

**Affordable Rental Housing: Exploring the Impacts of COVID-19 on Rental Housing in
the City of Toronto**

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Abstract

In the past few decades, house prices and rentals are rising resulting in low- and middle-class people struggling to find quality and affordable housing. Concurrently, government funding for affordable housing has declined and minimal efforts have been made by the public and private sector to develop affordable housing units. In 2020, this issue was heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic which triggered a series of unfortunate and unprecedented situations at a local and global level delineating long-term effect on rental housing and urban neighbourhoods. Consequently, this paper aims to illustrate the effects of COVID-19 on rental housing by exposing the consequences of dismissing the execution of adequate housing as a fundamental human right. This qualitative study obtains a broad range of perspectives on the issue by reviewing media sources and government policies to ascertain the state of rental housing in the City of Toronto. The main findings speak to the lack of tenant protections, opposing perspectives of stakeholders, and the urgent need for rental housing affordability. Finally, this paper proposes considerations for future study and innovative solutions to achieve rental affordability in the City of Toronto.

Foreword

When I began the Master in Environmental Studies (MES) program, I knew that that topic for my Major Paper would involve community and equitable planning. My interest in social justice and challenges surrounding the topic have always been my motivation to seek inclusive solutions that create a better community for all members. In the MES program, I have further developed my knowledge of planning's complex problems, while developing skills on the application of sensible and collaborative solutions, approaches, and methods to problem-solving. The interests I have developed in the MES program include community planning and affordable housing development. As a future urban planner, I want to be an individual who is able to critically analyze, effectively communicate, and provide solutions to social, cultural, and environmental issues. I want to work towards policy implementation that is reflective of demographic changes and structural needs. I believe that equitable planning is only possible if planners formulate policies that center on the needs of minority and marginalized populations first to provide equitable services for all communities.

This Major Paper fulfills the requirements set forth by the Master Environmental Studies program. This paper discusses the broader topic of affordable rental housing by illustrating the impacts of COVID-19 on rental housing in Toronto. My Plan of Study outlines three components which are, the complexities of urban planning, financialization of rental housing, and establishing the needs of the community. Based on these components, the learning objectives that I have incorporated in my Major Paper are as follows:

Learning Objective 1.1: To obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the program requirements of the Canadian Institute of Planners and the Ontario Professional Planners Institute for Candidate membership.

Learning Objective 2.1: To investigate how housing is used as a form of economic growth and development

Learning Objective 2.2: To examine how housing inequalities create forms of oppression in society

Learning Objective 3.2: To investigate how marginalized populations are often forgotten in planning regimes

Acknowledgement

Writing this Major Paper and completing my MES degree are some of the biggest accomplishments in my life thus far. The African proverb “it takes a village to raise a child” comes to mind when I think of all the people that have supported me throughout this journey.

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List of Abbreviations

AGI	Above Guideline Increase
CERB	Canada Emergency Response Benefit
CMHC	Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
CRB	Canada Recovery Benefit
CRCB	Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit
CRSB	Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit
EI	Employment Insurance
LTB	Landlord Tenant Board
OP	Official Plan
PPS	Provincial Policy Statement
REIT	Real Estate Investment Trust
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
STR	Short-term Rental
WHO	World Health Organization

Section 1: **Introduction**

This paper aims to determine the impacts of COVID-19 on the rental housing market in the City of Toronto. My research is centered around the primary question: what impact has COVID-19 had on rental housing in the City of Toronto? This study will particularly examine policies and procedures during COVID-19 and their impacts on tenants and landlords. This topic is important because the rental housing market has experienced plenty of volatility in the past few years and COVID-19 may contribute to even more volatility. Existing literature suggests that pandemics have negative impacts on housing markets (Ambrus et al., 2020). With tenants making up nearly half of the Toronto population, growing rental housing concerns due to financialized housing, and increased levels of poverty, it is critical to evaluate how rental housing is affected by COVID-19 and how to plan for affordable rental housing in a post-pandemic economy.

According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, Canada has recognized adequate housing as a fundamental human right (Human Rights Code, 1990). Adequate housing refers to the access to quality, affordable housing to support individuals and their families. Instead in recent years, housing has become a growing for-profit commodity. This analysis delves specifically into the Toronto housing market. The City of Toronto's housing market has become increasingly more expensive year after year. The volatile market has also continued to create obstacles for low- and middle-income Torontonians who are finding it extremely difficult to afford quality housing options; in particular, affordable rental housing is an ongoing struggle.

Affordability is a relative term that has varying definitions when applied in the City. According to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), affordable rental housing is defined as spending less than 30% of gross annual income on housing (CMHC, 2018). The City of Toronto defines affordable rental housing as the total monthly amount of housing (including heat and hydro) being at or below the average market rent which is issued by CMHC (City of Toronto, 2021c). The varying definitions of affordable housing have drastic implications on affordable housing policy and make it difficult to develop funding models to accurately achieve affordable rental housing within the City.

In the past thirty years, it has become clear that the private rental market has failed to adequately accommodate the demand for affordable rental housing in Ontario and large urban

centres such as Toronto. From the 1950s to 1980s Toronto experienced a high volume of privately built rental housing. However, there was a steep decline during the 1990s – as more Torontonians were entering homeownership – and the decline has continued to the present day where the amount of privately built rental housing is at an all-time low (Black, 2014). Decreased supply of rental housing is problematic because in Toronto, 47% of residents are renters (City of Toronto, 2018) which makes the rental market crucial for those seeking affordable housing. With 95% of all housing in Canada being provided by the private market, the private sector has continued to provide limited affordable rental housing options (Hulchanski, 2007). Without the development of affordable rental housing, the rental market does not cater to the needs of low- and middle-income Torontonians. Most privately owned rental housing developed is not affordable and this does not alleviate housing concerns. In fact, from 2014 to 2017 almost 40,000 rental units were constructed in Toronto and only 2.5% were considered affordable (Monsebraaten, 2018). This means that approximately 1 in 40 new build rental units were considered affordable during this time period.

As privatized housing becomes the main approach for housing development, the impacts on affordable housing (specifically affordable rental housing) are more dire. In recent years, Toronto has experienced a transition to condominium-style developments as the main development in rental housing. This is a result of condominiums being financialized in the real estate market. Condominium-style rental units pose issues to affordable rental housing because the financialization of housing has increased the cost of development and land value which has resulted in developers creating purpose-built rentals to see quicker returns on capital investments. Housing has become a money operating business whereby each stakeholder (i.e., developer) expects quick financial returns that match the risk they assumed. Consequently, the incentive to build rental apartments as opposed to condominium-style housing is minimal because condominiums often have a quicker capital return. Moreover, the supply of rental housing within the City is insufficient in comparison to the population growth in Toronto. According to Canada Population (2019), between the years 2011 to 2016, Toronto experienced a growth rate of 4.46% and the population is only expected to continue increasing (as per the *A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*). This new growth is expected to come from immigrants, refugees, international students, and foreign workers. Since homeownership costs are at an all-time high in Toronto (The Canadian Press, 2021), the

projected population growth will only increase the demand for rental housing. Ultimately, with future growth rates, the lack of development of affordable housing will surely create more difficulties in accessing affordable rental housing within Toronto.

Furthermore, the proliferation of coronavirus (also known as COVID-19) has exacerbated the Toronto housing crisis. Coronavirus is an infectious disease that has spread to approximately 221 different countries and territories, infecting approximately 181.1 million individuals (and counting) as of June 28, 2021 (Pettersson et al., 2021). On March 11, 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic. This revelation created global panic and uncertainty. Notoriously, global pandemics foster both short- and long-term economic challenges that can alter a country as a whole (Jorda et al., 2020). COVID-19 is not an exception to this fact, as the Canadian economy is facing multiple health-related, economic, social, and political challenges (Liu, 2020). Housing, particularly rental housing, has seen crucial changes that negatively affect minority groups (Jones & Grigsby-Toussaint, 2020). During the initial months of COVID-19, it is estimated that there were over 1 million job losses in Canada (Evans, 2020). Due to job loss, affording basic necessities such as food and shelter became very difficult for many individuals. During the first state of emergency in the City of Toronto (March 2020), many individuals were provided with rent relief from their landlords and subsidies from the Federal government. This relief was meant to give tenants the opportunity to defer payments for a limited time.

This Major Paper is divided into eleven sections. *Section 1* provides an introduction to the current context of Toronto's rental market while outlining the historic context of COVID-19. *Section 2* details the research methods that I used to conduct this study. *Section 3* identifies several planning policies enacted to achieve affordable housing within the City of Toronto. *Section 4* and explores the historic background of housing policies in Canada. *Section 5* outlines current rental housing programs and policies within Toronto. *Section 6* provides a brief comparison of other global pandemics and their effects on rental housing. *Section 7* details specific COVID-19 government policies that affect rental housing, tenants, and landlords. *Section 8* and *Section 9* discuss stakeholder perspectives on the rental market during COVID-19. Lastly, *Sections 10* and *11*, provide a deeper analysis on the impacts of COVID-19 of the rental market and identify current changes to the rental market.

Section 2: **Research Methods**

This study uses qualitative research methods to examine how rental housing has been impacted throughout COVID-19. The paper involves conducting an online analysis of written media and document review to define the existing literature surrounding rental housing in the City of Toronto. The methodology of the paper is comprised into the following sections: (1) review of housing policies and programs in Canada, (2) historical review of rental housing in Toronto from years 2000–2021, (3) review of government policies during COVID-19, and (4) review of newspaper articles, websites, etc., with respect to the perspective of both tenants and landlords during COVID-19.

1. Review of Housing Policies and Programs in Canada

To properly understand how rental housing is portrayed in public discourse, I compiled a list of preliminary research of literary articles and written media. Affordable housing legislation was also consulted to provide a full overview of public and private housing in Canada. The search engines used for this research include databases such as ProQuest, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. The articles selected were based on a review of abstracts and general relevance to my research topic.

2. Historical Review of Rental Markets During Major Crises in Toronto

To understand the implications of a major crisis on the rental housing market, I conducted a 20-year historic review of the rental market from years 2000-2020. Over this period, there are three moments of particular interest: the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) pandemic of 2003, the financial crisis of 2007/2008, and the COVID pandemic of 2020. Both the SARS pandemic and the financial crisis are addressed briefly to provide a comparison for how rental markets change and respond during a crisis. I utilized website databases from the CMHC to provide data on the rental housing market in regard to price, size, vacancy rate, etc. I then used charts to display the influence of the three identified moments on rental housing.

2. COVID-19 Government Policy Review

As COVID-19 is an ongoing pandemic, understanding and contextualizing the applicable government policies is necessary to fully grasp how the policies affect rental housing. A grey literature analysis of government websites and online newspaper articles were utilized to review all the policies and guidelines that came out in regard to COVID-19 and rental housing by the federal, provincial, and municipal level. I used this analysis to determine

and evaluate how the government responded to rental housing issues that are affecting neighbourhoods in the City of Toronto.

