

# HOUSING-UNIT TAKEOVER (HUT)



Advocacy Centre  
for Tenants Ontario

Tenant Duty  
Counsel Program

# An Overview

## What is a Housing-Unit Takeover

A housing-unit takeover (HUT) is a term used to describe a situation where a tenant's guest refuses to leave, causing tenancy issues. These issues could include putting the tenancy at risk or making it an unsafe or inaccessible environment for the tenant to live in ([Community Counselling Resource Centre, 2024](#)).

In other words, HUTs occur when guests use coercion or manipulate tenants into accommodating long-term unwanted arrangements in their housing ([Homeless Hub, 2016](#)). Tenants could also be subjected to domestic or physical violence, drugs, elder abuse and criminal acts such as weaponry or trafficking taking place in their home.

HUTs encompass situations in which an existing social housing tenant is exploited or **trafficked** by another individual seeking access to their housing unit ([ACTO, 2025](#)). In many cases, unhoused or precariously housed guests exploit a tenant's vulnerability, using coercion or intimidation to gain entry.

In these circumstances, the guest has no legal tenancy which may prompt the landlord to raise concerns about overcrowding, interference with other residents, and/or potential damage to the unit or property ([Community Counselling Resource Centre, 2024](#)).

In some cases, police intervention is often required to remove the guest ([Community Counselling Resource Centre, 2024](#)). Over time, these issues can put a tenant's housing at risk.



### Human Trafficking

Human trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation, harbouring and/or exercising control, direction or influence over the movements of a person in order to exploit that person, typically through sexual exploitation or forced labour ([Department of Justice Canada, 2021](#))

More importantly, the tenant may no longer feel safe in their own home and may be reluctant or unable to seek help or share with a housing provider that their unit has been taken over (Community Counselling Resource Centre, 2024).

Commonly reported reasons for this reluctance include:

- Fear of being blamed for “outing” the guest.
- Concern about potential retaliation against themselves.
- Being labeled “complicit” if drug use or other illegal activity occurred in the home and included the tenant.
- Intimidation through threats of physical or sexual violence toward the tenant, their children or other household members, designed to stop them reporting or testifying to the police (Crime Prevention Ottawa, 2013).

The prevalence of HUTs was raised as an emerging issue in social housing by interviewees of our research study (ACTO, 2025). In most cases, survivors of HUTs faced extreme forms of violence, including trafficking, sexual assault, physical violence, and psychological terror. The guest causing harm was often involved in criminal activity and used the unit to conduct that activity, which included drug or weapons trafficking, extortion, and robbery (ACTO, 2025).



## Populations At Risk of Experiencing HUTs

An overview of home takeovers in Ottawa based on a survey of 133 frontline workers found that **86% reported home takeovers occurring in public housing, while 29% reported them occurring in private housing** (Crime Prevention Ottawa, 2013). In 2017, The Dream Team's report, surveyed residents (people with tenancies) across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and found significant takeovers reported in **North York (23.5%), Etobicoke (17.6%), York (17.6%), Toronto (88.2%), East York (17.6%) and Scarborough (26.5%)**.

In addition to this reported distribution across the GTA, there are factors that may increase a person's vulnerability to experience HUTs in any region across Canada. They include:

- **People with physical or mental disabilities** often rely on another person to support their daily needs. This means they have limited control over the actions of the person that they depend on. Also, people with developmental disabilities may struggle with articulating when they are being taken advantage of.
- **Isolated elderly adults**, often experience HUTs more often due to factors such as social isolation and disability (Weissman et al., 2016).

- **Having a low income** guest who cannot afford renting their own housing.
- **Single working mothers with children** may be open to allowing guests into their unit for the purpose of protection or gaining additional support with homecare (Weissman et al., 2016).
- **People who are dependent on alcohol or other substances** may be reliant on someone associated with their substance use and let them into their rental unit.
- **People with a history of incarceration or recently released from prison** with nowhere to go could be vulnerable to being a guest in a HUT situation (Community Counselling Resource Centre, 2024)

In these contexts, vulnerable populations may allow harmful guests into their homes without fully understanding the potential long-term personal consequences such as eviction, safety issues, criminal charges, loss of self control, power and their dignity.

This is because they unknowingly accept the responsibility of fulfilling the guest's unmet social, economic, and personal needs (The Dream Team, 2017).

Tenants may receive the following notices from their landlord if they are being affected by a HUT:

1

### **N4: Notice to End your Tenancy Early for Non-Payment of Rent**

This is common when the tenant has been experiencing financial strain as a result of the HUT.

