

Listening Session Content Analysis Memo

Prepared for the Fair Housing Council of Oregon

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Introduction

In the fall of 2024, the Fair Housing Council of Oregon (FHCO) conducted a series of listening sessions to better understand the housing issues facing people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). FHCO staff held the listening sessions across the state, and participants included people with I/DD, family members, disability services providers, housing providers, and other partners. Staff also met with several people individually and collected information through an online survey.

These outreach activities yielded 24 sets of notes, which we used for content analysis. After reviewing the notes, we defined seven conceptual categories of content —property management, discrimination, accessibility, policy gaps, training needs, affordability, and non-accessible housing characteristics. We then coded items that contained words and phrases related to the conceptual categories. Where inferences were possible, items that lacked these specific words and phrases were categorized. During analysis, we discovered themes in each category and grouped items accordingly.

The identified themes will help advocates and policymakers to have a more nuanced understanding of housing issues and ways to resolve them. Here, we summarize the content for each conceptual category. The appendix provides detail for these summaries.

Summary of Content from Listening Sessions

The challenges faced by people with disabilities in securing and maintaining suitable housing are multifaceted, deeply affecting their ability to live independently and comfortably. From complex and inaccessible application processes to discriminatory practices and inadequate housing conditions, the barriers are numerous. Addressing these concerns requires a combination of awareness raising, training, and systemic change that values inclusion and accessibility, ensuring that all people can secure housing without discrimination or undue hardship.

Property Management

Challenges in property management for people with disabilities include difficulties with application processes, such as limited credit history, inaccessible platforms, strict timelines, and a lack of alternative options like paper forms. Five participants noted that online platforms for applications and maintenance are not accessible. Communication

with landlords is often hindered by misunderstandings of disability needs, inaccessible documents, and the inability to involve advocates. Recertification processes are burdensome due to extensive paperwork, difficulties in accessing necessary documents, and tight deadlines. Maintenance requests are frequently ignored or delayed, with additional discriminatory hurdles placed on tenants with disabilities. Inconsistent property management, often caused by staff turnover and a lack of on-site managers, creates further barriers. Other issues include privacy issues, threats of eviction, and tenants' lack of support to maintain housing.

Discrimination

Discrimination against tenants with disabilities is pervasive, with landlords displaying offensive attitudes and dismissiveness. Unfair treatment includes higher deposits, denial of accommodations, and refusal to accept requests for accessible units. Seven participants reported that landlords have been disrespectful to them and six reported that accommodation requests were denied. Many tenants avoid reporting discrimination due to fear of retaliation or the belief that reporting will be ineffective. Other discriminatory practices include harassment, misinformation, and failure to enforce accessibility-related rules. Nine participants said they feared retaliation for reporting discrimination.

Accessibility

Accessibility issues in housing remain widespread, with inadequate requirements that fail to comprehensively address the needs of people with disabilities. Seven participants reported concerns about the lack of accessible housing units. Concerns about noncompliance with accessibility standards mirror the challenges outlined in "Access Denied" (Hines 22). Essential features such as wider doorways, sufficient maneuvering space, and accessible light switches are often missing, as highlighted in "Access Denied" (Hines 19-22). Modification requests are frequently denied, and funding for universal design is limited. Common areas often present barriers, including obstructed paths, underscoring the need for better maintenance and safety measures.

Policy

Policymaking frequently overlooks the needs of people with disabilities, with tokenized interactions and limited inclusion in housing strategies. The limited supply of affordable and accessible housing, indicated by 14 participants, aligns with concerns raised in "Access Denied" about the shortage of units for people with disabilities (Hines 14-17). Several participants stated a need for housing support services, including advocacy (seven participants) and navigation (10 participants). Housing authorities face criticism for slow response times, inadequate funding, and insufficient case management.

Training Topics

Fifteen participants saw a need for training to identify and report housing discrimination. Others said landlords need to develop a better understanding of renters' rights. Renters also need education on eviction processes, financial management, and navigating housing systems. Training could provide an overview of complex processes, such as applying for affordable housing or eviction, and provide accessible resources to navigate these processes.