3. Review of the Tenant and Landlord Perspective During COVID-19

As both the tenant and the landlord are active stakeholders in the rental market, understanding their perspective of the effects of COVID-19 on the rental market is crucial to this analysis. I conducted a systematic overview of various online newspaper websites, blog posts, and social media such as the Globe and Mail, Global News, and Twitter pertaining to the lived experiences of tenants and landlords. The focus was to share stories detailing how tenants and landlords have been coping with job loss, rent payments, rent relief, and evictions.

The search for prospective articles for the perspective of tenants section mainly consisted of Google News and searching keywords such as “COVID-19”, “tenants”, “rental housing”, “advocacy” and “evictions”. The search for prospective articles for *the perspective of landlords* section consisted of using Google News and searching keywords such as “COVID-19”, “rental housing”, “REITS”, “Toronto” (for REIT landlords) and “COVID-19”, “rental housing”, “landlords”, “Toronto” (for small business landlords). Articles dated from mid-March 2020 to mid-May 2021 were used for this study. To find applicable articles, I read through titles and skimmed through the articles. The chosen articles were used as they were relevant to my primary research question.

Section 3: **Planning Policy Legislation**

My research is guided by the need for the City of Toronto to address affordable housing, particularly focusing on affordable rental housing. The existing land use planning framework has undergone significant changes in the past few years to support affordable housing implementation. Ontario, through the Planning Act, the Provincial Policy Statement, and the Growth Plan legislation, provides direction for local municipalities to prepare policies and action plans to guide development and change. As such, this section details the applicable planning legislation in place to help tackle Toronto’s affordable housing crisis.

The Planning Act is the main legislation that deals with providing a range of housing choices. Under this Act, municipalities can establish Official Plans and land-use designations to support the development of affordable housing. The Act can also be used to streamline the approval process of affordable housing development. Alongside the Planning Act, the *Provincial Policy Statement* (PPS) also provides legislation for the implementation of

affordable housing within the province. Particularly, section 1.4 of the PPS establishes policies that “provide an appropriate range and mix of housing options and densities to meet projected market-based and affordable housing needs of current and future residents” (Provincial Policy Statement, 2020, p.16). Both the Planning Act and the PPS address the need to ensure affordable housing development in Ontario. Thus, municipalities must ‘have regard to’ provincial interests in relation to affordable housing objectives.

The Official Plan (OP) provides an extensive overview of the legislation and policies that will shape the future of the City of Toronto. The OP sets out a broad vision for plans and goals that govern land use in Toronto. Although the OP goes into greater depth regarding the future of Toronto, for the sake of this paper, close attention will be drawn to Section 3.2.1 “Housing”. The OP emphasizes the need to accommodate current and future residents with access to “adequate, affordable and appropriate housing” (City of Toronto, 2019, p.3-20). Under the OP, the City outlines the following policies: (1) stimulate production of new private sector rental housing; (2) preserve existing affordable housing stock; (3) investment in new rental housing, particularly affordable rental housing, is encouraged; (4) work in partnership with other levels of government as well as private and non-profit sectors (City of Toronto, 2019). By addressing affordable rental housing, the City is committed to helping some of its most vulnerable constituents.

Section 4: Historic Review of Housing Policies

Understanding the history of rental housing policy in Canada is important when discussing the current need to address affordable rental housing. Each level of government in Canada operates differently when regulating housing. The Federal government controls interest rates, economic policy, immigration, and other aspects of housing that affect the supply and demand (Walker & Carter, 2010). The Provincial government outlines land use policies, building codes, and construction standards (Walker & Carter, 2010). The municipal government oversees zoning by-laws, lot regulations and subdivision design (Walker & Carter, 2010). This section examines public housing policy at the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal level while also examining the private sector’s involvement in affordable housing.

4.1 Public Housing

The strongest years for public housing policy were between the 1960s to the mid-1990s (Suttor, 2016). During this period, the federal government was actively involved in public housing initiatives and still allowed for the provincial government to enact housing policies (Suttor, 2016). With increased federal funding in the 1960s, the federal government transferred housing development projects from the role of the municipality to the role of the province (Sutton, 2016). With the additional funding, provinces were able to develop large-scale housing projects that provided housing to vulnerable populations who could not afford housing in the private market (i.e., Immigrants, low-income individuals, veterans, etc.). Large-scale public housing developments are meant to create more units for more individuals and decrease the overall cost of housing. However, these projects required plenty of funding and political support to acquire land, building the homes, and gaining tenants/homeowners. As such, political funding is necessary when creating public housing projects

4.2 Private Housing

Not only was the Canadian government involved in public housing, but the government also sets housing policies for privatized housing. According to Hulchanski (2004) and Crook (2004), the Canadian government favours homeownership models and provides more support for homeowners. Hulchnaski (2004) states that homeownership assistant programs were heavily predominant in the 1970s which helped Canadians purchase homes and increased the Canadian homeownership rate by two-thirds. Additionally, in the 1940s, the government also helped supply mortgage loans to assist with homeownership and this aspect has continued to the present day (Hulchanski, 2004). Homebuyers were also permitted to withdraw money from their Registered Retirement Savings Plan to purchase their home. Hulchanski (2004) argues that the Canadian government is pro homeownership and develops housing policies and programs tailored for middle- and high-income homebuyers and not low-income tenants. Since Canadian housing policies are developed based on accommodating homeownership, the private sector as well has mainly developed housing for homeownership purposes as opposed to affordable rental housing.

4.3 Rental Housing

In 1972, the Federal government began to restructure the Federal tax system which had an effect on both the demand for rental units and the supply of rental stock (Crook, 1998; Smith, 1983). The tax reform helped recreate a tax shelter for individuals and/or companies that invested in rental housing (Crook, 1998). Although the tax reform was not purposely meant to affect housing policy, Canadian rental housing was nonetheless impacted. Prior to the tax reform, there was a boom in the construction of apartment buildings because the tax system allowed for deductions of high-interest expenses by providing subsidies for rental housing (Steele & Tomlinson, 2010). As such, rental housing investors benefited from the development of rental apartments across Canada. In particular, rental housing investors benefited from building multi-unit rental housing as they were able to obtain tax deductions. However, most of these incentives were eliminated due to the introduction of capital gains tax (Smith, 1983). The introduction of capital gains tax reduced the desirability of rental housing investments and shifted housing investments towards ownership. This is because as opposed to renting, homeownership allowed for non-taxable capital gains and provides investors with equity investments. Rental housing investors were disincentivized to continue developing rental housing and instead shifted their focus to homeownership investments (Smith, 1998). As a result, there was minimal development of purpose-built rental housing and this trend has continued to the present day.

Section 5: Current Rental Housing Programs, Action Plans and Policies

5.1 Canadian National Housing Strategy

In 2017, the Federal government initiated a housing strategy called the Canadian National Housing Strategy. This was the first major federal housing intervention in the past 25 years. Essentially, the Canadian government outlined \$40 billion geared towards developing affordable housing over the next 10 years. The objective is to reduce homelessness by 50% across Canada (Mathieu, 2018). The program also sets out \$13.2 billion to provide low-cost loan options for the development of affordable housing and/or repairing affordable housing. This housing strategy permits community housing providers, a municipality, and/or the private sector to develop new construction or repair existing affordable housing as long as 30% of the rental units are below the median market rental rate (National Housing Strategy, 2017). The median market rental rate is outlined by CMHC and new affordable housing construction must

provide affordable rental units for at least 20 years (CMHC, 2018). This strategy will help increase funding for affordable and public rental housing, while also helping maintain existing rental properties.

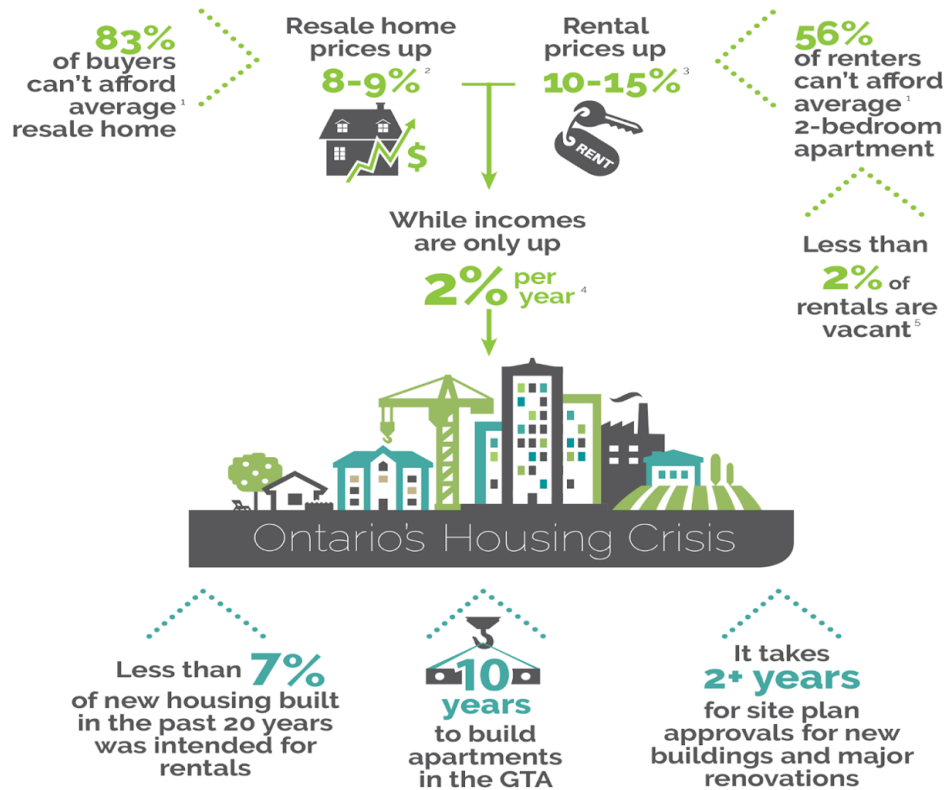
5.2 City of Toronto Housing Now Initiative

In January 2019, City Council voted to launch the Housing Now Initiative in the City of Toronto. This initiative is meant to develop affordable housing options to accommodate mixed-income, mixed-use, and transit-oriented communities (City of Toronto, 2021d). The initiative includes developing 10,000 new homes, including approximately 3700 new affordable rental housing units in 11 different sites across Toronto. There are three stages incorporated in this initiative: (1) business case, (2) market offering, and (3) housing delivery. Stage three is the longest stage, taking approximately 2-4 years to complete, with a targeted deadline for 2022-2024. In terms of what affordability would resemble in this initiative, Housing Now aims to create affordable housing for a diverse range of incomes. An affordable rental unit will be determined based on rents that are 40% and 80% of the City's average market rent. The affordable homes will also be available to households with an annual income of \$21,000 to \$56,000. As a result, this initiative is meant to increase the supply of affordable housing within the City of Toronto.

