content remains gender-neutral. These findings suggest the frequent use of gendered language is a factor in the minimal options impacting their exclusion in most programs.

Furthermore, the emphasis on women and mothers extends beyond the mere language choices across the materials; it is reflected in the program policies and its purpose. When examining program descriptions, four organizations, all of which use gendered language across their materials, offer programs exclusively to women and their children with child welfare intervention. These programs include Sorella Housing for Women and Children, YWCA Crabtree Corner Housing, Aboriginal Mother Centre Transformational Housing and UGM's Sanctuary Transitional Housing. Of these four programs, only UGM's Sanctuary Transitional Housing serves as a program that allows fathers to participate if they are in the company of women, as discussed earlier. Consequently, this gendered approach in policy that prohibits fathers from residing in supportive housing with their children can inadvertently suggest that women are the parents responsible for their children's safety, an attitude embedded within the child welfare system (Strega et al., 2009)

5.2. Interview Findings

To understand the reasons for fathers' exclusion in supportive family housing programs in Vancouver, its impacts on families, and considerations for improving program outcomes for all family members, eight interviews were conducted with individuals working in social worker positions in the DTES and supportive housing program providers and funders. While many themes emerged from the interviews, the following subsections discuss the three key themes derived from the analysis, which were most frequently discussed: (1) Gender Norms and Parenting Roles, (2) Responses to Gender-Based Violence—Ensuring Women's Safety, and (3) Funding Shortfalls.

5.2.1. Gender Norms and Parenting Roles

In line with existing literature, the analysis revealed the influence of societal gender norms and expectations of parenting roles in the absence of fathers from

supportive family housing policies. Across interviews, participants identified how societal gender norms, which depict women as primary caregivers, shape organizations providing family-centered services to be inherently mother or women-oriented. For example, participants pointed out that most organizations in the DTES with supportive family housing programs have a women-centered mandate or mission, mainly to support women, as they are perceived as primary caregivers. However, the result of organizations in the community being predominantly women-centered is that fathers are excluded from service provision. A participant working in a women-centered program explained this by sharing how their organization mandate prevents fathers from applying to live in the building, as well as inhibits program staff from supporting non-resident fathers who are involved in the lives of women residents. The findings additionally revealed that the predominant women-centered organizations pose challenges for developing new programs inclusive of fathers in the community, as women-centred organizations are unlikely to propose programs to the various government funders in the sector that misaligns with their mandate. Thus, the findings indicate that women-centered mandates adversely affect the overall availability of father-inclusive supportive family housing programs and have implications for program staff to support fathers included in the family unit.

The connection between gender norms and women-centered organizations was further discussed in relation to funding. Participants highlighted how the prevailing discourse emphasizing mothers as primary caregivers could lead organizations to become women-centered or prevent them from providing father-inclusive services due to potential funding impacts. As organizations heavily depend on external funding for operations, providing women-centered housing can ensure consistent funding from the government, as governmental institutions often reinforce the perception of women as primary caregivers. Conversely, aiming to secure government funding for father-inclusive services could experience challenges. One participant illustrated this, stating,

I think it will be difficult for organizations to get funding from the government for father-only housing when moms are recognized as the primary caregivers of children, especially in the court system.

Similarly, another participant emphasized the gendered nature of policies in government, stating,

Even when we think of policies in child protection...the key player is usually going to be mom, or for Child Tax Benefit, if you are in a relationship with a male and a female...the child tax benefit goes to the mother.

The gender bias in funding was further touched on by a participant with prior experience in fundraising for programs in the DTES. They explain that agencies may encounter difficulties in securing public donations for father-inclusive housing due to the public's bias in parenting expectations. This participant stated,

It's attractive when you're seeking donations.... for agencies when you're talking about babies and single mothers.... [but] I don't know if that same view exists for men.

These examples collectively demonstrate how gender bias may cause organizations to structure themselves to be women-centred to ensure consistent funding due to institutionalized gender bias and that programs may fear that adapting services to include fathers will result in funding repercussions from stakeholders at various levels.

To further understand whether higher-level policies within government funders impact funding decisions to be inherently biased toward mothers, insights were sought from an individual employed by an agency that allocates supportive family housing funding. In the interview, they clarified that, to their knowledge, there are no specific policies or guidelines in their organization that direct funding resources exclusively toward mother-centered services. However, the interviewee acknowledged the presence of dominant assumptions that mothers are the primary caregivers, which likely impacts decisions to fund mother-oriented projects. Importantly, the responsibility for funding and managing the entire supply of supportive family housing programs is not solely held by one government stakeholder; while the Ministry of Housing and BC Housing play key roles, the findings indicate that municipal governments, various provincial ministries, crown corporations, and health authorities are involved. Therefore, the identified gender bias in funding projects oriented toward mothers appears to be embedded across multiple funders in the sector, suggesting a broader systemic influence on funding practice based on gender norms.

Family Impacts

The importance of having programs tailored to mothers and their children was a clear need based on participants noting that statistically, many women are single parents

and, in their experiences, are the primary caretakers of children. However, there was also a consensus that societal systems are set up for women to be in the primary caregiver role, which can pose challenges for changing the standard and meeting the needs of families without mothers.

In the context of supportive family housing, participants emphasized that when programs exclude fathers from residing with their partner and child in their policies, child-rearing responsibility falls disproportionately on the mother. Participants discussed how this parenting responsibility assigned to mothers further "upholds traditional gender roles that it's the mom's job to raise the children," creating implications for promoting gender equity. Participants further emphasized the additional pressure on mothers, stating that Child Protective Services (CPS) often requests parents' attendance at these programs to ensure the child's safety. If fathers cannot participate, it becomes solely the mother's responsibility to ensure she and her child remain in the program, even in cases where both parents are involved. Participants noted that in many cases, mothers expressed a desire for fathers to attend to share parenting responsibility. However, existing policies often restrict fathers to visitation, often to occur outside of the building entirely. This limitation creates a challenging environment for shared parenting. For instance, one participant shared,

The real parenting comes at night when your baby's waking up or in the morning getting a bottle, and those routines just aren't established if they're not living together.

