

NEW WESTMINSTER



CONNECT &
PREPARE

SCALING PILOT

Learning Report



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Land Acknowledgment

We express our deep gratitude for the invaluable insights presented in this report, gathered collaboratively with the many partners of Building Resilient Neighbourhoods across diverse unceded, traditional, and ancestral territories. These encompass lands belonging to various Indigenous communities, including the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), sə́lilwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh), xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), qʷa:ńł'əń (Kwantlen), ǵícəy (Katzie), kʷikwə́łəm (Kwikwetlem), səmi'a:mu (Semiahmoo), Qayqayt, Halkomelem speaking people, s'cəwaθən məsteyəxʷ (Tsawwassen), Syilx (Okanagan), and Ləkʷəŋən (Esquimalt and Songhees) nations.

We acknowledge the impact of colonialism in perpetuating isolation and disconnection among Indigenous Peoples. This historical outcome arises from deliberate measures, such as the prohibition of cultural practices, community fragmentation, and the erosion of familial and language ties. We recognize that emergencies, whether acute or chronic, disproportionately affect IBPOC (Indigenous, Black, People of Colour) communities. Recognizing that achieving community resilience necessitates unlearning colonial practices to dismantle these systems of oppression, we stand dedicated to fostering equitable, just, and resilient communities.



About the Scaling Pilot

Through its partnership with Hey Neighbour Collective, from 2022 to 2023, Building Resilient Neighbourhoods (BRN) helped to bring Connect & Prepare to three new BC municipalities, in collaboration with resident champions, housing operators, local government emergency management and community planning staff, and non-profit organizations. This was a scaling pilot – an attempt to test ways to broaden the reach of the program to more communities and to deepen impact by focusing on reaching more vulnerable or socially isolated residents. Partners in North Vancouver, New Westminister, and Vancouver-Mount Pleasant concurrently implemented localized versions of the Connect & Prepare program in their communities. The shared goals that guided this collaborative work were to:

Shared Goals:

- Strengthen emergency preparedness, intergenerational neighbourly connections, and community resilience in multi-unit housing that includes high percentages of residents who are seniors, with a particular emphasis on low-income rental buildings and resident-groups known to have higher levels of vulnerability to social isolation, extreme heat, and other chronic stresses and acute emergencies.
- Implement and evaluate the Connect & Prepare program to test its success when led by different people and organizations in different social contexts.

Partners in the Connect & Prepare Scaling Pilot included:



What did we do?

Across Communities (by the numbers)

3

Scaling Pilot Communities

- North Vancouver
- New Westminster
- Vancouver - Mount Pleasant

10

Multi-unit Buildings

7

Non-profit Rentals

3

Market Rentals

- 3 high-rise (>7 floors)
- 5 low-rise (<7 floors)
- 1 low-rise (<4 floors)
- 1 multi-plex

100%

of **Housing Operators** would recommend the program to other housing operators.¹

95%

of **Residents** would recommend the program to a friend, or relative who lives in multi-unit housing.²

100%

of **Scaling Pilot Partners** connected to populations they wanted to reach, and expanded the reach of their services or programs.³

Resident Impacts

Residents reported the program contributed to neighbours:

97%

better understanding strengths, assets & vulnerabilities in their buildings.

95%

getting to know each other.

95%

becoming more connected with each other.

80%

sharing knowledge, skills, or resources.

86%

taking action to build long-term resilience, and be better prepared for an emergency.²

25+

Connect & Prepare Workshops

80+

Participants

15+

Connect & Prepare Resident-led projects

1. Based on a survey completed by housing operators from 7/10 sites.

2. Based on a survey completed by 56% of program participants.

3. Based on a survey completed by 10 program partners.

Community Activities & Stories



New Westminster

A collaboration between Seniors Services Society of BC and the City of New Westminister Community Planning Division and Emergency Management Office.



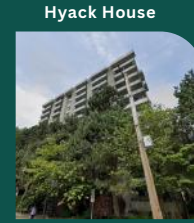
3 Multi-unit Buildings

- 2** Non-profit Rentals
- 1** Market Rental

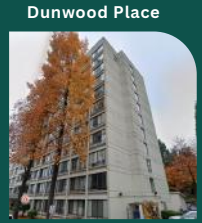
Who participated?
30+
Residents



Ross Tower
BC Housing Managed | 101 Units | Affordable Rental Housing for Seniors



Hyack House
Market Rental | 107 Units | Mixed Demographics



Dunwood Place
Managed by Presbyterian Senior Citizens Housing Society | 193 units | Affordable Rental Housing for Seniors

What resident participants reported:

100%

felt more connected to their neighbours

100%

of participants would recommend the Connect & Prepare Program



100%

felt more prepared to take action together during an emergency

100%

felt the program contributed to neighbours building long-term resilience

"[I learned] how strong this community is and how much it can be strengthened by this program."