Affordability

Housing affordability is a significant challenge, with high costs, deposits, and rent increases making housing unattainable for many tenants. Disability-related issues, such as income limits imposed by SSI/SSDI and complex benefit navigation, exacerbate these challenges. Six participants reported that income limits were a challenge for being able to afford a home. "Access Denied" highlights struggles faced by people with disabilities due to limited income and benefit restrictions (Hines 9-10).

Non-Accessibility Housing Characteristics

Non-accessibility characteristics of housing further impact tenants with disabilities. Safety concerns, including substance use and a lack of secure playgrounds, were noted by five participants. Noise, traffic, and limited access to transit or services negatively affect quality of life. Other issues include inadequate habitability standards, insufficient laundry facilities, and the absence of social spaces.

Conclusion

FHCO's listening sessions revealed a range of interconnected challenges that people with disabilities encounter in securing and maintaining appropriate housing. These barriers include inaccessible application processes, discriminatory practices, inadequate accessibility features, and affordability concerns, among others.

Our analysis suggests the urgent need for systemic changes in housing practices and policies. The information gathered will aid advocates and policymakers in developing more effective strategies and solutions that ensure people with disabilities have access to safe, affordable, and accessible housing.

Appendix A: Themes from FHCO Listening Sessions

Items that are followed by one or more plus signs were mentioned by multiple participants. Each plus sign indicates an additional participant mentioned the item.

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

- Application process
 - People with I/DD less likely to have credit scores or rental history
 - Difficulty with application process +++++
 - Maintaining spot on long waitlists can be difficult
 - Cumbersome applications
 - Accessing application
 - Online platforms for applications and maintenance not always accessible ++++
 - Strict timelines when applicants reach the top of waitlists +
 - Landlords are not required to have options during application on how someone might complete an application (online, paper, through advocacy)
 - Not enough information on waitlist position
- Landlord communication
 - Landlords do not understand disability
 - Communication limited to landlord's preferred means (limited phone support)++
 - Miscommunication and assumptions about participants' needs
 - Information is not tailored to diverse reading levels and languages++
 - Documents are hard to understand and can be overwhelming--violation notices, rental applications, eviction notices, etc ++
 - Confusing/poor communication from landlords ++
 - Fears eviction due to lack of clarity from landlord
 - Communication with the landlord can be hard and may lead to eviction+
 - Landlord refusing to communicate with family or advocates

- Landlords not allowing advocates for people with IDD to help with paperwork and understanding lease

- Recertification challenges

- Recertification complicated and overwhelming
- Recertification needs to be completed in a timely manner otherwise housing at risk
- Recertification paperwork is onerous
- People are unable to locate/make copies of documents for recertification

- Maintenance

- Housing providers do not repair because the tenant is unable to understand the process of submitting a maintenance request

- Tenants with disabilities asked to take additional steps for maintenance requests (also discrimination)

- Fear of retaliation results in not reporting maintenance issues+

- Landlords not held accountable for maintenance/not taking maintenance requests seriously/unresponsive ++

- Long wait for maintenance

- Landlord asking tenant to pay for repairs +

- Overcharging for repairs of damage caused by tenant

- Presence at property

- Turnover in property management causes inconsistency in enforcement of rules, having to educate about disability+

- No manager on site+

- Other

- Landlord shares tenant information where other tenants can hear

- Threats of violence and property damage from landlord

- Eviction due to noise related to disability++

- Not having support to clean can lead to eviction

DISCRIMINATION

- Landlord attitude
 - Landlords say offensive/disrespectful things++++++
 - Landlord not taking applicants with disabilities seriously
 - Landlords' assumptions about people's ability to pay rent and maintain the unit
- Unfair treatment
 - Facing higher deposits and financial requirements when dealing with a disability
 - Treating individual differently due to disability and need for emotional support animal++
 - Landlords will disengage upon learning of family member with I/DD
 - Misinformation about units
 - Accommodations/modifications for disabilities are often denied +++++
 - Bias against families with children
 - Landlords not accepting vouchers
 - Retaliation after accommodation request
 - Refusal of rental or sale based on disability status
 - Denying request for an accessible unit for a household member who is a child
 - Law enforcement might be called if the child is screaming
 - Landlord may harass tenants after law enforcement involvement
 - Landlord not enforcing parking rules for accessible spots
 - When people with disabilities are treated badly, they don't report it because they expect to be treated poorly
 - Being used to not feeling heard or you have a voice
- Reporting discrimination
 - Communication barriers for people who don't speak English may keep them from reporting discrimination