From the viewpoint of social workers, it was a common sentiment among families that fathers should be included in these programs. Mothers often report to these participants feeling pressured to be single parents by CPS threats of the risk of their children entering foster care if they do not leave their partners to attend these programs. Participants across the board highlighted the necessity of these programs for ensuring child safety while parents receive support. However, social workers also recognized the problematic nature of separating families through these programs, acknowledging that the absence of fathers harms the child's development and attachment, creates relationship breakdowns between parents, and places additional strain on mothers, often jeopardizing their recovery and ability to be successful in programs.

Equally important are the implications of these policies for single fathers or two-father families. One participant, for example, shared how the lack of programs

accessible to single fathers resulted in government resources privately paying for hotel accommodation and 24/7 professional support to supervise the father's care of the children. This strategy was found to be the only means of preventing foster care entry and ensuring family preservation, as no supportive family housing was available. Similar examples were prevalent across the interviews. However, participants noted that often, the outcome is more children either remaining in foster care or entering foster care as the available services for single fathers are limited, with long wait lists.

Lastly, participants spoke about how supportive family housing programs serve as an opportunity for parents to receive wrap-around support to assist with homelessness, learn parenting skills, and engage in healing for substance use, trauma, and mental health. However, when programs exclude fathers from participation, it also limits fathers' ability to learn parenting skills and engage in their healing, as many are left on the streets and often fall through the cracks. This can prevent CPS from utilizing fathers as a resource in child safety planning interventions in instances such as if the mother relapses because oftentimes, fathers have not received the appropriate support to be in a position to parent.

5.2.2. Responses to Gender-Based Violence—Ensuring Women's Safety

The second key theme in the analysis pertains to ensuring women's safety as a result of gender-based violence. There was a universal consensus among participants that ensuring women's and children's safety from violence is paramount. This shared perspective was rooted in the evident disparity in rates of gender-based violence, both in the DTES community and globally. However, participants pointed out that the focus on ensuring women's safety has consequently led organizations offering supportive family housing programs to adopt an exclusionary policy that results in the absence of fathers from program participation.

Organizations' exclusionary approach to fathers was recognized to have advantages and disadvantages for families. The primary advantage highlighted across the board was the fulfillment of a crucial need in the community for families where women and their children are fleeing situations of domestic violence. The primary disadvantage noted was that not all families seeking support from these programs are

characterized by situations of violence against women. Despite this main drawback, ensuring women's safety resonated strongly in subsequent discussions. Housing providers particularly commented on the importance of excluding fathers in policies, reporting that most of their residents were women fleeing violence, seeking a secure environment for themselves and their children. In addition, the consideration of surveillance emerged as a key element in the interviews with respect to developing programs available to fathers to ensure the safety of both residents and staff.

A more nuanced perspective arose from the interviews with social workers in the DTES community. While these professionals acknowledged the importance of providing housing that excludes men in cases of violence against women and advocating for safety measures for women residents, such as fobbed floors or separate entrances, they shared that excluding fathers across all programs for the safety of mothers poses significant difficulties for mothers who are not seeking refuge from violence and wish to maintain a familial unit with their partner and child. Participants explained that,

Not having any support from a father, especially if the father wants to be involved, and the relationship is healthy between the parents—I think that's really hard for the mom because it puts everything on her.

Additionally, the implications of this approach for single fathers and two-father families were stressed again. As a result, social workers cautioned against a universal approach of excluding fathers in programs as generalizes all men as violent. As one participant asserted,

We can't also make blatant judgments by saying there's intimate partner violence in every situation when there's not.

This sentiment, echoed throughout the findings, highlighted the potential harm of a universal approach which reinforces stereotypes about all men being inherently violent and resistant to change. Another participant noted that such an approach also prevents services from being client-centered, stating,

One thing that's so important is focusing on client-centered care and trauma-informed care. if a parent is coming in, like a mom....and they're identifying the father as a safe support for them, and somebody who's engaged and working on themselves and doing the work that they need to do as well, then that needs to be looked at and respected too, because that's going to be a catalyst to successful parenting experiences to keeping families together.

Evidently, the need for increased flexibility within program policies emerged as a necessary strategy to improve programs for family members. This was particularly evident in one participant's response that emphasized the importance of not letting criminal records or history of violence automatically disqualify individuals from program eligibility, stating,

Our clients or people in Downtown Eastside—the majority of them are going to have a criminal record and have a history of violence, and I don't think that should impact their eligibility to get into a program, especially if they're working hard to counteract what was happening in the past.

Similarly, another participant emphasized the importance of recognizing this potential for change, including men who have engaged in violence against women, and tailoring support accordingly, stating,

I also think there needs to be capacity to recognize that change does exist, and that's not only within moms and babies, but if there is intimate partner violence, men also have the capacity to change. and encourage that. ... There needs to be this ability to look at the individual, the change that they've done, the role that they're playing in the situation, the role that they're playing in the safety plan, their role as a parent....

The responses underline the necessity for programs to shift their perspectives on men and adopt a more nuanced approach to families. Social workers advocated for moving away from a one-size-fits-all mentality within program policies. Rather than generalizing men as inherently violent and unable to change, as well as approaching mothers and their children as separate entities from fathers, social workers echoed the need for programs to look at the familial unit, considering their specific and unique circumstances. One participant recognized this framework could be implemented as a comprehensive risk assessment at program intake so that families with a history of violence with changed behaviour could still receive support, and this support is tailored to their needs. Another participant noted that women with past experiences of violence could be triggered by living with men. Thus, they suggested programs create adaptable options to accommodate these differing circumstances within programs, such as developing fobbed floors within their building so those with past experiences of violence could safely live on one floor while other families could be together on another.

Finally, the lack of appropriate training for staff in supportive family housing programs was frequently discussed among participants as a reason for fathers' exclusion across programs. The social services arena is widely recognized as female-dominated, with many staff members in peer worker roles who support program residents' recovery. Thus, the inherent nature of work being woman-dominated and past experiences of peer workers with men were captured as possible factors in the reluctance of programs to include men in policies to ensure staff safety. However, this mindset embeds similar ideas that all men are inherently violent and unable to change. Therefore, staff training and representation of men in programs were key considerations for father-inclusive programs.