5.3 More Homes, More Choice: Ontario's Housing Supply Action Plan

More Homes, More Choice is used as a guideline to help the provincial government curb Ontario's rising housing crisis. The goal of this Action Plan is to develop strategies to build housing that meets the needs of all residents. With respect to rental housing, More Homes, More Choice aims to focus on developing more rental properties to decrease the shortage of rental units for tenants (More Homes, More Choice, 2019). Figure 1 visually displays some of the challenges to housing and rental prices within Ontario. The figure displays how rental prices continue to increase significantly, while income marginally increases, and the number of rental units developed are not enough to sufficiently house all tenants. As rental prices are on the rise, it is important to provide more rental stock for tenants because an increase in supply should help bring down the price of rents (More Homes, More Choice, 2019).

Home prices and rents in many large and mid-sized cities, have risen faster than incomes.



Lengthy approvals and high costs have slowed down the building of new housing and rentals.

Figure 1: Image of Ontario's Housing Crisis

Source: More Homes, More Choice: Ontario's Housing Supply Action Plan (2019)

5.4 Bill 184: Protecting Tenants and Community Housing Act

In March 2020, the Ontario government tried to support tenants by introducing Bill 184, also known as the *Protecting Tenants and Community Housing Act, 2020* (Georgieva, 2020). This Act amended the Building Code Act, 1992, the Housing Services Act, 2011, and the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, and enacted the Ontario Mortgage and Housing Corporation Repeal Act, 2020 (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2020). Although the name of this Act suggests that tenant protection is the priority, rental tenant advocates suggest that Bill 184 actually hinders tenant protections by creating barriers to tenant justice (Parkdale Organize, 2021b). For instance, before Bill 184, if a tenant was unable to pay their rent and subsequently facing eviction, the tenant and landlord would both set a hearing date to appear

before the Landlord and Tenant Board (CERA, 2020). At this time the tenant could explain their financial circumstance and suggest a realistic repayment option to the Board. This process helped protect tenants from unfair repayment agreements. Bill 184 outlines that landlords are now able to provide tenants with a repayment plan for unpaid rent during the pandemic months and if a tenant violates the repayment plan, the tenant may be subject to evictions without a hearing (Chris, 2020). The problem with this new method is that tenants can potentially sign a repayment agreement that they cannot afford which could cause a potential eviction and further worsen the financial stress of the tenant.

There are opposing opinions about the role of the provincial government and their attempt to ease the financial burdens of rent during COVID-19. Although Premier Doug Ford implemented numerous preventative measures to help reduce the spread of COVID-19, Bill 184 became law in a short period of time (by July 2020), which caused concerns for many tenants. Some tenants claim that Bill 184 will spark an increase in evictions during COVID-19 which will put many vulnerable tenants at risk (Ruddy, 2020). This Bill is an example of how good intentioned action can lead to unintended and perhaps damaging effects on vulnerable tenants fuelling equity concerns in the rental housing market. Thus, tenants remain vulnerable and at risk during these unprecedented times.

Section 6: **Brief History on Major Crises in the City of Toronto**

This section provides rental housing data ranging from 2000 to 2020, particularly focusing on 2003, 2007- 2008, and 2020 for the following reasons: the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) pandemic of 2003, the financial crisis of 2007/2008, and the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. As Toronto was a hotspot for SARS, many events were suspended in the area and thousands of individuals were quarantined; this forced the economy to pause. Illustrating the effects of the SARS pandemic will allow for a direct comparison between the effects of SARS on Toronto and the effects of COVID-19, as both pandemics are health-related. Further, the financial crisis of 2007/2008 gravely impacted economies in Canada, the US, and Europe. Due to the global economic downturn, analyzing housing prices (particularly rental housing prices) is critical when assessing the impact of the financial crisis in Toronto. Finally, COVID-19 is a global pandemic that is both health-related and has had immense economic implications within the past year. Assessing the impacts of COVID-19 with respect

to the rental housing market is the basis of my study, consequently, this section is very crucial to my work.

6.1 SARS

The SARS outbreak of 2003 brought many unprecedented and rapid changes in cities around the world causing numerous hospitalizations and deaths. SARS was first encountered in China on November 16, 2002 (Goudie, 2003). At the time, the Chinese government assumed that the infections were an atypical form of pneumonia (Goudie, 2003). The disease soon spread to Vietnam, Hong Kong and Singapore, before reaching Canada (Goudie, 2003). In total, forty-four people died during the SARS pandemic in Toronto (Wall, 2006). The initial case of SARS in Toronto was identified on February 23, 2003 and the first death due to SARS was on March 5, 2003, (Canada, 2004). Although the death rate does not compare to other health-related disasters such as Ebola or H1N1, SARS remained prevalent for a relatively long time in Toronto.

There were two waves of SARS in Toronto, the first wave was issued on April 22, 2003 and the second wave was issued on May 20, 2003 (Canada, 2004). During the first wave, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued a travel advisory against Toronto as a preventative measure to control the spread of SARS (Canada, 2004). WHO lifted the travel advisory on April 30, 2003 however, on May 20, 2003, a patient infected multiple individuals at a Toronto hospital which resulted in the WHO placing Toronto back on the list of countries with recent transmissions (Wall, 2006). Due to the travel advisory issued by the WHO, Toronto experienced a decline in tourism activity. It is estimated that during the summer of 2003, Toronto hotels reported occupancy rates of 30% which is a steep decline from the usual occupancy rate of 80% (Daniels, 2003). As the tourism industry supports upwards of 95,000 jobs within Toronto (Globe and Mail, 2003), the lack of tourism during summer 2003 may be the reason for the slight decline in rental prices in 2004.

6.2 Financial Crisis

Both scholars and economists suggest that the cause of the financial crisis was a combination of credit debt accumulation and the popping of the housing bubble (Acharya & Richardson, 2009; Fields, 2017; August & Walks, 2018). As housing prices continued to rise

exponentially between the years of 2002 to 2007, this only exacerbated the severe financial crisis that occurred between 2007 to 2008. Unlike the US and Europe that experienced tremendous financial losses during the recession, the Canadian economy did not experience economic loss to the same extent due to the regulations in place by the Canadian government that prevented predatory lending practices (Gordon, 2017). One of the main concerns of the financial crisis was the impact on housing (August & Walks, 2017). As subprime mortgages and predatory lending were promoted in the years prior to the crisis in the US and areas in Europe, it is not surprising that many homes were foreclosed, and homeowners were forced to default on mortgage payments. This issue was mainly a concern for Europe and the American economy. Instead, many Canadian investment firms became financialized landlords transforming the rental housing market which affected tenants, communities and enhanced socio-spatial inequalities (August, 2020). As a result, rental prices continued to increase despite the economic crash.

6.3 COVID-19

The speculated first case of COVID-19 in Ontario was reported on January 25, 2020 and the first death was reported on March 11, 2020 (Neilson, 2020). Throughout the initial outbreak, international travel was limited, only essential workers were permitted to continue working in-person, remote learning/working became the “new normal”, and a province-wide lockdown was in effect. Although COVID-19 is a health-related pandemic, the economic related issues of COVID-19 have been very severe as well. This pandemic has also created a multitude of uncertainties such as; job security and long-term health issues. COVID-19 completely altered the ways in which people maneuver through urban spaces. With respect to rental housing, initially, as the pandemic grew worse, rental housing costs decreased because of rising unemployment. As unemployment rates continued to climb, many individuals were forced into Employment Insurance (EI) and/or Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB).

Due to immense job losses, it became increasingly difficult for tenants to pay their rent during the beginning of the pandemic which is why many municipalities and landlords provided rent relief initiatives to help support renters (Adkins and Konings, 2020). As the pandemic persists, the rental market continues to be unpredictable. In a recent study by REMI Network (2020), data from *Rentals.ca* and *Bullpen Research & Consulting* demonstrate that

average rental prices for typically more expensive units declined within major Canadian cities such as; Toronto, Vancouver, and Winnipeg. Throughout the initial duration of the pandemic, there is a steady decline in the average monthly cost of rent in Toronto (see Table 1). The decline in cost is most likely associated with the economic crash that Canada experienced due to COVID-19 in the beginning. Notably, the decline in the average rent is only throughout 2020. Table 1 and Figure 2 both illustrate the steady increase in average rents beginning in April 2021 to present day. This increase suggests that there is a correlation between the economy “bouncing back” from COVID-19 and average rents in the City. Therefore, in the coming months average rents may continue to increase.

Average Rents in Toronto (Monthly)	
Month	Price (\$\$)
Jan 2020	\$2571
Feb 2020	\$2527
Mar 2020	\$2483
Apr 2020	\$2387
May 2020	\$2380
Jun 2020	\$2314
Jul 2020	\$2261
Aug 2020	\$2220
Sep 2020	\$2158
Oct 2020	\$2150
Nov 2020	\$2040
Dec 2020	\$2024
Jan 2021	\$2086
Feb 2021	\$2000
Mar 2021	\$1987
Apr 2021	\$2004
May 2021	\$2027
Jun 2021	\$2086

Figure 2: Graph of average rents in Toronto from January 2020 – June 2021
Source: Myers, 2020

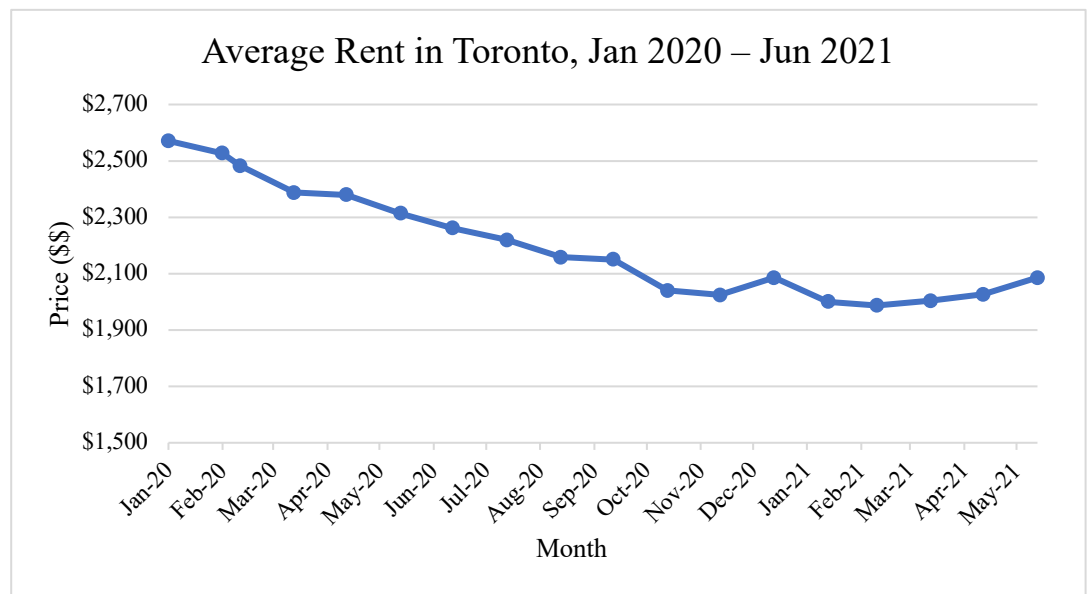


Table 1: Table of average rents in Toronto from January 2020 to June 2021
Source: Myers, 2020

6.4 Rental Market Trends

SARS

In the years 2003 and 2004, Toronto experienced an all-time high in vacancy rates. In 2003, vacancy rates were at 3.7% for a two-bedroom rental while in 2004, vacancy rates rose to 4.5% for a two-bedroom rental (see Table 2). CMHC also reports that there was lower rental vacancy in high-end rentals (CHMC, 2004). This means that tenants are choosing quality rental accommodations and are willing to pay extra for it. Notably, the immigration flow into Toronto continued to increase as the concerns over SARS eased within the City which has also contributed to the rental demand. However, due to lower mortgage rates and alternative forms of rental tenure, the rental demand dropped. With lower demand, a landlord's ability to raise rent prices is limited. As such; the average rent for a two-bedroom in Toronto went from \$1040 in 2003 to \$1052 in 2004 (see Table 3). Although the rent difference from 2003 to 2004 is marginal, CMHC suggests that this is due to landlords needing to increase the price to accommodate the rental vacancy increase (CMHC, 2004).