- Reporting discrimination is hard for people with IDD ++
- Fear of retaliation for reporting discrimination +++++++
- Fear of negative reference when moving
- Feeling that reporting discrimination won't do anything
- Other
 - Intimidation and manipulation
 - Landlord drives by house to monitor how many tenants are living there and conditions of the yard
 - Families worry about noise from children+
 - People with I/DD not receiving move-in specials
 - Harassment from neighbors related to disability

ACCESSIBILITY

- Inadequate requirements
 - Lack of accessible housing++++++
 - Lack of understanding of what makes a unit accessible
 - Townhomes are not accessible+
 - Compliance with ADA and other accessibility laws
- Needed features
 - Covered in accessibility requirements
 - Ground floor units (FHAct says all ground floor units in multifamily are Type B)
 - Sufficient space to navigate through doors and corners (Type A standard)
 - Wider doorways (Type A standard)
 - Essential features include a large bathroom on main floor, adequate space for wheelchair maneuverability (Type A-like standard)
 - Accessible light switches and door handles are essential (Type B standard)

- Accessible trash facilities (ADA)
- Not covered: Common areas
 - Multi-floor buildings should have elevators
 - Lights along paths are important
 - Should be fenced yards to allow children with IDD the ability to play outside
 - Asthma and allergies to animals, cannabis, tobacco need to be considered
- Not covered: Unit wide
 - Neurodiversity needs
 - Need space to deescalate ++
 - Free standing house
 - Quiet rooms, quiet spaces for decompression
 - Needed to find placement where child wouldn't disrupt other tenants
 - Sound proofing++
 - Important amenities include lights with dimmer switches, central HVAC systems, and accessible storage and counter space
 - Living under another apartment impacts quality of life due to noise from footsteps and pets
 - Easy to use fixtures
 - Electronic door handles
 - Wall/corner protectors to prevent damage
 - Non-florescent lighting
 - Design features that address sensory stimulation
 - Adequate space for vehicles with accessibility features is necessary
 - Units with room for mobility equipment
 - Open floor plan
- Not covered: Entry/kitchen/bathroom

- Door locks should be easy to operate+
- Induction stovetop
- Design elements like sideways-opening ovens
- Walk-in showers
- Modification requests
 - Modifications could support safety and independent living
 - Landlords unwilling to provide modifications+
 - Need for funding and resources for universal design
 - Advocates feel burdened by the need to repeatedly request expensive disability-related features from landlords
- Common areas - Paths
 - Property management does not clear sidewalks
 - Animal waste, children's toys obstruct paths

POLICY

- Policy formation
 - People with I/DD could inform policy makers
 - Policy makers need to learn more about the communication and inability to process information
 - Feel overlooked in policymaking with little effective decision-making that positively influences their lives
 - Policy makers do not understand disability and the unmet needs of the community+
 - Interactions with policy makers are tokenizing
 - Needs must be included in planning and structural development to ensure they are fully integrated and supported within society+
 - Policy makers should give people the right or the choice of where to live
 - Policy makers assume that disability services meet all needs, including accessibility

- People with disabilities need to be included in decision-making
- Building connections between agencies for better communication with clients and residents
- Supply issues
 - Lack of suitable housing (accessibility or affordability) ++++++
 - Integrated affordable accessible housing does not exist
 - Insufficient supply leads to desperation and willing to accept far less than ideal situation
 - Housing needs for people with mental health issues and disability are left out of the housing conversation
 - Long wait lists
 - More ADA units+
 - Incentives are needed for developers to include features like elevators and adopt Universal Design standards++
 - More cottage cluster/detached housing needed+
 - Limited funding for developing low-income housing
 - Converting rental vouchers to mortgage subsidies
 - Challenges of creating preference policies for specific populations
 - Challenges of integrating affordable housing into existing communities
- Needed housing support
 - Advocacy services to help people with IDD access housing+++++
 - Need help to report discrimination
 - Housing navigation ++++++
 - Need for money to help people access housing
 - Needs assistance to ask for reasonable accommodations at time of application
 - System is complex and people receive inconsistent guidance++++
 - Roommate matching service