Connect & Prepare Participant, Ross Tower

** Survey completed by 43% of participants.

Neighbour Projects included



Neighbour Gatherings (Potluck Party)



Emergency Preparedness (Distributed Grab & Go Kits and Updated Emergency Contact Lists)

"I really liked coming together and sharing all our ideas. I really learned a lot and want to keep going forward."

Connect & Prepare Participant, Dunwood Place



A Small Connection Can Be a Big Change

Connect & Prepare in New Westminster

“The COVID-19 pandemic and the extreme heat event in 2021 revealed major vulnerabilities in many BC communities,” said Anur Mehdic, a social planner with the [City of New Westminster](#). “Especially among seniors who are frail, low-income, or more isolated.”

City staff and Council have consequently had growing interest in engaging with vulnerable residents to better understand their needs, fostering resilience to chronic stressors and acute emergencies, and connecting residents to community resources and services. In this context, collaborating with [Seniors Services Society of BC](#) (SSSBC) on the Connect & Prepare program was a natural fit.

SSSBC has long provided varied assistance to older and vulnerable residents, such as with light housekeeping, meals, transportation, or navigation of community services –and their staff have also been seeing the adverse impacts on their clients from the pandemic and heat events. So, the City’s social planning and emergency management departments partnered with SSSBC along with [BC Housing](#) and other building managers to deliver the Connect & Prepare program in three multi-unit buildings with high percentages of seniors and residents with disabilities.

SSSBC facilitator Noel Pio Roda quickly discovered that nurturing social connections is a key step before any shared preparedness can develop—many residents were grappling with physical disabilities, mental health struggles, and food and income insecurity, and sometimes felt protective of their privacy or cautious about interacting with others living in the building. “I was surprised that a considerable number of residents preferred to stay isolated, and were not initially open to participating in group activities or engaging with their neighbours,” said Pio Roda.

He focused on building connections with individuals first, and then encouraged them to come to the workshops to meet others who shared similar interests. “As more seniors began to participate, it was incredibly rewarding to see gradual progress,” said Pio Roda. “It was heartening to see the transformation of isolated seniors into active participants and contributors within their communities.”

As one example, Pio Roda described how a neighbour-group was discussing the value of checking in on each other during emergencies, when one resident said she didn’t know anyone in the building. Another resident promptly shared his contact information. “It’s a small thing, but those kinds of one-on-one interactions and connections can become invaluable,” said Pio Roda (*continued on next page*).

“It was heartening to see the transformation of isolated seniors into active participants and contributors within their communities.”

-Noel Pio Roda, Senior Services Society of BC



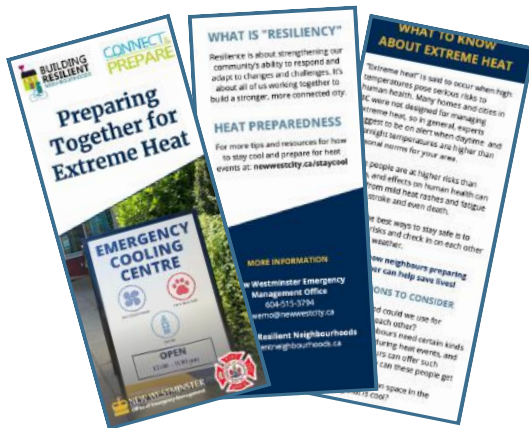
Residents were also educated about and connected to available local supports and services related to emergency preparedness, food security, financial assistance, tenant rights, and digital inclusion. After the workshops, across all of the buildings, tenants reported feeling more connected to one another, prepared for emergencies, and supported by their neighbours. “Learning about what essential items to have on hand and how to stay connected during emergencies was incredibly informative,” said one resident.

Resident Anne Ladouceur described Connect & Prepare as a catalyst for change in her building. “Many people in the building had been thinking about doing stuff [to improve emergency preparedness], but in a nebulous way—the program provided us with a concrete structure to start putting something into place. It was really helpful in that sense. It was an excellent exercise for us.”

With these successes, the City of New Westminster incorporated some of Connect & Prepare’s messages into the City’s early summer heat-safety public education campaigns, and promoted the Connect & Prepare guide Prepare Together for Extreme Heat. “We’re focused on a community outreach approach where neighbours are helping neighbours—not just during heat events but for any emergency,” said Emergency Management Coordinator Cory Hansen. “By educating residents on how to be better prepared, we can increase community resiliency. And the Connect & Prepare guides are an excellent resource to support that.”



Residents and partners at a Connect & Prepare workshop. Photo provided by Seniors Services Society of BC.



“I have a walker [and live] on the third floor. Every time we have a fire-drill, a neighbour checks in on me to make sure that I am okay. Not everyone might have this... [Connect & Prepare] reminds people of the importance of having such a system.”