2

### **N5: Notice to End your Tenancy for Interfering with Others, Damage or Overcrowding**

The tenant is likely to receive the N5 notice if they or their guests caused damage to the property or their actions compromised the enjoyment of nearby residents.

3

### **N6: Notice to End your Tenancy for Illegal Acts or Misrepresenting Income on a Rent-Geared to Income Rental Unit**

The tenant is likely to receive the N6 notice if they or their guests are dealing drugs, handling weaponry or operating human trafficking.

4

### **N7: Notice to End your Tenancy for Causing Serious Problems in the Rental Unit or Residential Building**

The tenant is likely to receive the N7 notice if the HUT compromises the safety of any person in the building.

These notices when served by the landlord, put the tenant at risk of losing their housing, because they are held responsible for any action of their guest ([Community Counselling Resource Centre, 2024](#)).

## The Impact of Housing-Unit Takeovers on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Survivors

Gender-based violence has long been recognized as a significant factor affecting housing stability of women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals. Our research found that survivors who experience HUTs are often further exploited and, in many cases, criminalized or evicted as a result of the activities occurring in their units. Instead of receiving trauma-informed, survivor-centred interventions, tenants experiencing this form of exploitation are frequently pushed into deeper precarity ([ACTO, 2025](#)), including homelessness and exposure to further violence.

One service-provider interviewee ([ACTO, 2025](#)) described how tenants in social housing who find themselves in these highly vulnerable circumstances are often held responsible for damages or illegal activities occurring in their units:

“

*They were trafficking her and the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) came and raided her unit, destroyed it, blew off all the windows, all the doors of her unit, ripped everything up, drywall down, everything. Because everything was, like, hidden. And [the social housing provider] was like, “Well, it’s your place. So, you’re also responsible.*

*- Service Provider Interviewee (SP53)*

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*Women are being evicted from social housing because of drug trafficking happening in their units, by people who are trafficking those women also. And so, they’re... losing...instead of being transferred to a secure place or being supported to get out of that dangerous situation. The housing provider is like, “I don’t want to have to deal with this problem, I’m going to evict you for drug trafficking,” when in fact, that woman is... totally being exploited by the people who are using her home as a hub for trafficking drugs in low-income communities.*

*- Service Provider Interviewee (SP41)*

In some cases, social housing providers involve police when they suspect a housing-unit takeover and may ultimately pursue eviction in an effort to protect the building and neighbouring tenants from potential harm. However, this response can further harm survivors who are themselves victims of exploitation. As another service-provider interviewee ([ACTO, 2025](#)) explained:

These experiences highlight how current responses to HUTs can unintentionally penalize survivors rather than protect them, underscoring the need for housing and justice systems to adopt survivor-centred and cross-sectoral approaches when addressing suspected housing-unit takeovers.

## Policy Recommendations

In Toronto, the social housing waitlist includes a total of **105,115 active applications as of 2025**. Wait times vary significantly by applicant type: families typically wait 3–7 years, seniors 2–4 years, and non-senior singles 8–12 years ([City of Toronto, 2025](#)).

At the same time, wages have not kept pace with the rising cost of market rents across Canada. This growing gap between income and housing costs continues to place immense pressure on people without housing, the result of which can be targeting vulnerable populations with housing to meet their needs.

Protecting survivors (particularly of intimate partner violence, trafficking, elder abuse, or exploitation) from HUTs requires a mix of education, safety planning, and coordinated community response. These recommendations aim to tackle the HUTs faced by survivors.



### 1

## Education

Educating tenants, particularly survivors of violence and other vulnerable tenants about HUT is vital. A study on home takeovers in Ottawa ([Crime Prevention Ottawa, 2013](#)) found that **62% of frontline workers reported difficulty helping tenants recognize when they are experiencing a housing-unit takeover**, including how these situations typically occur and the warning signs to watch for.



## 2 Cross-Sector Collaboration

Strengthening cross-sector collaboration is essential to improving support services. Governments should prioritize establishing safe and coordinated communication channels among tenants, landlords, housing support workers, mental health services, public housing security, case managers, police, and other community service providers.

Such collaboration is especially important in situations involving suspected housing-unit takeovers, as tenants are often reluctant to report concerns due to fear of eviction or the possibility of being implicated.

## 3 Examine Guest Policies in Social and Supportive Housing

Unwanted guests are a significant contributor to HUTs. Housing providers should review and assess guest policies in social and supportive housing, including the potential impact of limited-guest policies. Evaluating this approach could help determine whether stricter guest controls reduce the risk of HUTs.

When carefully designed and implemented, such policies could serve as a protective measure to limit unwanted access to units and better safeguard vulnerable tenants ([The Dream Team, 2017](#)).