- Need more supportive services in large multifamily buildings
- Navigating multiple agencies with different services is confusing – needs to be streamlined+
- Case managers and disability services could help create accountability
- Support for navigating the home-buying process
- Housing authority issues
 - At Housing Authority case managers only assigned when applicants come up on waitlist
 - Housing authority payment standard does not allow for renting adequate unit
 - Slow/unresponsive housing authority staff
 - Updating portion of rent after change in income
- Application barriers
 - Limited rental history, work history, or credit history prevent many from securing housing
 - Lack of savings for deposits, compounded by benefits imitations on savings
 - Evictions related to mental health creates barrier
 - Require landlords to allow paper copies of applications to be submitted
 - Saving money can impact benefits
 - Providing appeal documentation and VAWA information to applicants who were removed from waitlists
- Finding units
 - No advertisement for available community-based accessible housing++
 - Advertising to people with disabilities poses challenges under Fair Housing laws
 - No comprehensive statewide resource for affordable housing
- Modifications
 - Landlords not allowing modifications
 - Tenants might not have money to remove modifications at move out

- Care providers
 - Participants without support systems
 - Care coordination
 - More support for families
 - When transitioning adult child into a group home, no advocate or support steps in
 - Difficulties in finding accessible group homes
 - Hard to find adequate group homes
 - No services to assist someone with IDD and medical problems in small communities
 - Need more in-home workers++
 - Affordable housing for care providers
- Other
 - No service to assist person with IDD to be a better tenant+
 - Require landlord to provide information to tenants on who to contact if they feel they are being discriminated against
 - Renters need information on average cost of utilities
 - System challenges of pairing housing and in-home support
 - Make section 8 inspections easier
 - Transit-oriented development
 - Transit access in rural communities
 - Paying parents as care providers

TRAINING TOPICS

- Discrimination
- Knowing what to ask in terms of fair housing+
- Concrete examples of discrimination and micro-aggressions
- Learning to spot housing discrimination and how to report it ++++++

- Distinguishing between acceptable practices and unfair treatment in housing
- Landlords should receive information about IDD and other disabilities ++
 - Noise and children's behavior
- Renters' rights and responsibilities
 - Understanding responsibilities as a renter+
 - Housing rights and available resources+
 - Understanding eviction process
 - Asking for reasonable accommodation++
 - Financial education
 - Understanding lease terms
 - Understanding internalized ableism and how it becomes a barrier for advocacy
- How to find housing
 - Understanding housing process of finding and maintaining housing+
 - Confusion around navigating processes, accessing housing, and understanding voucher types and project-based voucher applications.
 - One-stop shop for toolkits that provide comprehensive housing information, including a flowchart to guide individuals to appropriate services+
- Advocacy
 - How to share opinion
 - Trauma-informed communication for landlords
 - How systems work
- Other
 - Giving landlords and tenants information on preventing harassment between tenants
 - Requiring landlords to provide resources before issuing eviction notices
 - NIMBYism in terms of affordable and disability-specific housing
 - Support animals, no-pet policies and accommodations

AFFORDABILITY

- Housing market issues
 - High interest rates
 - Requirements that applicants have income 3x rent
 - High deposits +
 - Application fees
 - Allowable annual rent increases of 14%
 - Housing is expensive++++
 - Lack of funding resources
 - Home buying difficult because of financial, down payment, and credit score challenges++
 - Vouchers often do not cover market rates or allow third-party contributions for nicer units
- Disability-related issues
 - People with disabilities face income limits +++++
 - Navigating SSI/SSDI is complex+++
 - Need to have a cosigner
 - Cost of care can tighten household budgets

NON-ACCESSIBILITY HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS

- Safety +++++
 - Substance use issues are common in low-income housing
 - Safe playground areas for self-regulation
- Traffic, transit, and ambient noise
 - Away from loud noises+

- Away from heavy traffic
- Good access to transit++++++
- Access to services++
 - Implementing mixed-use zoning makes essential services easier to reach
 - Near service providers
- Other
 - Free of habitability issues—mold, lack of insulation/weatherization, faulty appliances+
 - Enough washers/driers in onsite laundry
 - Social space in building