5.2.3. Funding Shortfalls

The last theme in the analysis revolves around funding shortfalls. The lack of funding resources for Vancouver's low-income housing was frequently discussed in interviews. Based on these discussions, the funding shortfall for low-income housing emerges as a fundamental reason for the exclusion of fathers from supportive family housing programs. One participant noted that mothers with children already face challenges accessing units in supportive family housing due to funding deficiencies. Consequently, the participant stresses that securing funding for programs targeting fathers would pose an even greater obstacle. Within this context, the participant further highlights the prevailing gender norm, positioning mothers as primary caregivers and fathers as secondary, emphasizing that services reflect this narrative. Nonetheless, they suggest that if additional funding were available, housing programs might exhibit greater flexibility in adapting to provide inclusive services for fathers.

Likewise, another participant expressed apprehensions regarding funding of the father-inclusive supportive family housing programs, stating,

I do feel like there will be some backlash from the community because it means that if you're putting the services for fathers for father-inclusive services, you will be taking from mother services.

The need for more funding arises as a central concern in this scenario, with the participant asserting that establishing father-inclusive supportive family housing appears feasible only at the expense of diverting resources tailored explicitly to mothers and

children. Thus, the analysis reveals a need for more funding across the board, with one participant summarizing,

The Downtown Eastside is full of resources for people, but the commonality among everyone is that they can't find adequate housing support.

This response collectively stresses the participants' consensus that addressing the funding shortfall is paramount for developing inclusive and equitable supportive family housing services that meet the families' needs within the community.

The overall lack of funding extending across British Columbia also indicated challenges in developing more options in the DTES. When organizations propose programs for government funding, decisions from government stakeholders to fund certain proposals were noted to consider various aspects, such as the communities' needs, what is being advocated for within the community from non-profits and people in the community, the number of people being turned away within the community, and location. It was also highlighted that funders consider the current existing supply in a community to prevent oversaturating a particular area, as many areas of the province also require support, and funding remains limited. Thus, it is inferred that these funding considerations could be barriers to establishing new father-inclusive programs, as the DTES has options for families already and currently, resources are not meeting the needs of mothers in the community. Although this strategy serves to meet the province's needs, the perspectives of participants working on the front line still emphasized the significantly high homeless population in the community and the unique DTES community connection families have, stating,

You don't want to take people away from their community if this is where they want to be.

Logistical Challenges

In addition to the overall funding shortfall to establish programs, the impact of funding deficiencies creates logistical challenges for programs to serve fathers. For instance, participants discussed how various programs in the community lack the space to accommodate programming for fathers to join mothers or visit their kids within their building. Additionally, participants highlighted understaffing as a direct reason for the programs' inability to include fathers residing in the building. Within these cases, the

importance of women's and children's safety came into play. To prevent women from feeling unsafe by having men on-premises, it was noted that separate communal rooms from suites are needed to welcome father-inclusive programs and additional staff if programs opt to include fathers as residents. Ultimately, these findings suggest that insufficient funding is a critical barrier to developing supportive family housing programs in the DTES, not only affecting the availability of services but creating logistical challenges within existing programs.

Chapter 6. Policy Options and Considerations

The research findings from the environmental scan and the interviews offer valuable insights into the fathers' representation in supportive family housing programs and the need to address their absence. The environmental scan aligns with existing literature on father representation in family-centered services, revealing a lack of fully accessible units to fathers, with only 80 out of 499 units available throughout Vancouver. Interview participants further confirmed these findings, stressing a scarcity of programs available to fathers.

The interview findings also shed light on the multifaceted reasons behind the exclusion of fathers in supportive family housing programs in the DTES of Vancouver. Participants alluded to societal gender norms as a prominent barrier to father-inclusive programs, alongside funding deficiencies and responses from social services to ensure women's safety due to their disproportionate experiences with violence. While separating violent fathers from women and children remains crucial and should not be ignored, excluding fathers across all programming has drawn criticism from service providers in the community. This approach, they argue, neglects the needs of families where fathers are not perpetrators of violence or have made changes to address past violence. Additionally, participants stressed the implications of excluding fathers from program eligibility policies for father-led families. Instances were highlighted where children of single-father families had to enter foster care due to a lack of housing opportunities, or government agencies had to fund private interventions to prevent apprehension. Therefore, the results of this study illustrate the need to reduce eligibility barriers to supportive housing for families and expand father-inclusive housing options while recognizing the importance of ensuring women's safety to better align with the overarching goal of supportive family housing programs—family preservation.

6.1. Policy Options

Given the gap in the literature about fathers' absence in supportive housing programs, subsequent consequences, and feasible solutions for change, this research leverages the environmental scan, interview findings, as well as the promising practices to increase fathers' involvement identified in the literature to formulate three policy

options that focus on improving supportive family housing programs in the DTES for families. The following policy options, shown in Table 6.1 and further explained in the subheadings below, are aimed at government stakeholders that fund supportive family housing programs. While organizations are responsible for proposing programs, many organizations rely primarily on government funding for operations. Therefore, the choice to target government stakeholders stems from the government's significant stake in program funding, influencing which initiatives come to fruition. Chapter 2 and the interview findings highlight that many government stakeholders are involved in funding programs. However, the specified policy options specifically target two provincial government stakeholders, the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), given their responsibilities and current provincial service plan goals of enhancing family preservation and coordination of services in the DTES (MCFD, 2022; Ministry of Housing, 2023).

Table 6.1. Proposed Policy Options

Policy Options	
#1	Establish 90 new gender-inclusive supportive family housing units in the DTES.
#2	Pilot a supportive family housing program for fathers with children.
#3	Grant program for existing supportive family housing providers.

6.1.1. Option 1— Establish 90 new gender-inclusive units

The first policy proposes developing 90 new supportive family housing units in the DTES community that are gender inclusive. These new units aim to accommodate fathers as program residents and independent applicants, filling a crucial service gap articulated by participants and revealed in the environmental scan. Funding new units would also contribute to the available units for all types of family structures in the DTES, including mothers with children who already face waitlists to access current programs.

Given the absence of data indicating the precise number of units required to meet families' and fathers' needs, specifically in Vancouver and the DTES, this policy draws upon multiple data sources to justify the development of 90 units. The policy considers that of the 3,728 Vancouver residents on the BC Housing Supportive Housing Registry in December 2021 (City of Vancouver, 2022), approximately 24% of the waitlist includes family households, totaling 894 households. This estimate is based on family

households (couples with children and lone-parent households), making up 24% of Vancouver's households in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2023). Thus, this policy estimates that developing 90 new units will yield a 10% reduction in the waitlist for families. While acknowledging the limitations inherent in this estimate, establishing 90 new units serves as an initial step toward addressing the shortage in housing supply until further data is gathered and balancing the current funding limitations identified by study participants.