4

#### Consult Law Enforcement on Barriers to Addressing HUTs

Municipal housing should consult with police and security services to better understand the barriers that limit their ability to effectively respond to HUTs. Law enforcement officials should be surveyed to identify operational, legal, and resource-related challenges.

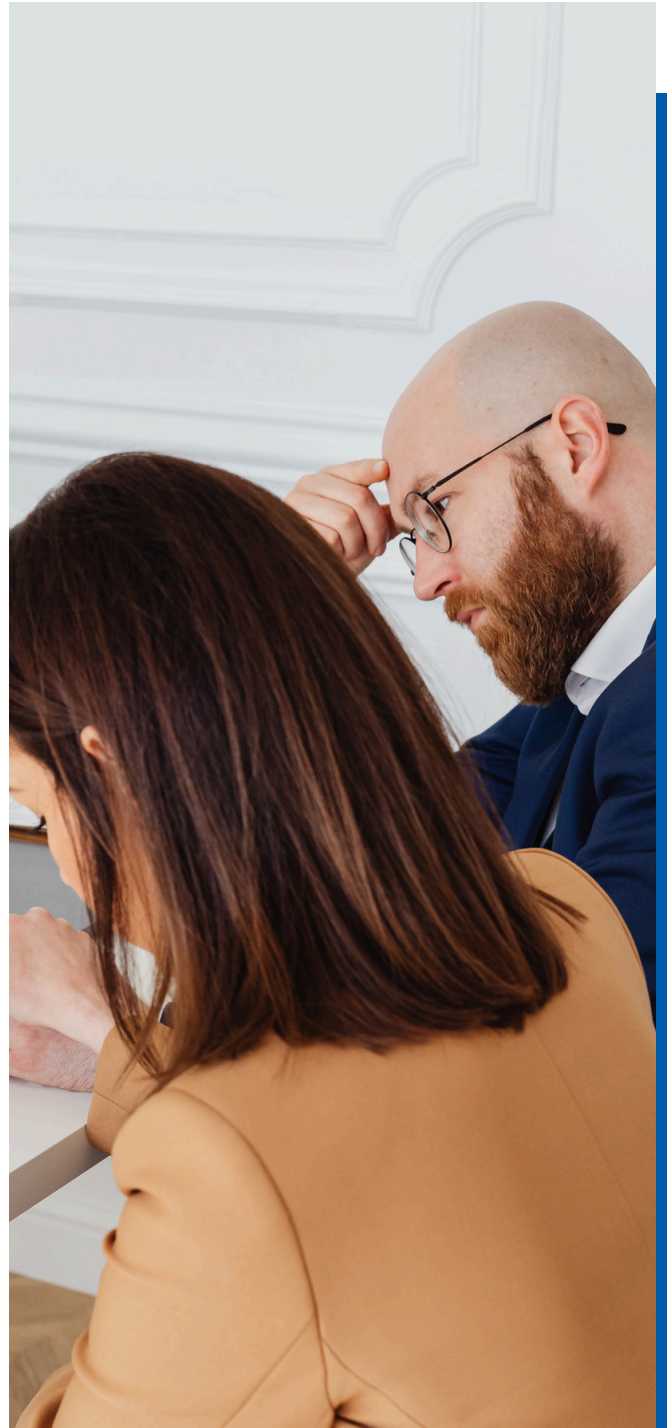
In addition, individuals with lived experience of HUTs, along with peer advocates, should be engaged to help train police and other law enforcement personnel to better recognize, understand, and respond appropriately to these situations.

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#### Increase the Supply of Specialized Supportive Housing for Survivors

The lack of supportive housing has led to survivors with disabilities and complex needs struggling to remain housed.

Increasing the provision of supportive housing would also ensure that survivors with complex needs are protected from a heightened risk of experiencing further violence, HUTs, and homelessness ([ACTO, 2025](#)).



For further insight into housing-unit takeover and additional barriers experienced by survivors of gender-based violence, refer to ACTO's "[The Journey to Housing Stability for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence](#)", June 2025 research report.

## Glossary References

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Tribunals Ontario. Form N5: Notice to End your Tenancy for Interfering with Others, Damage or Overcrowding.

[file:///C:/Users/acto5/Downloads/N5%20instructions\\_final\\_Nov30\\_2015.pdf](file:///C:/Users/acto5/Downloads/N5%20instructions_final_Nov30_2015.pdf) Accessed March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Tribunals Ontario. Form N6: Notice to End Tenancy for Illegal Acts of Misrepresenting Income in a Rent-Geared to Income Rental Unit.

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