Financial Crisis

In 2008 rental vacancy dropped to 2.1% in comparison to 3.2% in 2007 (see Table 2). The 2.1% rental vacancy rate has been the lowest recorded rate in 7 years in the City (CHMC, 2008) (see Table 2). This record low vacancy rate can be attributed to the economic uncertainty due to the financial crisis. During the years of the financial crisis, many condominiums were being developed, increasing pre-construction condominium sales (CMHC, 2008). Reports indicate that first-time home buyer purchases were down to 40% in 2008 compared to 47% in 2007 (CMHC, 2008). Clearly, less people were financially comfortable buying homes and instead opted for rentals, thus increasing the rental demand. Other factors that increased rental demand include: loss of full-time employment, increased condominium development, and immigration (CMHC, 2008). There was a significant increase in rental prices from 2007 to 2008. In 2007 the average rent for a two-bedroom unit cost \$1061 compared to \$1095 in 2008 (see Table 3). CMHC (2008) suggests that since many individuals were waiting for their condominiums to be built, they often resorted to rentals which helped increase the rental demand.

COVID-19

Although, it may be assumed that rental prices would decrease given the COVID-19 pandemic, that is not the case. CMHC reports that there was an increase in rental housing

prices from 2019 to 2020 (see Table 3). CMHC notes that the increase in rental pricing may be related to the high vacancy rate within the City throughout 2020. The vacancy rate went from 1.5% in 2019 to 3.4% in 2020 (see Table 1), which is the highest vacancy rate in the past 14-years. Since there have been less renters in the City, landlords are increasing the cost of rent to offset the balance of not having enough tenants. Reports also indicate that rent growth in the Greater Toronto Area is 4.6% in 2020 as opposed to 6.1% in 2019 (CMHC, 2020). Although the growth is still high, the City of Toronto experienced the lowest rent growth in 2020 (CMHC, 2020). The lower growth rate in Toronto can be explained by the fact that there is high concentration of service and hospitality workers in the urban core and these workers have been the most impacted by COVID-19. Reports indicate that employment (i.e., joblessness and remote working) and housing preference (i.e, wanting to live in a less dense area to avoid infection transmission) are reasons why tenants are opting for suburban rentals instead of rentals in the City (CMHC, 2020). Lastly, as displayed in Table 3 and Figure 4, the average cost of rent increase from 2019 to 2020. CMHC suggests that the increase in price is related to landlords providing incentives such as; free months of rent or free parking, as opposed to drastically lowering the cost of rent. Therefore, average rents did not decrease across Toronto.

Average Rental Vacancy Rates (Yearly)	
Year	Rate (%)
2000	0.6
2001	0.9
2002	2.5
2003	3.8
2004	4.3
2005	3.7
2006	3.2
2007	3.2
2008	2.1
2009	3.1
2010	2.1
2011	1.4
2012	1.7
2013	1.7
2014	1.6
2015	1.6
2016	1.4
2017	1.1
2018	1.2
2019	1.5
2020	3.4

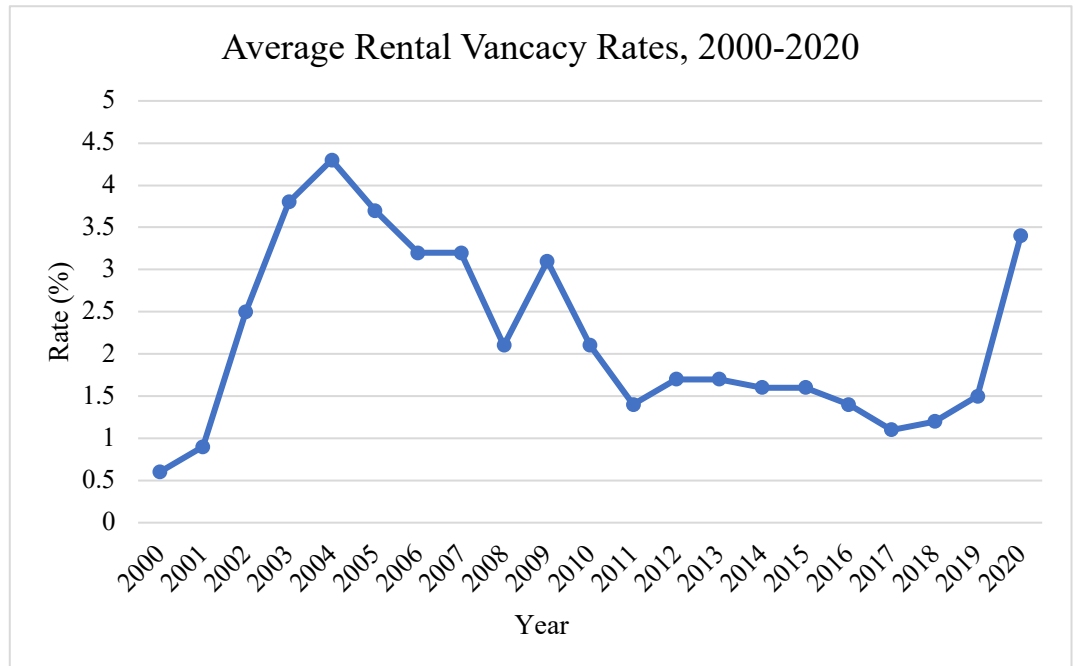


Figure 3: Graph of average rental vacancy rates in Toronto from 2000-2020
Source: CMHC, 2000-2020

Table 2: Table of average rental vacancy rates in Toronto from 2000-2020.
Source: CMHC, 2000-2020

Average Rents in Toronto																					
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Bachelor	\$683	\$695	\$729	\$731	\$727	\$724	\$740	\$740	\$764	\$758	\$777	\$819	\$837	\$873	\$896	\$937	\$957	\$1,013	\$1,080	\$1,148	\$1,202
1-Bedroom	\$830	\$866	\$891	\$884	\$886	\$888	\$896	\$900	\$927	\$926	\$949	\$977	\$1,007	\$1,032	\$1,067	\$1,103	\$1,132	\$1,194	\$1,261	\$1,374	\$1,417
2-Bedroom	\$979	\$1,027	\$1,047	\$1,040	\$1,052	\$1,052	\$1,067	\$1,061	\$1,095	\$1,096	\$1,123	\$1,149	\$1,183	\$1,213	\$1,251	\$1,288	\$1,327	\$1,404	\$1,467	\$1,591	\$1,622
3-Bedroom	\$1,165	\$1,224	\$1,253	\$1,211	\$1,235	\$1,243	\$1,272	\$1,252	\$1,288	\$1,290	\$1,322	\$1,349	\$1,413	\$1,454	\$1,458	\$1,510	\$1,515	\$1,569	\$1,633	\$1,766	\$1,837

Table 3: Table of average rents in Toronto by property type from 2000-2020
 Source: CMHC, 2000-2020

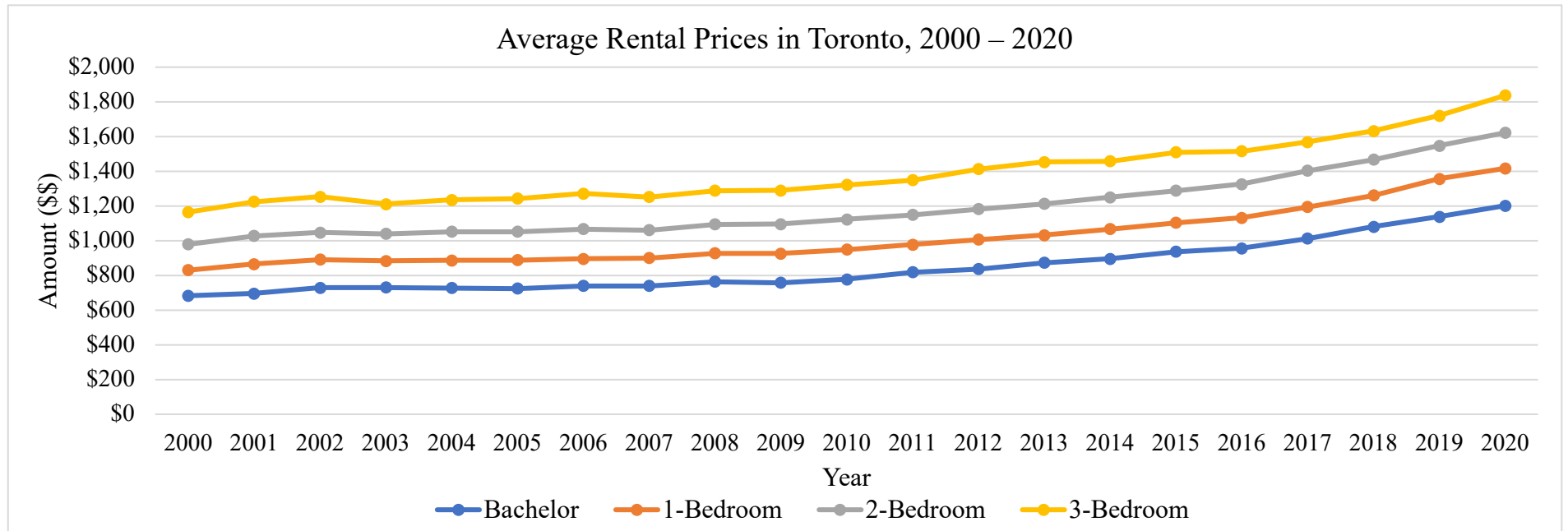


Figure 4: Graph of average rents in Toronto by property type from 2000-2020
 Source: CMHC, 2000-2020

Section 7: **Government Policy Review**

Each government level has responded to COVID-19 differently in hopes of ensuring the best possible outcome for the communities they serve. Although some of these regulations have been beneficial, this section will also reveal how government regulations also further exacerbate inequalities in the rental housing sector.