Various avenues could be explored to fund the 90 new units to minimize costs. These include establishing a new 90-unit program, setting up two smaller unit programs, or investing in infrastructure to expand Station Street, an already operational gender-inclusive program. However, it is essential to acknowledge that funding is a prerequisite for implementing this policy option regardless of the chosen avenue. To secure the necessary funding, the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Children and Family Development will need to collaborate across ministries and public sector organizations to coordinate a funding envelope and resources. Following this, the Ministry of Housing should, alongside BC Housing, issue a request for proposals (RFP) to housing providers for new supportive family housing units with both fathers and mothers as eligible applicants through the province's existing infrastructure, BC Bid. As non-profit social housing providers are often responsible for proposing new program development projects to funders, a tailored RFP from the BC government will ensure housing providers submit or modify existing proposals per the specified criteria.

6.1.2. Option 2 —Pilot a supportive family housing program for fathers with children

The second policy option includes developing a three-year pilot program for fathers with children in the DTES. The environmental scan identified two existing Vancouver programs that are fully accessible to fathers; however, interviews noted that this program supply does not adequately support family preservation among single-father or two-father households. This policy addresses this challenge by increasing options for fathers-led households to decrease and prevent child apprehension. The pilot program would model a structure similar to programs designed for single mothers and children, such as the Aboriginal Mothers Centre Transformational Housing Program. However, this program would be tailored specifically to fathers, with content geared towards fathers. This will help make the program appeal to and meet the unique needs

of fathers, as research demonstrates that most family-centered parenting resources are inherently mother-orientated, often impacting fathers' willingness to participate (Darroch et al., 2023; Sicouri et al., 2018).

The policy proposes initiating this program as a pilot with fewer units, ranging from 10-15, given current funding limitations and the absence of specific data on the required number of units necessary to fill the service gap for this population. The smaller unit pilot approach allows the provincial government to assess the program's appropriateness and its impact on improving outcomes for families in the community over the three years. The pilot program will, therefore, necessitate thorough evaluation, considering the perspectives of fathers and child protection social workers, to assess its effectiveness in filling service gaps and promoting family preservation and reunification. The data will also help to bridge the gap in the overall lack of research evidence regarding father-inclusive services to assist in evidence-based decision-making in the future (Alemann et al., 2020; Dozois et al., 2015).

The pilot program will necessitate funding, requiring the Ministry of Housing and the MCFD to collaborate across ministries and public sector organizations to coordinate a funding envelope and resources. Subsequently, the ministries should issue an RFP through the BC Bid Public Portal website to solicit opportunities from organizations. Noting that BC Housing's Supportive Housing Program Framework (2024) outlines regular reporting from housing providers to BC Housing for review, the Ministry of Housing should request that BC Housing issue the RFP and BC Housing work with the MCFD to collaboratively complete program evaluation.

6.1.3. Option 3 — Grant program for existing supportive family housing providers

The third policy option proposes collaborative efforts between the Ministry of Housing and the MCFD to fund a year-long grant program for existing supportive family housing providers at the municipal level in Vancouver. The grant program aims to incentivize existing providers to modify their programs to support the inclusion of fathers by offering financial assistance. The monetary incentive becomes particularly crucial considering existing literature identifying grants for organizations as a promising practice to promote fathering (Selekman & Holcomb, 2021), and the study findings emphasize

how financial constraints within existing organizations limit their capacity to involve fathers in internal programming opportunities, visitations with family members, and as program residents. Additionally, the oversaturation of programs presents challenges in securing funding for new projects within the community. Thus, the grant program aims to alleviate the financial barriers hindering organizations from including fathers in programs. Simultaneously, it ensures that provincial funding for development projects remains accessible to other communities, preventing diversion.

This option requires the Ministry of Housing and the MCFD to coordinate resources together, involving collaboration with the City of Vancouver for program provision. As the City of Vancouver has several grant programs offering financial support eligible to supportive housing programs, including the Core Supports Grants, Social Responsibility Fund (SRF) Community Grant Program, and the Supportive Housing Capital Grant Program, the policy could be adapted to existing grant applications or implemented as a separate grant program with similar applicant procedures by the city. However, participating organizations should have the flexibility to modify their programs to enhance father involvement at their discretion. These modifications will be categorized under three main streams: (1) increased family visitation, (2) programming, and/or (3) adjusted residency policies. Financial support through the grant program will be determined based on the initiatives within the organization's application proposal, with a higher allocation for those intending to amend program policies to accommodate fathers as residents. The grant should operate for a minimum of a year to provide ample time for the organization to develop a proposal.

There is currently no requirement or incentive for housing providers to support fathers' involvement in families within their programs. Therefore, the proposed grant program will serve as a positive incentive for providers to adapt their programs and actively encourage father involvement in families. Still, this initiative does not mandate providers to change their programs, and housing providers can develop their policies at their discretion. Nevertheless, the grant program showcases the provincial and municipal governments' commitment to acknowledging the role of fathers in families and supporting organizations willing to embrace positive change.

6.2. Safety Consideration and Recommendation

The policy options outlined above primarily aim to enhance opportunities for fathers in supportive family housing programs in the DTES. However, insights from this study emphasize crucial considerations in developing father-inclusive programs. A significant concern raised pertains to women's safety within such programs, particularly given existing gender-based violence disparities. Contrary to assessing women's safety as a criterion for the policy options in the subsections below, this report proposes an overarching recommendation that cuts across all policy options to address women's safety concerns within gender-inclusive programs.

This report recommends that the province establish a working group dedicated to creating best practices in supportive family housing that balance women's safety with inclusivity. These best practices should encompass program architecture, development, design, policy and protocols, and service delivery, providing robust support for housing providers to meet families' needs and effectively address the concerns identified in this study. The working group should consist of diverse members, such as mothers and fathers with experiences of violence, domestic violence advocates, supportive housing providers, Indigenous communities, and social workers, to ensure best practices offer a holistic perspective. Given the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in the DTES, Indigenous women's disproportionate experiences with violence, and the legacy of colonialism within shelters, it is crucial that Indigenous community members, advocates and leaders are at the forefront of this group (Bayes & Brewin, 2012; City of Vancouver, 2020; Martin & Walia, 2019).