-Connect & Prepare Participant, New Westminster

Free Kits for all residents

Resident Project



Residents at Ross Tower collaborated with delivery partners to host a “Grab & Go Kit Party” where all 101 units at Ross Towers received a small emergency preparedness kit.





SPOTLIGHT ON NEW WESTMINSTER

Resident Leadership Multiplies Impacts

The Connect & Prepare workshops led by the Seniors Services Society of BC and the City of New Westminster at the 117-unit Hyack House building helped ignite and rally resident leaders. “It brought people who would tend to be activists, who would tend to take the lead, it brought a bunch of us together,” said resident Anne Ladouceur— noting that progressively more people came to each workshop, including both longer-term and newer residents, and people from different generations.

“Many people in the building had been thinking about doing stuff [to improve emergency preparedness], but in a nebulous way—the program provided us with a concrete structure to start putting something into place,” said Ladouceur. “It was really helpful in that sense. It was an excellent exercise for us.”

A representative from the City’s Emergency Management Office spoke at one of the workshops. After hearing resident experiences with the impacts of extreme heat, the Fire Department delivered an air conditioner for the building’s common room as part of a new City heat-mitigation program.

Residents from two of the participating buildings later went to City Hall to attend discussions about safety issues in rental buildings. City of New Westminster Social Planner Anur Mehdic was thrilled that some Connect & Prepare participants came and shared their experiences and views with staff and Council. “The voices of seniors that are renters are often under-represented at City Hall,” said Mehdic. “And a big part of feeling resilient is feeling like you have a voice.”



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-Anur Mehdic, Social Planner, City of New Westminster

Back at Hyack House, Ladouceur and her fellow residents are just getting started—some of them are especially interested in developing a floor-connector system or another way of regularly checking in on each other’s safety. “Our plan right now is that we will do some social events, and then another series of get-togethers to talk more about emergency preparedness. For instance, some of the studio apartments have windows only on one side and no cross-breeze and can become extremely hot—so, how can we help each other?” Ladouceur added, “Connect & Prepare is a valuable tool. It kickstarted a process.”

“Connect & Prepare is a valuable tool. It kickstarted a process.”

-Anne Ladouceur, Connect & Prepare Participant, New Westminster



Collaboration is Key

Community Partner View

Across all of the sites in New Westminster, representatives of local government and the Senior Services Society of BC played key roles in bringing the Connect & Prepare program to residents – contributing time, energy, resources and expertise, while breaking down silos and strengthening collaborative models of working in community.

According to Kyoko Takahashi, Program Manager at SSSBC, these collaborative relationships provided many benefits for everyone involved. “We show up for each other. We apply together for funding, coordinate public educational events, and can solve issues and concerns with residents or in buildings more effectively together thanks to these working relationships, shared goals, and mutual understandings.”

Anur Mehdic, Social Planner with the City of New Westminster, agreed. “As social planners we have only so much capacity and can’t be experts in everything, so we rely on non-governmental organizations like Seniors Services Society to bring their experience, knowledge, and skills, and help us connect with and support some of our city’s most vulnerable residents,” said Mehdic. “A collaborative community planning project should leave a community not just with immediate ‘products,’ but also with an increased capacity to meet future needs. The Ross Tower Project is a wonderful example of such work.”

“We show up for each other. We apply together for funding, coordinate public educational events, and can solve issues and concerns with residents or in buildings more effectively together thanks to these working relationships, shared goals, and mutual understandings.”

-Kyoko Takahashi, Program Manager, Senior Services Society of BC.



Visible Impacts from Connect & Prepare

Municipal Partner View



“Since participating in Connect & Prepare, several older adult residents, who previously identified as being socially isolated, have taken their own initiative to directly engage City staff and Council to advocate for resources and supports to increase safety and resiliency in their buildings. Their efforts were successful, and this directly helped improve the quality of life for these tenants and their neighbours. This is direct evidence that the Connect & Prepare program can increase resilience in powerful ways.”

Anur Mehdic. Photo provided by Seniors Services Society of BC.

—Anur Mehdic, Social Planner,
City of New Westminster.

Impacts, Learnings & Moving Forward



What did we learn and achieve?

Resilient Residents



IMPACT:

Through participating in Connect & Prepare, residents strengthened their social connections, shared leadership, emergency preparedness, and resilience.

LEARNINGS: Key Catalyzing Factors

- Supporting the development of resident leaders and champions enhanced collective resilience.
- In safe, well-facilitated environments, deeper social connections and emotional resilience spontaneously emerged.
- Access to ongoing support and community resources increased resident resilience and the likelihood of more long-term, resident-led activities and projects.



Lessons for Action:

1

To maximize long-term impacts, cultivate and support resident leadership to emerge through the Connect & Prepare process.

2

Enhance the possibility of greater group cohesion by providing skilled facilitators who can bring a trauma-informed lens to supporting deeper discussions as they arise.