7.1 Federal

On March 18, 2020, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau took immediate action and announced that Canadians will have access to financial support due to the unprecedented unemployment strain of COVID-19. The Government of Canada budgeted up to \$27 billion to support both workers and businesses (Canada, 2021). With this budget, there were numerous emergency response plans implemented to ensure that Canadians were and continue to be supported throughout COVID-19. Particularly, the Government of Canada set out five emergency response plans (see Table 4). Currently, four of the five benefit plans are active as CERB was removed and replaced by the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB). These varying benefit options were instituted to provide Canadians with relief. These subsidies were crucial in assisting individuals to maintain and obtain their basic needs. The quick response from the Canadian government throughout the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in immediate financial aid for individuals who lost their jobs.

It is important to note that all subsidy option operate separately and cannot be combined at any point. Many Canadians were readily granted CERB relief which amounts to \$2000 per month. However, 53% of Canadians live paycheque to paycheque with few dollars in savings in case of an emergency (Investment Executive, 2019) hence \$2000 per month may not be a sufficient amount of money to survive on monthly. For instance, MoneySense.ca (2020) reports that tenants who lived paycheque to paycheque with minimal savings, experienced difficulties coping with COVID-19 in spite of their CERB payment. This is a reasonable concern when expenses such as rent, utilities, car insurance, credit card bills, and student loans are factored into an individual's average monthly budget. Therefore, there may not be much money left for an individual to purchase groceries and/or miscellaneous monthly purchases. Tenants have questioned if CERB is actually a relief for tenants or a bailout for landlords as most of the CERB money that tenants received was used to repay rent (Parkdale

Organize, 2020). As a result, although government intervention was needed to provide income to individuals, the amount of money and/or lack of rental support from the government created additional barriers for tenants during COVID-19.

In April 2021, the Canadian government released the *Budget 2021: A Recovery Plan for Jobs, Growth, and Resilience*, which is Canada's Plan to ensure an economic recovery against COVID-19. Budget 2021 is a \$101.4 billion plan covered over three years to create jobs and support a resilient community (Government of Canada, 2021c). COVID-19 has proven to disproportionately low-wage workers, young adults, and racialized Canadians. Budget 2021 is an investment to address the COVID-19 recession by creating jobs, growing the middle class, and ensure long-term growth for businesses (Government of Canada, 2021c). Budget 2021 is meant to be an inclusive plan that will increase the minimum wage to \$15, support the development of 35,000 affordable homes for vulnerable Canadians, and get 100,000 people out of poverty (Government of Canada, 2021c). Through this plan, the Canadian government is committed to addressing affordable housing solutions that have been intensified due to COVID-19.

Emergency Response Plan	Purpose	Eligibility	Amount (\$\$)
Employment Insurance (EI) Program	Provides financial support for eligible workers by replacing part of their income	On payroll before COVID-19 and paying part of income to EI *Individuals who qualified for EI were transferred to the CERB relief plan	Minimum \$500 every week before taxes
Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) (currently inactive)	Provides financial support for employed and self-employed Canadians directly affected by COVID-19 and are not entitled to EI benefits	Available to workers: Residing in Canada and at least 15 years old <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Who have stopped working due to COVID-19 OR have exhausted their EI OR eligible for regular, sickness, or fishing EI benefits ● Who had employment and/or self-employment income of at least \$5000 prior to the date of application ● Who have not quit their job voluntarily 	\$2000 for a 4-week period. Must reapply every 4 weeks
Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB)	Provides financial support for employed and self-employed Canadians directly affected by COVID-19 and are not entitled to EI benefits	Available to workers who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Were not employed or self-employed for reasons related to COVID-19 ● Had a 50% reduction in average weekly income compared to the previous year due to COVID-19 ● Did not apply for Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit OR Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit OR short-term disability benefit OR EI OR Quebec Parental Insurance Plan benefit ● Were not eligible for EI benefits ● Reside in Canada ● Are at least 15 years old ● Have a valid Social Insurance Number ● Earned at least \$5000 12 months prior to the date of application 	\$1000 every 2 weeks (\$900 after taxes). Must reapply every 2 weeks

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have not quit their job or reduced hours voluntarily ● Are actively seeking work during the period of application ● Have not turned down reasonable work during the period of application ● Are not self-isolating or quarantining due to international travel 	
Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit (CRCB)	Provides financial support to employed and self-employed individuals who are unable to work because they must care for their child under 12 years old or a family member who needs supervised care	<p>Available to workers who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Were unable to work at least 50% of the scheduled work week because they are caring for a family member for one of the following reasons: Their school, daycare, etc has closed or is unavailable to them due to COVID-19 The person under care is: is sick with COVID-19, has health complications, self-isolating due to COVID-19 ● Did not apply for Canada Recovery Benefit OR Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit OR short-term disability benefit OR EI OR Quebec Parental Insurance Plan benefit ● Reside in Canada ● Are at least 15 years old ● Have a valid Social Insurance Number ● Earned at least \$5000 12 months prior to the date of application ● Are the only person in the household applying for the benefit for the week ● Are not self-isolating or quarantining due to international travel ● You are not receiving paid leave from your employer 	\$500 (\$450 after taxes) per week for a maximum of 38 weeks. Must reapply every week

Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB)	Provides financial support to employed and self-employed individuals who are unable to work because they are sick or need to self-isolate due to COVID-19 or underlying health conditions that put them at greater risk	<p>Available to workers who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Were unable to work at least 50% of the scheduled work week because you're self-isolating for one of the following reasons: You are sick with COVID-19 You have an underlying health condition You are advised to self-isolate due to COVID-19 ● Did not apply for Canada Recovery Benefit OR Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit OR short-term disability benefit OR EI OR Quebec Parental Insurance Plan benefit ● Reside in Canada ● Are at least 15 years old ● Have a valid Social Insurance Number ● Earned at least \$5000 12 months prior to date of application ● Are not self-isolating or quarantining due to international travel ● You are not receiving paid leave from your employer 	\$500 (\$450 after taxes) per week for a maximum of four weeks. Must reapply every week
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Table 4: Table of the different emergency response plans initiated by the Federal Government for COVID-19
Source: Government of Canada, 2021b

7.2 Provincial

On March 23, 2020 Premier Doug Ford declared a state of emergency in the province of Ontario (Martin-Robbins, 2021). This meant all non-essential businesses, indoor recreation, public, and private educational facilities, childcare centres, theatres, concert venues, bars and restaurants (with the exception of take-out orders) were closed to the general public (Ranger, 2021). The state of emergency was meant to last a few weeks with the potential for businesses to reopen on April 6, 2020. However, this was not the case due to the rapid progression of COVID-19 throughout the province. By mid-April, Ontario reported that COVID-19 cases had surpassed 10,000 with 500 deaths (Ranger, 2021) which allowed for a prolonged lockdown period. Ontario officially began the first phase of reopening non-essential businesses on May 4, 2020. At this time, only seasonal businesses such as garden centres and landscaping were allowed to reopen for curbside pickup. Slowly, Ontario began phased reopenings of more outdoors public spaces and non-essential businesses during the summer months. During the time of the state of emergency until the first phased reopening, it is estimated that over 355,000 Ontarians lost their jobs due to COVID-19 in 2020 (Jeffords, 2021). It is safe to assume that due to the immense job loss many individuals faced financial burdens during the initial outbreak of COVID-19.

During the first state of emergency in March 2020, Ford declared that rent relief will be provided for all tenants (Boutilier, 2020). Rent relief occurs when tenants are able to withhold their rental payments for a limited period of time (Campbell, 2020). Rent relief was a crucial policy during COVID-19 as it was meant to ease some of the financial burdens for tenants. On March 19, 2020, Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) Doug Downey and MPP Steve Clark released a statement indicating that due to the rapid progression of COVID-19 in Ontario, landlords will not be able to serve eviction notices to tenants (see Figure 5). This statement comes after multiple tenants and housing advocates urged politicians to take a stand on preventing mass eviction notices and Canadian banks announced a mortgage deferral program

for homeowners (Miller, 2020). This statement was able to ease some tension and anxiety for tenants during the initial COVID-19 months.

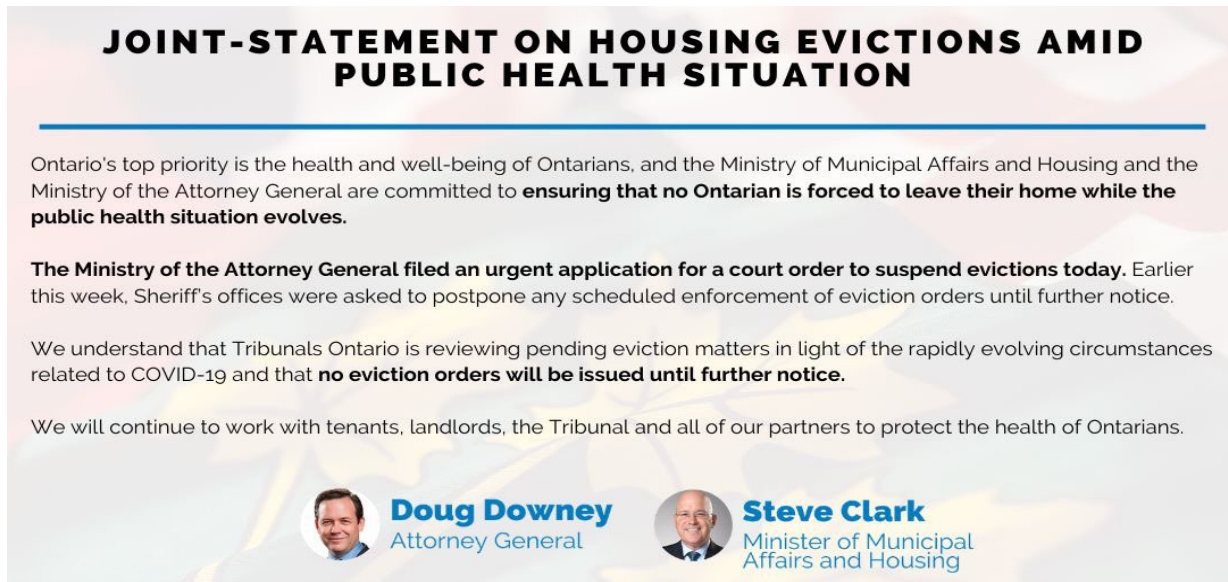


Figure 5: Statement from Doug Downey and Steve Clark about Housing Evictions

Source: Twitter.ca, 2020

7.3 Municipal

According to the City of Toronto, a short-term rental (STR) is defined as a dwelling unit that is rented for less than 28 consecutive days in exchange for payment (City of Toronto, 2021a). This includes bed and breakfasts but excludes hotels and motels. Recently, STRs have gained more traction as popular companies such as Airbnb have made STRs easily accessible. Essentially, Airbnb allows hosts to rent their spaces to guests for a specific time period. Airbnb can be accessed either via the Airbnb app or through the online website. Airbnb operates as an accommodation site by inviting guests to choose the location of where they would like to stay, choose the date of the stay, choose the type of accommodation (i.e., amount of rooms, beds), then choose their preferred accommodation. Airbnb is an internet-based market base that uses peer-to-peer accommodations to rent rooms to guests and tourists (Guttentag, 2015). Peer-to-peer accommodations refer to common individuals who are able to rent spaces to other common people. Peer-to-peer home-sharing is very difficult for local governments to regulate as it does not operate through government regulatory practices (Nieuwland & van Melik, 2018). The sharing economy allows people to have access to goods and services quicker, while also

allowing for money to remain in the community (Davidson & Infranca, 2016). For instance, the money generated from Airbnb stays within the community and helps the individuals of the neighbourhood rather than money being taken out of the community by large hotel chains.