When identifying best practices, the working group is encouraged to draw on the evaluation of Station Street, an existing gender-inclusive program in the DTES community, to assess its policies regarding women's safety. Additionally, the use of comprehensive risk assessment policies and procedures for program intake that prioritize client-centred care and flexibility may serve as an area for the working group to explore further. This study found that the assessment intake should be sensitive to the unique circumstances of families, considering the perspectives of each family member and incorporating insights from community professionals closely working with families in the DTES. As highlighted by study participants, this type of assessment can serve to recognize the nuances between families, accounting for their different circumstances,

perspectives, and personal histories, preventing the exclusion of all men based on overarching gender norms characterizing men as violent and ensuring that individuals who have addressed past violent behaviour are still eligible.

The overarching recommendation to establish a working group draws inspiration from the Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver's 2012 report, *Bridging the Divide: Building Safe Shelters for Women and Families in BC*, which recommends the development of a working committee focused on creating best practices to protect women in shelters to bridge the gap in tools for shelter providers. Authors Bayes and Brewin (2012) highlight the realities of women's safety in co-ed shelters in BC due to the lack of women-only spaces and stress the importance of meaningful solutions to increase women's safety in such settings. Given the alignment of concerns for women's safety in housing between the report and this study, a recommendation for a working group focused on safety in supportive family housing is considered invaluable.

This group becomes particularly significant as provincial guidelines from BC Housing regarding the balance of women's safety with male residents lack. While BC Housing (2017) offers Shelter Design Guidelines for housing providers, they reflect shelter settings rather than supportive housing. Furthermore, while the guidelines offer safety measures for co-ed shelters, they lack specific details for gender-inclusive shelter models, particularly those accommodating families with members of the opposite sex. This gap makes it challenging to apply the guidelines effectively within the context of supportive housing. Such a deficiency of guidelines is especially problematic considering BC Housing's (2024) Supportive Housing Program Framework emphasizes the importance of safety protocols from housing providers and adopting practices "which ensure the safety and security of women, men, transgendered individuals, women and children, couples and families, as applicable" (p. 3). Therefore, establishing a working group to develop best practices that balance women's safety needs and promote inclusivity is imperative to ensure that family members like fathers are no longer left behind. This initiative will bridge the information gap for service providers as they create and implement effective programs that support family preservation and address the needs of family members.

6.3. Evaluation Criteria and Measures

Four criteria were chosen based on the insights gained from the study to evaluate the policy options: (1) family preservation, (2) stakeholder acceptance, (3) cost, and (4) administrative complexity. These criteria assessed the strengths, limitations, and trade-offs associated with the three policy options. Each criterion and its corresponding measure are discussed in the following subheadings and summarized in Table 6.1 at the end of this chapter.

6.3.1. Family Preservation

The study's findings highlighted the frequency of gender preferences in supportive family housing program eligibility and the lack of accessible units for fathers, affecting families' abilities to stay together and support equal distribution of parenting responsibilities. In light of these findings, the main objective of this research is to increase fathers' access to supportive family housing programs, enabling them to remain with their families. Consequently, family preservation was identified as the key criterion for the analysis.

The criterion of family preservation specifically evaluates each policy option's capacity to improve the accessibility of supportive family housing programs and units for fathers. The criterion will be measured by considering the anticipated capacity of each policy to improve accessibility through increased options (quantity) and/or eliminating existing gender-based restrictions. Policies with a high capacity to improve accessibility for fathers will receive a **good** score. Policies with a moderate capacity to improve accessibility for fathers will receive a **moderate** score, while those policies with no or minimal capacity to improve accessibility for fathers will receive a **poor** score.

6.3.2. Stakeholder Acceptance

The second criterion for evaluating the policy options is stakeholder acceptance. This criterion considers two different stakeholder groups. The first includes child protection services and families in the DTES community. Interviews revealed that funding allocations from government stakeholders for supportive housing project development consider the perspectives of those living in and working within the

community. As such, assessing the projected level of support for the policy options from this first stakeholder group is crucial for decision-making.

The second stakeholder group to assess is housing providers. This group was separated from the first, as it factors in the role of housing providers and organizations in the delivery of services. Given that most organizations have women/mother-centred mandates rooted in ensuring women's safety that impedes organizations' ability to provide father-inclusive programs, providers may need to change existing organizational procedures and policies to implement the policy options. Additionally, it considers the differing views that arose in the research, with housing providers advocating for services to ensure women's safety and needs, as most women in the DTES are single women. Considering these findings, the level of acceptance from housing providers is important to evaluate separately.

Policies expected to have high stakeholder support for both groups will receive a good rating. Policies with some stakeholder support will receive a moderate rating, and policies expected to have minimal to no stakeholder support will be assigned a poor rating. Data from the interviews will be used to evaluate the level of stakeholder support. As families were not directly involved in this research, the perspectives of families shared by social workers in the interviews will be used to estimate their level of support.

6.3.3. Cost

Cost is important in evaluating policy proposals, particularly regarding budgetary impacts. Although funding for social housing, including supportive housing, has increased in recent years, interviewees highlighted that financial support remains constrained. As a result, cost has been selected as a criterion to consider in the analysis of the proposed policies, with a particular focus on cost for two provincial ministries, the Ministry of Housing and MCFD. Given the diversity of supportive housing programs in terms of services offered, building size, and location, the policy options will be measured based on estimated upfront costs and provide a basis for comparing the options. Policies that demonstrate a lower estimated cost to the provincial ministries will be assigned a rating of **good**, those with moderate costs will receive a **moderate** rating, and policies with high costs will be rated **poor**.

6.3.4. Administrative Complexity

The final criterion for evaluating policy options is administrative complexity. This criterion focuses on evaluating the ease of implementation of the proposed policies. This criterion, identified through the literature review and interviews, recognizes the diverse array of stakeholders involved in program development, including multiple provincial ministries, health authorities, municipal government, and non-profits. Given this multi-faceted involvement, the necessity for collaboration and coordination among multiple stakeholders is paramount to consider when assessing the complexity of policies' implementation.

Ease of implementation evaluates the anticipated degree of complexity that the two provincial ministries will encounter when implementing the policy. The degree of complexity considers the projected number of stakeholder groups the two provincial ministries must involve for policy implementation. Policies requiring minimal stakeholder coordination will have lower complexity and receive a **good** rating. Policies with greater stakeholder coordination will be assessed as having a moderate degree of complexity, earning a **moderate** rating. Finally, policies requiring coordination among all recognized stakeholder groups will be considered to have a high degree of complexity, resulting in a **poor** rating.