3

Allow flexible time, especially for residents with more vulnerabilities or disabilities, to accommodate open group conversations about residents' concerns and interests.

4

Create opportunities for neighbour-group leaders to get ongoing supports from workshop facilitators, partners, and/or a "Champions Network" community of practice.



Supportive Housing Operators



IMPACT:

Engaged and supportive housing operators helped significantly increase the effectiveness of the Connect & Prepare program for residents and community partners, and housing operators themselves in turn experienced positive benefits.

LEARNINGS: Key Catalyzing Factors

- Support from housing operators increased resident engagement and the likelihood of successful projects.
- Connect & Prepare has the potential to strengthen positive connections between housing operators and residents.
- Housing operators benefited from increased resident leadership, social connections, emergency preparedness, and resilience.



Lessons for Action:

- 1 Liaise with housing operators ahead of time to maximize the potential impacts of Connect & Prepare.
- 2 Be aware that the pre-existing relationship history between a housing operator and the building residents may either promote or hinder resident engagement and leadership, and seek ways to maximize constructive impacts.
- 3 Ensure positive experiences for both resident-groups and housing operators by discussing the optimal role for the housing operators in the Connect & Prepare program ahead of time.
- 4 Take advantage of opportunities to integrate discussions of emergency preparedness with some of the common concerns in buildings, such as smoke-detector maintenance and reporting water leaks.



Residents participating in a Connect & Prepare workshop in New Westminster. Photo provided by Seniors Services Society of BC.

Partners Working Together



IMPACT:

Connect & Prepare helped community-based organizations and municipal government staff connect with “harder-to-reach” residents, while these residents benefited from greater shared resilience and awareness of and access to community services and supports.

LEARNINGS: Key Catalyzing Factors

- The Connect & Prepare partnership approach helped deliver the program and expand impacts.
- By coming into buildings to deliver the program, partners expanded their own community outreach and increased the diversity of participation in Connect & Prepare.
- Offering Connect & Prepare as part of an integrated suite of approaches, programs, services, and supports enhanced resident engagement and overall program impacts.
- The adaptability of Connect & Prepare to different partner and resident contexts was crucial for ensuring successful delivery.
- Connect & Prepare contributed to broader civic engagement and developments in municipal policies in relation to neighbourly connections.



Lessons for Action:

1

Continue to seek community-based partnerships to help deliver Connect & Prepare and connect participants with local resources.

2

Enhance the Connect & Prepare training, materials, and supports provided to partners, to emphasize still greater flexibility and adaptability of the core model for different contexts.

3

Encourage partners to incorporate Connect & Prepare into their existing suite of programs, services, and approaches.



Moving Forward with Connect & Prepare

One of the main goals of the scaling pilot was to identify strategic ideas for broadening reach and deepening impacts of Connect & Prepare. The following three priority actions will guide further scaling and development of the program moving forward:

1 Expand the Range of Options and Adaptability of Connect & Prepare

Expand the repository of Connect & Prepare resources, supports, and tools, including more do-it-yourself and “plug and play” modules addressing different content, activities, and resident interests. These tools evolve most effectively in consultation with partners, resident groups, or in a facilitated “champions network” or peer learning environment.

2 Cultivate More Partnerships

Continue working with existing partners who have already made investments and developed skills for delivering Connect & Prepare, and develop new partnerships that can integrate Connect & Prepare into the larger suite of activities for which these government agencies, housing operators, or community organizations are already resourced. These kinds of partnerships not only create efficiencies but also enhance learning, innovation, and impacts.

3 Encourage Policy Changes and New Funding Approaches

Work more proactively with local governments, funders, community organizations, and housing operators to improve understanding of, and develop strong policies for supporting resident connections and shared resilience, especially for those residents who tend to be most negatively affected by chronic stressors and acute emergencies.



Acknowledgments

The success of the Connect & Prepare scaling pilot involved the collaborative efforts of Building Resilient Neighbourhood's (resilientneighbourhoods.ca) many partners, including municipal governments, emergency management agencies, and community organizations, as well as participating housing operators and residents. We express our gratitude to every individual and organization involved for their commitment, resources, and efforts in cultivating more resilient and interconnected communities.

This work would not have been possible without the ongoing support of the Hey Neighbour Collective, which has provided the resources, support, and collaborative environment to expand the reach and deepen the impact of the Connect & Prepare program. Learn more at the Hey Neighbour Collective website (heyneighbourcollective.ca) about how its partners work to address loneliness and social isolation in multi-unit housing.

Learn More

To read more about activities in the other pilot communities along with more detailed learnings and action planning, see the complete Scaling Pilot Learning Report on the BRN website.

Building Resilient Neighbourhoods | resilientneighbourhoods.ca

Hey Neighbour Collective | heyneighbourcollective.ca

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