

ROOMING HOUSES 2017

Highlights of a study by Direction régionale de santé publique de Montréal and Direction de l'habitation de la Ville de Montréal

Investigation overview

The investigation was conducted in summer 2017 and focused on rooming house residents in five central boroughs of the Ville de Montréal: Côte-des-Neiges–Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, Le Sud-Ouest, Ville-Marie, Rosemont–La Petite-Patrie and Mercier–Hochelaga-Maisonneuve. Of the 125 rooming houses listed in these areas, 52 of them were selected at random to form the participant sample. In total, 274 roomers answered a questionnaire on their housing conditions, health condition and residential background. The response rate is 75% (274/364).



In Montréal, a rooming house refers to a building composed of at least four bedrooms and in which occupants share sanitary facilities, like a shower or toilet, and sometimes a kitchen. In Montréal, these buildings have an average of 15 bedrooms.

Sociodemographic portrait

Despite the diverse profiles of roomers, the majority of private rooming houses that were studied are lived in by Francophone men between the ages of 45 and 64. A large majority of roomers, even those who are employed, live in extreme poverty.

- The declared median income is \$920 a month.
- 59% of roomers receive last-resort government assistance (Social Assistance or Social Solidarity programs).
- 25% of roomers are employed, and 7% are students.
- 31% of roomers do not have a high school diploma, a rate which is nearly four times higher than the Montréal average.

Housing conditions

Although their rents are among the lowest on the residential market in Montréal, the majority of roomers spend too high a percentage of their income on rent. This limits their ability to meet other basic needs, like properly feeding themselves.

- The median rent for rooms is \$425 per month.
- 78% of roomers spend over 30% of their income on rent.
- 58% of participants turned to a food bank in the last 12 months.

Several buildings have major maintenance needs, and a large proportion of roomers are exposed to unhealthy conditions, including excessive humidity, mould and harmful pest or insect infestations.

- 46% of roomers report the presence of bedbugs in their rooming house in the last 12 months.

Health condition and habits

A large proportion of roomers are in poor physical and mental health.

- 58% of roomers report having at least one chronic physical health problem.
- 28% report having at least one mental health problem that has been diagnosed by a health professional.
- 24% report having been admitted to a psychiatric hospital at some point in their life.
- The rate of alcohol abuse (38%), drug use (47%) and tobacco dependence (76%) are much higher than those observed in the general population.

Residential and homelessness background

Although rooming houses are a form of transition housing for many, a number of roomers become long-term residents.

- 41% of roomers have been living at their current address for over two years.

The majority of roomers have experienced periods of residential instability.

- 52% of participants have experienced visible homelessness in their life (sleeping in public places, shelters or safe houses).

Potential courses of action

The issues revealed by the results signal the need to explore different courses of action that complement previously established measures and that consolidate interventions promoting access to affordable housing for everyone, especially single individuals with low incomes who make up the majority of roomers. The four priority courses of action are:

- Maintain a residential offer that meets the needs of vulnerable populations.
- Strengthen monitoring of the number of rooming houses.
- Mobilize stakeholders involved in lodging vulnerable single individuals.
- Support the integrated management of harmful pest and insect infestations.

For the complete study in French: Les chambreurs montréalais 2017, [click here](#).

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