Table 6.2. Summary Table of Criteria and Measures

Criteria	Definition	Measure	Ranking	
Key Objective				
Family Preservation	Increase fathers' access to supportive family housing programs to remain with their families	Projected capacity to improve the accessibility of supportive family housing programs for fathers	Good	High capacity to improve accessibility
			Moderate	Moderate capacity to improve accessibility
			Poor	No or minimal capacity to improve accessibility
Additional Considerations				
Stakeholder Acceptance	Support from families and child protection social workers in the Downtown Eastside.	Level of support from families and child protection social workers.	Good	High level of support from stakeholders.
			Moderate	Moderate level of stakeholder support.
			Poor	Minimal to no stakeholder support.
	Support from supportive housing providers.	Level of support from supportive family housing providers	Good	High level of support from stakeholders.
			Moderate	Moderate level of stakeholder support.
			Poor	Minimal to no stakeholder support.
Cost	Cost to provincial ministries	Estimated cost to provincial ministries.	Good	Low cost to provincial funders
			Moderate	Moderate cost to provincial funders
			Poor	High cost to provincial funders
Administrative Complexity	Ease of Implementation	The degree of complexity to implement policy with consideration to the projected number of stakeholder groups required.	Good	Low degree of complexity to implement
			Moderate	Moderate degree of complexity to implement
			Poor	High degree of complexity to implement

Chapter 7. Policy Evaluation

The subsequent section provides an analysis of each of the three policy options, evaluating them against the criteria and measures outlined in Chapter 6. A summary of this analysis is presented in Table 7.4 at the conclusion of the chapter.

7.1. Option 1 — Establish 90 new gender-inclusive units

Table 7.1. Policy Option 1 Analysis Summary

Family Preservation	Stakeholder Acceptance (Families & CPS)	Stakeholder Acceptance (Housing Providers)	Cost	Administrative Complexity
Good	Good	Good	Poor	Poor

Upon analysis, the first policy option exhibits three notable strengths. Its primary strength lies in its projected capacity to increase fathers' access to supportive family housing, as seen by the **good** rating in Table 7.1. This rating is grounded in the policy's projected capacity to expand opportunities for fathers without eligibility restrictions and its adaptability to diverse family structures. Through this policy, the current supply of units in the DTES fully accessible to fathers without restrictions, such as gender preferences and health status (HIV+), would increase by 90 units. While units will be open to all genders, the total number of units fathers can access increases from 80 to 170.

Importantly, these gender-inclusive units are designated to cater to various family structures, including nuclear families, two-father families, or single fathers. The absence of gender restrictions ensures that families of all genders, including non-binary parents, have viable options. This policy, therefore, shows the most promise in meeting overall unmet housing needs in Vancouver by reducing the number of families on the BC Housing Supportive Housing Registry by approximately 10%, based on rough data estimates on the number of families on the waitlist. The widened choices will also address the shortage of spaces for single mothers with children, a concern emphasized by participants. Considering these attributes, this policy option could play a pivotal role in mitigating the current housing scarcity, averting child apprehension in vulnerable

families, and meeting the diverse family structures in the community. Thus, support from CPS and families in the DTES will likely be high for this policy, contributing to a **good** rating for this criterion.

It is anticipated that housing providers will also offer substantial support for this policy, resulting in a **good** rating for this subgroup. This rating is based on the policy's commitment to ensure the continuity of current resources for women fleeing violence without disruption and the absence of significant organizational changes; both touched on in the interviews. However, there exists a potential for this rating to shift to moderate. Since many providers have a women-centered focus, the province may need to advocate for change in housing providers with such mandates if alternative providers cannot submit proposals to meet the specified criteria or if the existing program, Station Street, does not wish to adapt its program to increase units.

Despite its merits in accommodating more diverse family structures, this policy option has limitations. Firstly, the introduction of new gender-inclusive units could inadvertently lead to a disproportionate occupancy by women, as interviewees highlighted how many single mothers in the community already are facing housing shortages. Thus, this could leave single fathers without resources, maintaining the status quo. Secondly, the relatively high costs pose a challenge, leading to a **poor** rating for the cost criterion. Drawing from a Government of BC (2011a) news release on Station Street, a building with a comparable number of proposed units, the total capital cost for the residential component was projected at approximately \$20 million for the 80-unit, six-story building. Of the \$20 million, the province planned to contribute \$12 million for the construction, with other funders covering the outstanding costs. The report indicates that, at the time, the province also expected to provide up to \$1,031,813 in annual operational funding.

While funding for the 90 new units can occur through different avenues to minimize costs, including funding a new 90-unit program, funding two smaller unit programs, or funding infrastructure to add 90 new units to the existing Station Street program, the information in the news release provides an estimated cost of establishing housing units of this amount. Based on the estimates, the anticipated upfront policy to the provincial government will be notably high compared to the alternative options.

However, it is essential to recognize the cost benefits of supportive housing development despite the substantial financial commitment. BC Housing (2018) highlighted in their social return on investment analysis with the Budzey Building that 49% of the social and economic value generated by the building is returned to the government in cost reallocations due to decreased service use among residents. The decreased service use considers the cost savings in aspects like homelessness, hospitalizations, police contacts, justice services, and maintaining children in foster care or formal kinship care (BC Housing, 2018).

Another consideration of this policy is the complexity associated with the policy implementation. While establishing new units may be routine for government and community organizations, coordinating a tailored funding envelope among stakeholders elevates the complexity to a **poor** level. Referencing the same Government of BC (2011a) new release, the outstanding \$8.1 million for Station Street’s development had planned to come from two additional government stakeholders. Thus, this policy anticipates a similar level of stakeholder coordination for the two provincial ministries required to implement this policy. Additionally, allocating resources specifically to the DTES potentially limits funding for projects in other areas of the province requiring support. This poses a key trade-off to consider with this option.