On the other hand, STRs become very problematic due to housing policies that limit STRs and the number of residents that can live in a home. Jefferson-Jones (2015) states that current housing policies are meant to stimulate a competitive economy and not to promote a new collective economy. Without the regulation of the government, STRs prove to have many negative externalities within local communities. For instance, the influx of short-term rentals on Airbnb allows for landlords to drastically increase the rent prices in certain areas making renting unaffordable for the community (Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018). This is because STRs can limit the long-term rental supply which can cause landlords to increase rents for existing tenants. The use of STR platforms has caused some landlords to switch their long-term properties – which are aimed for local tenants – to short-term tenants – which are aimed for tourists and/or visitors. With a limited rental supply, the rental market becomes more competitive for tenants and landlords are able to increase prices to match the price of STRs. In a recent US study, Barron et al. (2021), found that a 1% increase in Airbnb listings resulted in a 0.018% increase in rental prices and a 0.026% increase in housing prices. This may seem like a marginal increase however, this increase can jeopardize affordability for low-income tenants.

Prior to COVID-19, STRs such as Airbnb contributed to the worsening of the Toronto housing crisis causing increased volatility in the rental housing sector (Jamasi & Hennessy, 2016; Wieditz, 2017; Wachsmuth et al., 2017). As of December 2017, Toronto's Waterfront Communities was home to the highest rental prices and Airbnb listings in Ontario (Fairbnb.ca, 2019). According to Fairbnb.ca (2017), the Toronto Waterfront Communities is also the area with the highest concentration of "ghost hotels". A "ghost hotel" is the name dubbed to condominium units that are strictly used for Airbnb purposes. Ghost hotels essentially help create volatility in the rental market, specifically resulting in 2-3 times higher average rental pricing increases for long-term rentals (Fairbnb.ca, 2019).

COVID-19 has prevented travel and tourism within the City of Toronto, which means the use of Airbnb was essentially halted. During the initial lockdown in March 2020, the use of STRs such as Airbnb was only permitted for individuals in dire need of temporary housing (City of Toronto, 2021a). In fact, during the lockdown months, if Airbnb hosts were found violating

the STR ban they could face fines of \$100,000 (City of Toronto, 2021). Without the active presence of Airbnb, there has been a relative shift in the rental housing sector (specifically in the condominium market) with many fully furnished units being listed as long-term rentals (Feldman, 2020). As a result, declining STRs have helped with the changing rental housing patterns within the City of Toronto.

Section 8: **Perspective of Tenants**

As this paper directly discusses the implications of COVID-19 on the rental housing market, tenants are very important in this conversation because they are the individuals that are most affected by rental price changes and policies. Since I did not conduct my own interviews, this section is based on a review of media sources. Tenants in Toronto have faced numerous stresses such as financial stress, mental health stress, physical stress, the stress of the unknown due to COVID-19, etc. Although all stresses faced by tenants may be equally important, this section aims to highlight two opposing rental perspectives that tenants have experienced since the commencement of COVID-19 as well as discuss tenant activism and advocacy.

8.1 Fear of Eviction

As the pandemic worsens, one of the main concerns that tenants have encountered are eviction policies. While most individuals have felt unhinged during this extended pandemic period, many tenants have increasingly displayed their distress and concern over forced evictions during COVID-19. COVID-19 has had drastic effects on many individuals' standard of living and yearly income due to unstable work hours and/or job loss. With that said, financial security and stability is not a luxury that many tenants have been afforded. Based on a consolidated media review of various news articles and blog posts, tenants have outwardly expressed their distress and concerns over the lack of sympathy from the federal and provincial government and landlords during COVID-19.

During the initial COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020 Doug Ford pledged that no tenant will be evicted and although there were no forced evictions, sources claim that L1 applications were still being filed during the lockdown (Gibson, 2020). An L1 form is an application to evict a tenant due to failure to pay rent or failure to retroactively collect outstanding rent (Tribunals Ontario, 2015). Before filing an L1, a landlord must serve their tenant with an N4 which is a notice to end the tenancy early due to nonpayment (Tribunals Ontario, 2015). In 2020, during the

first provincial lockdown, it is estimated that there were approximately 6,770 eviction applications filed from landlords to the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) between the time of March 17th to August 1st (Gibson, 2021a). This demonstrates that although a lockdown was enforced, landlords were still preparing to evict tenants once the lockdown was over in the summer of 2020.

Furthermore, when the latest “stay-at-home” order lifts in June 2021, tenants are increasingly worried about future evictions.

“They would like to evict us and I don't know why. We are good tenants and we pay our rent. I cannot afford a higher rent”, says Theresa, a Parkdale mother who has been served with an eviction notice (Ricci, 2021).

Of course, it is understandable that a landlord would want a non-paying tenant to evacuate so the unit can be rented out to a paying tenant. However, COVID-19 has made tenant evictions more complicated. For instance, if a tenant has lost their job and is using government subsidies such as CRB to pay for groceries, utilities, bills, etc. the tenant may not have enough money to also pay for rent and have some supplementary money for savings. Currently CRB payments are \$1800 per month (after tax) which may not be a livable income for an individual depending on their lifestyle, dependents, debts or other variables that may impede their ability to survive on \$1800.

“What we see in general in the neighbourhood is that as rents rise, and the rental real estate market heats up, landlords look for any way they can to evict the tenants, especially tenants like Theresa who are living in two-bedroom apartments where they could raise the rent substantially,” says Cole Webber, a community legal worker with Parkdale Community Legal Services (Ricci, 2021).

Not only has it become harder for tenants to pay their rent, but due to increased rental vacancy, landlords are trying to increase rent prices to offset the balance of not having paying tenants in every unit.

According to Toronto.com (2020), tenants have expressed their continuing anxiety due to uncertainties regarding their rental status. Gibson (2021b) states:

“He hesitated to spend 80 per cent of his Canada Emergency Response Benefit on rent, and paid just \$500 in April to his landlord, Pinedale Properties. He missed rent in May, and over the ensuing months, that rental debt has climbed ever higher”.

This statement reveals the disheartening nature of the tenant experience during COVID-19. As tenants struggle to find money to pay for rent, they are also faced with the decision of whether they should spend their entire subsidy on rent or leave some money to plan for the unpredictable pandemic.

According to CMHCs 2020 Rental Housing Report, Toronto reported the highest amount of rental arrears (0.92%) in Canada (CMHC, 2020). Approximately 11% of all rental units within the City reported arrears in rent payments during 2020 (CMHC, 2020). A rental arrear is a legal term for unpaid rent or rent that a landlord claims a tenant owes them (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2021). The difficulty to obtain payment can be directly linked to COVID-19 as the pandemic has disproportionately impacted resident neighbourhoods with essential workers and low-incomes (Pelley, 2021). Figure 6 illustrates the number of COVID-19 cases that have occurred within the City of Toronto from January 21, 2020, to May 5, 2021. Based on Figure 6, the outer neighbourhoods within the city (i.e., West Humber-Claireville, Malvern, York University Heights, etc.) have had the greatest number of COVID-19 cases. Further research indicates that the outer edge neighbourhoods are also populated with low-income and minority groups which suggests that COVID-19 disproportionately affects marginalized populations within the City of Toronto. Toronto Public Health has concluded that COVID-19 has a higher risk of spreading amongst individuals with the following socio-demographic characteristics:

- People living with low-incomes
- People from racialized communities (considered “visible minorities” on census)
- Newcomers (immigrants arriving in Canada within the past 5 years (2016))
- People with lower levels of education (no diploma, certificate, or degree)
- People who were unemployed (as of 2016 *does not account for COVID-19 job loss)
- People who live in crowded households (City of Toronto, 2020b)

These social determinants of health have proved to play a pivotal role in the spread of COVID-19 in the City of Toronto. Clearly, where a person lives can determine their ability to contract the virus. According to Benfer et al. (2021), rental housing evictions can allow for COVID-19 transmission as eviction can lead to overcrowding, homelessness, and housing instability. Increased overcrowding and homelessness hinder compliance with mitigation and prevention strategies because there is increased contact with others, fewer opportunities for social

distancing, and inadequate shelter to properly quarantine. As such, eviction prevention during COVID-19 can be a key component in reducing COVID-19 transmission and infection.

