

Observer-Rated Housing Quality Scale (OHQS)

ROOMING HOUSE AND SINGLE ROOM OCCUPANCY EDITION

OHQS

Rooming houses and single room occupancy hotels (SROs) are an important element of the affordable housing market for many Winnipeggers. We know that the housing quality is linked to people's health and well-being, but is there a way to measure just how good some housing units are?

In partnership with the West Broadway Community Organization, the Institute of Urban Studies is proud to launch the Observer-Rated Housing Quality Scale (OHQS)– Rooming House and Single Room Occupancy Hotel Edition. This survey **tool for rooming house tenants, case managers, community-based organizations, and property owners** has two main purposes for assessing the quality of rooming houses and SROs:

1. To help people looking for housing make informed decisions about rooming houses and SROs.
2. To assist community groups, housing workers, and case managers in determining if particular units qualify for Housing First supports or other housing subsidies.

Using the OHQS

The OHQS asks a set of general questions about each building followed by rating 27 detailed items on a five-point scale. To conduct the OHQS, trained staff visit each property and ask general questions about the building, unit type, rules, caretaker availability, rent, and tenancy agreements. Staff then use the OHQS to assess both the housing unit(s) and the building/property. Assessors first rate units on items such as safety, security, utilities, lighting, heating, pests, and amenities. Second, assessors rate the larger building and property details such as surface conditions, staff availability, accessibility, garbage facilities, and access to nature. Together, these items provide an overall rating of housing quality.

Some housing units may score high on particular items and low on others—but good units will rate higher than bad units. These housing units will fall within a range of scores determined by extensive testing of the OHQS across Canada. Certain conditions, such as safety issues or pest infestations, may be so severe that they make the unit unfit for occupation. These items are noted and considered alongside the final score. Users should be aware that the OHQS is not a building inspection and is not a substitute for inspections conducted by experts.

Background

The OHQS was originally developed and deployed in five Canadian cities as part of the Mental Health Commission of Canada's At Home/Chez Soi project. The full OHQS assessed more than 400 housing units across Canada. Field-testing of the OHQS in West Broadway rooming houses resulted in minor adaptations for this specialised version.

Measuring Housing Quality

Measuring housing quality establishes a rating scale to assist in determining eligibility for Housing First interventions and other housing supports. This OHQS instrument is an effective tool to understand the quality of places people call home.

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