7.2. Option 2 — Pilot a supportive family housing program for fathers with children

Table 7.2. Policy Option 2 Analysis

Family Preservation	Stakeholder Acceptance (Families & CPS)	Stakeholder Acceptance (Housing Providers)	Cost	Administrative Complexity
Moderate	Moderate	Good	Moderate	Poor

The second policy reveals strengths and limitations, as shown in Table 7.2. A notable strength is the policy’s projected capacity to improve supportive housing availability and accessibility for fathers. Through this policy, single fathers, two-father families, or father-identifying individuals gain an additional supportive family housing program opportunity with at least ten more units. The program’s development ensures

that options are specifically available and tailored for this demographic, aligning with research advocating for father-focused programs in the DTES (Darroch et al., 2023). Nonetheless, this policy received a **moderate** rating for the family preservation criteria. While the policy demonstrates a capacity to improve accessibility for fathers, the rating considers the potential impermanence of the program and the comparatively lower increase in total units than the other options.

Additionally, the proposed pilot program still enforces gender restrictions, limiting accessibility for family members not identifying as men and hindering families of all different structures and genders from staying together. As such, stakeholders' support from families and CPS in the DTES may be less enthusiastic about this policy than the first, earning a **moderate** rating. This is demonstrated through the interview findings, where social workers revealed that many women in the DTES wish to reside with their partners in these programs for additional parenting support.

On the other hand, housing providers are likely to show a high level of support as establishing a new resource for fathers safeguards existing resources dedicated to mothers. It ensures that resources that aim to support women's safety and needs, particularly those fleeing violence, remain intact. The policy also removes the concerns regarding women residents' safety within the program by dedicating the program exclusively to fathers. Lastly, the government must only secure one housing provider to operate the program. This reduces the risk of organizational changes from women-centered organizations, likely fostering a higher level of support from housing providers and, thus, earning a **good** rating for this stakeholder subgroup.

Regarding cost and administrative complexity, the ratings for this policy align closely with the first option. In terms of cost, the policy's estimated cost was assigned a **moderate**. The rating is based on a cost comparable to the proposed program, the Aboriginal Mothers Centre Transformational Housing Program, which incurred a \$7.8 million investment in capital funding for a 16-unit program. The province contributed over \$6.2 million of the total investment (\$504,534 allocated towards the daycare within the program), with other funders covering the outstanding costs. While this cost is still substantial, it is considerably lower than the first policy, resulting in a **moderate** rating instead of poor.

Administrative complexity was assigned a poor rating as the degree of complexity with this policy’s implementation mirrors that of the first policy option. It is anticipated that a high level of stakeholder coordination for the two provincial ministries will be required for policy implementation. While Station Street only indicated two government stakeholders, the Government of BC (2011b) new release reports that approximately \$1.6 million for the Aboriginal Mother’s Centre came from eight other partners. Thus, it is anticipated that this policy, like the first, will require a similar level of stakeholder coordination for the two provincial ministries to implement.

7.3. Option 3 — Grant program for existing supportive family housing providers

Table 7.3. Policy Option 3 Analysis

Family Preservation	Stakeholder Acceptance (Families & CPS)	Stakeholder Acceptance (Housing Providers)	Cost	Administrative Complexity
Good	Moderate	Poor	Poor	Moderate

Considering that participants in this study identified financial constraints as a limitation to involving fathers in programs, introducing a grant program to alleviate organizations' financial constraints could play a central role in increasing fathers' accessibility to supportive family housing in Vancouver. While no available data can quantify the policy's precise impact on increasing fathers' accessibility, the projected capacity of this policy is perceived to be high, as this initiative could empower all existing organizations to expand opportunities for fathers to participate, allowing fathers to remain with their families. Thus, this policy received a good rating for family preservation.

However, it is important to acknowledge that since this grant program will be open to all existing supportive family housing programs in Vancouver, substantial costs could be associated with it. Although not all housing providers may apply for the grant, the Ministry of Housing and the MCFD must consider the potential costs of the grant program if all programs were to apply to ensure adequate funding availability. This consideration led to a poor rating for cost.

Moreover, despite the positive rating for family preservation, low stakeholder acceptance from housing providers may limit the effectiveness of this policy option. Findings from this research indicate that while a grant may alleviate financial stress to address concerns about aspects like building space, barriers such as deeply ingrained societal norms, concerns about gender-based violence disparities, and potential organizational mandate changes could deter housing providers from applying for grant funding, despite its potential benefits. While the voluntary nature of the policy is a strength, it may not be enough to overcome these challenges. Additionally, this option will affect the limited resources available to single mothers and those women with children fleeing violence. Participants in this study identified the lack of existing resources for mothers as a concern. Thus, amending existing resources to include fathers as applicants would impact the options available to mothers. These factors have led to a **poor** rating for housing providers' level of acceptance.

With respect to stakeholder support from families and CPS in the DTES, a **moderate** rating was assigned. The rating considers that the grant program may increase opportunities for family members to remain together and extend beyond funding for fathers as residents; the program provides financial support for initiatives within programs that promote various types of father inclusion. As a result, the grant program may help fathers remain engaged with their families through visitation and participation in programming. The need for more programming resources for fathers was a key desire expressed among the mothers and fathers living in the DTES within Darroch et al.'s (2023) study. Additionally, social work participants in this study emphasized the need for more opportunities for fathers to gain parenting skills, as offered by supportive housing programs. Considering these aspects, the stakeholder support for families and CPS social workers is rated **moderately**.

Despite the identified limitations, the estimated complexity of the policy reveals another strength. Implementing this policy will necessitate coordination between the provincial ministries and the City of Vancouver to administer the program. Although involving an additional stakeholder adds complexity, the overall administrative complexity of the policy is lower than the alternative policies. Consequently, administrative complexity received a **moderate** rating.

Table 7.4. Summary of Analysis

	Option 1: Gender Inclusive Units	Option 2: Pilot Program	Option 3: Grant Program
Family Preservation	Good	Moderate	Good
Stakeholder Acceptance (Families & CPS)	Good	Moderate	Moderate
Stakeholder Acceptance (Housing Providers)	Good	Good	Poor
Cost	Poor	Moderate	Poor
Administrative Complexity	Poor	Poor	Moderate

Chapter 8. Recommendations

While each policy has its limitations, as highlighted in the analysis and summarized in Table 7.4, this study identifies the first policy option as the most promising option. This option enhances fathers' access to supportive family housing programs, enabling them to remain with their families and garners the most support from the community, including housing providers, CPS, and families. While policy option two may entail lower costs and option three may require fewer stakeholders to implement, the analysis reveals their respective trade-offs. Notably, the use of gendered eligibility restrictions in policy option two directly affects families with women actively involved in family dynamics, disrupting their ability to remain together. Similarly, while option three holds strength in expanding fathers' opportunities, its acceptance among stakeholders may be limited due to its impact on resources explicitly reserved for mothers.