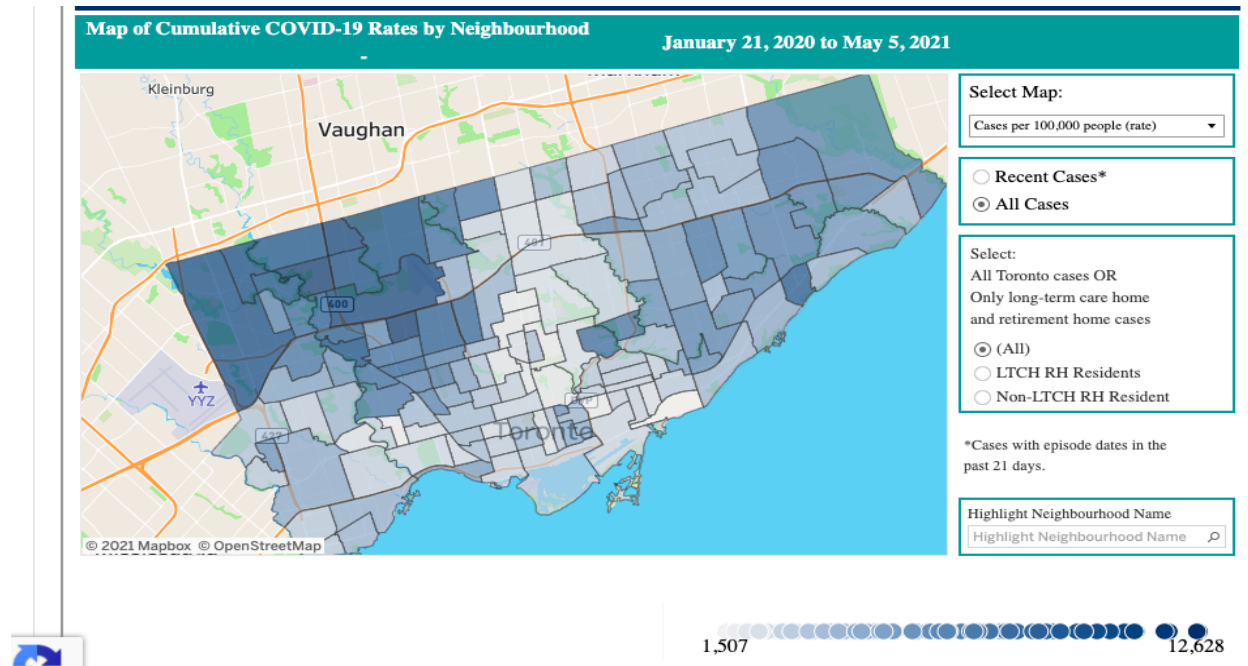


Figure 6: Image of COVID-19 cases within the City of Toronto from January 21, 2020 to May 5, 2021

Source: The Public Health Case and Contact Management Solution, Ontario Ministry of Health (City of Toronto, 2021b)

8.2 Tenant Advocacy

Rental tenants have been very outspoken about the injustice, stress, and fear that they are experiencing since the beginning of COVID-19 (Parkdale Organize, 2021a). Consequently, tenants have been advocating for their rights, supporting one another, and voicing their concerns about governmental policies on rental housing during COVID-19. Tenant advocates argue that the government is not providing adequate solutions to curb the tension and strain of dealing with the outcomes of COVID-19 when trying to secure rental housing (Raza, 2020).

“Politicians have left us to flounder. Some blame jurisdiction, some blame a lack of political will, but 47 per cent of the city are renters. That’s why you’re seeing tenants unions, we’re going to defend each other,” says Sam Nithiananthan, Peoples’ Defence volunteer (Raza, 2020)

Most of these advocates are protesting for the same rights: no evictions and rent decreases. As Ontario lifted its moratorium on rental evictions in late July 2020, there has been an uproar in tenant advocacy linked to evictions and defaulted rental payments (Haider & Moranis, 2020). For instance, the East York 50 - who are members of 50 households from Crescent Town, Goodwood Park, and Teesdale - called on politicians and landlords in late November 2020 to stop eviction processes as the City of Toronto entered its second lockdown (Lavoie, 2020). Many members of the East York 50 had upcoming eviction hearings with the LTB which heightened their fears as they could be evicted in the middle of a pandemic.

“I don’t know where I’m going to go [if I get evicted],” says Zinnat Jahna, resident at Crescent Town (Lavoie, 2020).

The East York 50 proves to be an example of just one of the tenant advocacy groups struggling to fight evictions during the pandemic. This form of advocacy is important as it actively demonstrates the additional hurdles that tenants must face during the pandemic to secure their home.

Moreover, Parkdale Organize and the Goodwood Park Tenants Union are also tenant advocacy groups that have actively displayed their discontent with landlords and the government regarding tenant protections during the pandemic. Parkdale Organize vehemently opposes COVID-19 evictions and has outwardly condemned Bill 184 for not truly protecting tenants during the pandemic (Parkdale Organize, 2021a). Currently, Parkdale Organize has outlined some demands that they believe landlords and government officials should undertake to support tenants:

- Tenants need rent forgiveness
- No evictions for unpaid rent during the pandemic
- No eviction orders during the pandemic (Parkdale Organize, 2021b).

These demands are meant to be guidelines to help ensure that tenants are protected and properly supported throughout the pandemic.

Goodwood Park Tenants Union is also a grassroots tenant union that opposes COVID-19 evictions and advocates against landlord injustice. Members of this Union mainly reside in Toronto’s East York neighbourhood (Ore, 2021). This neighbourhood is home to new immigrants and frontline workers, it is also considered a COVID-19 hotspot in Toronto (Ore, 2021). The Union has organized rallies as a preventative measure to respond to neighbourhood

evictions. One of their main goals is to create a collective negotiation agreement between tenants and landlords (Reza, 2020). The collective agreement works to ensure that tenants do not feel pressured by landlords to sign and/or commit to a rental repayment plans that they cannot afford. Both Parkdale Organize and the Goodwood Park Tenants Union are examples of how tenant neighbourhood initiatives during COVID-19 are becoming an important avenue for tenants supporting tenants throughout the pandemic.

Furthermore, tenant advocacy is not just by means of rallying outdoors; rather the advocacy has transitioned to online platforms such as Twitter involving a larger space for tenants to communicate and connect with fellow stakeholders and the public body. In March 2020 the Twitter account @KeepYourRent was formed to organize tenant communities in Toronto and enact a social movement pertaining to tenant rights during COVID-19. @KeepYourRent also shares links to Evictions Ontario which provides a detailed outlook on the ongoing eviction hearings happening throughout the City. According to Evictions Ontario, during the months of November 2020, December 2020, and January 2021, there have been over 13,000 eviction hearings pushed through by the LTB (EvictionsOntario.ca, 2021). Of these 13,000 eviction hearings, 90% of applications were brought forth by landlords pertaining to unpaid rent (EvictionsOntario.ca, 2021). Not all tenants have been provided with appropriate rent relief during the pandemic which is a cause for concern considering these evictions were being processed during provincial lockdowns.

According to tenant advocates, the sole way to properly support tenants in Toronto is not by enforcing a “rental freeze”, instead, by providing a tenant subsidy (Greene, 2020). A tenant subsidy would provide tenants with additional income to help pay their rent during the pandemic (Withers, Walks & Bunce, 2021). One may argue that tenants are already provided with government subsidies; however, according to CMHC, the average rent in the City of Toronto is \$1523 per month (CMHC, 2021). If a tenant were to apply for and receive CRB they would receive \$1800 for the month (\$900 bi-weekly). Based on the average rent in Toronto, a tenant would be left with \$277 to support themselves and/or their family. \$277 for the month to pay for food, transportation, utilities, etc this is not a liveable amount of money to sustain oneself. This is why tenant advocates are urging the government to provide a rent subsidy. The subsidy will help tenants pay their rent and have a livable income during the pandemic.

8.3 Rental Negotiations

Although COVID-19 has presented many obstacles for tenants, some tenants have had positive rental experiences. During the pandemic, the rental market in Toronto has slowed down which has allowed for bargaining and negotiating to take place (Gaviola, 2020). According to CMHC, rental vacancy within the City of Toronto has increased from 1.5% in 2019 to 3.4% in 2020 (CMHC, 2021). Notably, much of the rental vacancy is in condominiums (Senagama, 2021). Former Toronto Regional Real Estate Board President Lisa Patel suggests that since many condominiums were used on Airbnb or other STR platforms, the vacancy increases can be associated with the lack of tourists in the City (TRREB, 2021). Although, the lack of STRs have helped increase vacancy rates, the increase can also be associated with employment loss, halted immigration flow, and young adults who have either moved back in with their parents or no longer need to live in the City for school or work (Senagama, 2021). Lehrer et al. (2010) suggest that condominium sales are currently being driven by three groups of buyers: (1) young professionals, (2) empty nesters, and (3) immigrants. As young adults are also choosing to move back in with their parents due to job loss, many post secondary students are learning virtually negating the need for a rental unit in the City, and the usual flow of immigrants has stopped, these changes are affecting rental housing in the City (O'Brien, 2020a). For these reasons, there has been a surplus of rental units (mainly condominiums) which has allowed for a decrease in rental prices in some areas. For instance, many luxury neighbourhoods in Toronto such as the Annex, Yorkville, Bloor-Yonge and Bay Street Corridor saw significant drops in rental pricing during COVID-19. The Annex saw a rental decrease of 11.5%, Yorkville decreased by 19.21%, Bloor-Yonge decreased by 21.58%, and Bay Street Corridor saw the largest decrease of 22.56% (Hanrahan, 2021).

Due to higher vacancy rates, some landlords have decided to provide incentives for new tenants. For instance, the Globe and Mail reports that in midtown Toronto, the eCentral building offered one month free rent for selected units and a building in the west end of Toronto gave out free \$1000 Visa prepaid gift cards to new leasers (Lundy, 2020). Research group Urbanation released data indicating that the majority of vacancies within Toronto are located in the downtown core and in newer condominiums (Urbanation, 2021).

“I’ve seen two months of free rent with at least a year-long lease as well as things like six months of free parking or storage” (Gaviola, 2020)

is a statement made by a tenant who was shocked by some of the incentives landlords offered tenants during the pandemic. In December 2020, Rentals.ca reported that the average rental property in Toronto was down 7.1% from the year prior (Balakrishnan, 2021). This suggests that many tenants have the ability to renegotiate their rents to potentially cheaper prices for rental units in prime locations in Toronto. Not only have tenants been provided with incentives but these incentives have also led to cheaper overall rental prices for the year. As evidenced, the steep decline of demand for rental units allowed for an interesting change in the rental market which benefited some tenants.

Section 9: **Perspective of Landlords**

Another stakeholder involved in the rental market is the landlord. There are two dominant types of landlords present: small business landlords and financialized landlords. Similar to the section above, the research for this chapter is based on a media analysis of the perspectives of both small business and financialized landlords in the City of Toronto during COVID-19.

9.1 Small Business Landlords

Small business landlords are essentially small business landlords that own a few properties and use the money from tenants as part of their livelihood. As a small business, small business landlords have economically suffered throughout COVID-19 by not being able to attain rent money from tenants and/or having vacant units. Since Ford issued a rent freeze in March 2020, some landlords have struggled to obtain any type of rental payment from their tenants (Abozaid, 2021). For instance, landlords have stated that the rent freeze permits “lazy” tenants to have an excuse not to pay their rent (Levy, 2021). Ryan Sills - landlord of a 1-bedroom Etobicoke condominium - claims that he has not received payment from his tenant in over 8 months. Sills claims that he is owed over \$20,000 in rental payments and his tenant is taking advantage of the rent freeze (Levy, 2021).

“If you have a job, do not take advantage of this ... this is for people most in need...if you have a job, we expect you to pay rent,” states Sills (Levy, 2021).

Ryan Sills is not the only landlord that believes their tenant has been taking advantage of the rent freeze during COVID-19 lockdowns.