Despite policy option one's limitations in these areas, its strengths across other key criteria cannot be overlooked. The research emphasizes that, although funding is an apparent constraint, it is the primary solution to address the needs of families. Adapting current programs to accommodate fathers may help fathers increase access to support, but this may inadvertently leave other families behind. Consequently, this report recommends the development of 90 gender-inclusive new units of supportive family housing in the DTES, as outlined in policy option one.

Acknowledging funding deficiencies for social housing and the high estimated cost of establishing new units with this recommendation, the Ministry of Housing may consider allocating funding from the \$1.2 billion investment from the Building BC: Supportive Housing Fund for this initiative. However, caution should be exercised to prevent a reduction in funding for other programs across the province. Hence, it is advised that the Ministry of Children and Family Development specifically augment funding for this initiative, given evidence suggesting these programs as more cost-effective alternatives to foster care, ensuring family preservation.

Additionally, this report suggests allocating 10-15 of the 90 units to deliver a pilot program for fathers with children. Recognizing the prevalence of single mothers in the community, as highlighted by interviewees, the introduction of new gender-inclusive units could inadvertently lead to a disproportionate occupancy by women, leaving single

fathers without resources. Therefore, dedicating a small portion of the units to a pilot program designed specifically for fathers with children could ensure adequate access to support for this demographic, mitigating the risk of child apprehension among these families.

While developing new programs will entail time, it is questionable that the alternative policy (option three) would substantially increase fathers' residency opportunities within a comparable timeframe, given current family occupancy in existing units and potential construction requirements for expanding housing capacity for fathers to join. Additionally, housing providers may necessitate time to restructure their organizational policies. Nonetheless, a grant program akin to the one described in this report presents strengths, as revealed in the analysis. Thus, this report suggests that provincial ministries consider a grant program offering financial assistance to organizations to modify their programs to support the inclusion of fathers through increased family visitation and programming for fathers. Given the issue's importance, such a program could be implemented in the short term while construction for new gender-inclusive programs progresses. Such initiatives serve to engage men in fatherhood and showcase the commitment of provincial and municipal governments to recognizing and supporting fathers' role in childcare.

Finally, this report recommends that the province establish a working group dedicated to creating best practices in supportive family housing that balance women's safety with inclusivity. As detailed further in subsection 6.2, a working group will help fill the gap in provincial guidelines regarding strategies to balance women's safety with programs open to male residents. This approach will assist service providers in developing programs in the future that prioritize safety concerns for women while creating an inclusive framework that supports family preservation, effectively addressing the needs of all family members in the DTES community and beyond.

Chapter 9. Considerations and Limitations

The primary limitation of this research lies in the interview sample. While the interviews provided valuable insight into the current representation of fathers in supportive housing for families in the DTES and the implications of father absence on families' experiences, it is essential to acknowledge that these perspectives primarily reflect the perspective of service providers rather than families. This limitation highlights the need for future research to incorporate their experiences and opinions directly, considering they are the ultimate recipients of supportive family housing most affected by the issue.

Additionally, despite best efforts to select interview participants involved in supportive family housing programs in the DTES, this research was limited by the perspectives of only two individuals. Many professionals in supportive family housing did not respond to interview invitations or expressed hesitation concerning their organization's mandate to focus on advancing gender equity. This hesitancy revealed a potential misunderstanding that addressing the inclusiveness of fathers in supportive housing does not contribute to gender equity. Further research could assist in exploring these misconceptions to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers and challenges associated with including fathers in supportive housing.

Furthermore, the policy analysis faced a constraint in needing access to accurate data indicating the necessary number of units to meet the needs of various family structures in the DTES. The absence of publicly available data and the inability of the study's sample population to provide this information highlights the importance of further research focused on understanding the required number of units and programs to effectively meet the needs of family members in the DTES.

Chapter 10. Conclusion

This study sheds light on the complexities surrounding the exclusion of fathers in supportive family housing programs in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) and the pressing need to address the gaps in service provision for fathers. Through interviews with service providers in the DTES and supportive housing funders, the study revealed three overarching themes contributing to fathers' exclusion in supportive family housing programs. Firstly, the influence of societal gender norms on service provision emerged as a central barrier to creating father-inclusive supportive family housing programs, highlighting the need for organizations and program funders to acknowledge the valuable role of fathers' involvement in families. Secondly, the imperative need to ensure women's safety, driven by the disproportionate rates of intimate partner violence among women, often leads to the separation of fathers from mothers and children, disregarding the diverse needs and circumstances of families in the community. Lastly, the study finds the lack of funding at the provincial and organizational level to be a critical barrier to establishing new father-inclusive programs and including fathers within existing programs.

Considering these barriers and their profound implications for families, this study proposed two recommendations. Firstly, it calls for the provincial government of British Columbia to allocate funding for 90 new gender-inclusive supportive family housing units in the DTES. As detailed in Chapter 8, this report proposes that a portion of these units be dedicated to funding a small-scale pilot program tailored specifically for fathers with children. Secondly, it recommends that the province establish a working group tasked with formulating best practices in supportive family housing, focused on practices that can balance safety considerations and inclusivity.

These recommendations not only aim to address the evident supply shortage for fathers and fill the gap in provincial guidelines concerning strategies to balance women's safety with programs open to male residents but also hold the potential to challenge detrimental societal gender norms that hinder gender equity. By expanding access to supportive housing for fathers and aiding service providers in developing programs that prioritize safety concerns for women while fostering inclusivity, more fathers will have the opportunity to participate in parenting responsibilities, thus alleviating the burden on

women and promoting an equitable division of labour. Importantly, the proposed solutions maintain existing services for mothers as well as enhance support for them through increased options.

In conclusion, this research encourages stakeholders to address funding shortages and collaboratively reshape programmatic approaches to family service provision that advocate for gender-inclusive policies. While further research is encouraged, addressing these shows potential to achieving the overarching goal of supportive family housing programs in the DTES—keeping families together and ensuring the well-being of all family members, fathers included.

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