“I haven’t been working since March 24 [2020], and my tenants informed me that they could pay only 50 per cent of their rent for the coming three months because they also lost their jobs. I have eight tenants in two properties, and it’s a big expense coming out of my pocket. They said that the money they can get from CERB—\$2,000 per person per month—is not enough to pay full rent and put food on the table. I’ll have to use lines of credit if this persists. The Ontario law has put us landlords in a position without options because tenants can live at the landlord’s cost for a very long time. Why didn’t Mr. Ford encourage tenants to go into a grocery store and pay for only half of their groceries?” states Jola Kay (Toronto Life, 2020)

This statement is a clear example of how both tenants and landlords are struggling due to job loss during COVID-19. The rent freeze was important and necessary for tenants who needed extra support during the multiple lockdowns in Toronto; however, the freeze drastically affected landlords who depend on rent payments to support their livelihood. This example demonstrates the strain of competing interests as a result of the rent freeze. Although the rent freeze was meant to assist individuals and their families, the aftermath was devastating to many landlords.

Alternatively, some small business landlords have been fortunate enough to support themselves and their tenants throughout COVID-19.

“I’ve been a landlord for two years—I have one rental property with a single-family tenant. We are blessed to have been minimally affected by Covid-19 so far. I advised our tenant to speak to us if there is anything we can do to help. We have three months of buffer funds for our investment property, so if the tenant is struggling, we may allow them to defer up to 50 to 75 per cent of their rent for up to four months without issue. I’d suggest landlords and tenants openly discuss difficulties and try to find a solution together. The landlord needs the rent to sustain the property and keep a roof over the tenant’s head.” says Walter Cheung (Toronto Life, 2020)

Landlords that were able to maintain their jobs seemed more supportive of tenants. Landlords who saved money for emergency circumstances were also able to better support themselves in case their tenant was unable to pay rent. Both the landlord and tenant exist in a symbiotic relationship, they are codependent on one another. If the tenant does not pay for rent, the

landlord is unable to pay the mortgage which can cause both the landlord and tenant to suffer. The rent freeze and the no evictions policies during COVID-19 lockdowns has caused landlords to be in a very strenuous position because landlords must offset the unpaid balance of their tenants' rent as well as support themselves. Therefore, small business landlords, similarly to tenants, have struggled financially throughout COVID-19.

9.2 Financialized Landlords

Financialized landlords include but are not limited to Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT), private equity funds, and asset management firms that use real estate as an investment opportunity. August & Walks (2017) define financialization as a transition in the way capitalism flows within the economy through financial institutions and channels. Regarding rental housing, financialized rental properties turn ownership into an asset which helps drive the market transforming the rental sector into an investment. The landlords of these financialized properties are often operating rental units as a business with tenants being the consumers of a moderately volatile product. As the Federal government allowed for the introduction of REITs in 1993 (Landlords of Toronto, 2021), corporations became linked to the spiraling changes affecting rental housing in the City of Toronto. REITs allow for investors to easily access profitable real estate opportunities. REITs soon began to invest in multi-family rental units in the late 1990s; this is a result of multiple policies within the Province of Ontario that promote “decontrol rent, deregulate tenant protections, and withdraw from social housing provision” (August & Walks, 2017, p. 125). According to Yiftachel (1998), deregulated housing policies cause spatial public policies to control and deprive the poor and shift resources to the wealthy. Deregulated housing policies have also affected the cost of rental properties in many cities because rent prices increase more frequently, tenants have fewer rights, and there's a reduction of state subsidies (Hochstenbach, 2017).

According to August (2020), from 1996 to 2017, REITs went from owning zero rental properties to owning approximately 165,000 suites in Canada. One of the main ways of increasing revenue in financialized rental properties is by increasing rent costs by turning over suites (August, 2020). Consequently, financialized landlords often replace low paying tenants with higher paying tenants. The displacement of low paying tenants reveals financialized landlords are primarily interested in increasing profit and have strategically implemented

practices to increase revenue by profiting over tenants; this has caused non-financialized landlords to adopt similar practices in hopes of being competitive and increasing year-over-year profits. This exploitative process of rent extraction is what Andreucci et al. (2017) refer to as “value grabbing”. Value grabbing is a term used to describe the production of surplus value through rent (Andreucci et al., 2017). This term is also used to describe class struggles and inequalities that are brought about by unevenly distributed rent values.

Some REITs have fared quite well throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. These financialized agencies have monopolized rental properties and influenced the rental market. REITs not only act as landlords for residential rental properties but also as commercial landlords for grocery stores, fashion stores, pharmacies, and more. Similar to most corporate businesses throughout COVID-19, REITs suffered a large loss due to rent deferrals as a result of multiple COVID-19 lockdowns (Balakrishnan, 2020). For instance, RioCan reported a \$350.8 million loss in the second quarter of 2020 (O’Brien, 2020b). This massive loss is attributed to the fact that RioCan was only able to collect 73% of the rent from both residential and commercial tenants from the months of April, May, and June of 2020 (Balakrishnan, 2020). In terms of rental housing properties, RioCan reported that they had collected 98% of their rents from tenants (Pachner, 2021). According to former CEO of RioCan (a REIT company) Ed Sonshine, he accredits tenant rent collection during COVID-19 to RioCan owning higher-end rental buildings and the tenants in those rental properties have continued to receive paycheques (Pachner, 2021). When asked about the condition of RioCan’s residential properties, Sonshine stated:

“So occupancy has gone down, people are doubling up or moving back in with their parents. You also have two big holes in the rental business. Typically, Toronto gets 200,000 foreign students every year and that whole population is missing. And, in 2020, immigration has been a fraction of what Canada needs” (Pachner, 2021).

Without the influx of foreign students, immigrants, and domestic students who usually live in Toronto to be in close proximity to colleges, universities, and job prospects; there has not been an increase in demand for rental units. Therefore, the lack of demand has contributed to the loss of profit for financialized landlords.

Moreover, REITs have also been notorious for above guideline rent increases (AGI). According to Ontario law, AGIs permit landlords to increase rents for the following reasons:

- *“Major capital work has been paid for and finished (balconies, elevators)”*

- *Conservation programs have been paid for and finished (low energy lights, low-flow toilets)*
- *Safety elements have been paid for and finished (security cameras)*
- *Accessibility elements have been paid for and finished (wheel-chair ramps, automatic door openers)*
- *There's been an extraordinary increase in the landlords property taxes” (FMTA, 2021).*

Although the above points are guided by legitimate reasons, AGI poses problematic obstacles for tenants who are forced to pay more rent, sometimes without notice (FMTA, 2021). According to RenovictionsTO (2021), AGI in Toronto has increased by 250% in 6 years. This can result in tenants paying thousands of dollars more in rent over the course of their tenancy. The additional financial strain caused by AGIs often contribute to the displacement of tenants and the loss of affordable rental housing in Toronto (Zigman & August, 2021). Approximately 84% of all AGI from 2012 to 2019 were issued by REITs (Mastroianni, 2021). CAPREIT (a REIT company) has also stated: “In line with its focus to maximize average monthly rents, CAPREIT continues to pursue AGIs where it believes appropriate” (Mastroianni, 2021). This suggests that REITs are sometimes purposely increasing rental prices in order to maximize rental profits. The increase in rental prices continues to negatively affect tenants and jeopardize their ability to afford rent.

Section 10: **Discussion**

The purpose of this research was to evaluate whether or not COVID-19 has affected rental housing. Some key findings in this study reveal that there have been varying impacts that have affected the rental market in Toronto due to COVID-19. The major themes drawn from the findings are: (1) the lack of protection for tenants, (2) opposing perspectives of stakeholders, and (3) rental housing affordability.

(1) It is reasonable to assume that a competent adult goes to work, makes money, and is able to pay for all their necessities. In this ideal world, this adult is also able to save on the side in the event of a “rainy day”. However, this is not always the case. Many low-income individuals are often subjected to a vicious cycle of living paycheque to paycheque. This means that an individual’s revenue is equal to their expenses. If this is the case, there is no remaining money to save for the future “rainy day”. Without the extra money to save, individuals are more vulnerable whenever there is an unpredicted crisis.

Throughout COVID-19, the lack of employment options allowed for the emergence of extreme vulnerability for Torontonians especially for low-income Torontonians. Although the Federal government provides a monetary subsidy for residents (CRB), the egalitarian approach to the disbursement of funds does not suffice. The assumption that every individual applying for CRB should receive the same amount of money is fallible, as there are individuals in more pressing situations who require more resources and funding from the government. Providing *equitable* subsidies and not equal subsidies, should be priority because the stakes are higher for low-income individuals in more vulnerable situations. Equitable subsidies would mean that if a person were to identify as low-income, they would be provided with more money from the government. Additionally, when examining the types of occupations low-income individuals have within the City, many of the occupations were in the service and hospitality sector. Since the hospitality sector has been negatively impacted by COVID-19 through the various lockdowns which limited the availability of restaurants, this also limited the employment options for hospitality workers. As for service workers, COVID-19 expedited the need for more sanitization services, grocery clerks, warehouse workers, etc. Hence, individuals who have been working in these services are more exposed to COVID-19 which puts them at greater risk for infection. Tenants are therefore subject to a cycle of disproportionate inequities ranging from job loss to increased risk of infection which is why tenants should receive more subsidies during COVID-19 to offset their lower wages.

(2) In sections 8 and 9, I outlined the differing perspectives of tenants and landlords. Tenants argue that landlords have taken advantage of them throughout COVID-19 and they deserve more financial relief. While landlords suggest that it is their right to receive payments for rent and require the payments to uphold their business. These opposing views portray a vicious cycle of an on-going debate between tenants and landlords. Although both sides of this debate are valid in reason, the tenant perspective is ultimately most essential during COVID-19. The particular reason for this is because tenants are more vulnerable, and the stakes for them are higher. If a tenant is unable to pay their rent and their landlord decides to evict them, this can potentially lead to homelessness for the tenant. Thus, vulnerabilities of tenants are more dire in the debate between tenant and landlord during COVID-19.

(3) Fundamentally, the basis of this study is guided by the principle of the importance of affordable rental housing in the City of Toronto. Due to the broad nature of the term *affordability*

there is no way to fully determine what the price of “affordable rental housing” costs because affordability is a relative term. During COVID-19 affordable rental housing is necessary to ease the financial burdens of paying rent for many tenants. Affordable rental housing is also necessary to provide tenants with a home for potential remote work, a place to quarantine, and a home to stay-at-home in. If an individual does not have a home, it becomes extremely difficult to “stay at home” during provincial lockdowns. By denying tenants the right to affordable rental housing, tenants are inherently being denied the right to properly protect themselves from infection. Affordable rental housing does not directly contribute to the spread of COVID-19, however, there is an indirect correlation between affordable rental housing and the spread of COVID-19. Essentially, if tenants are able to find affordable rental units (or are able to remain living in their current rental unit without the fear of eviction) then they are able to better follow the outlined rules and regulations set out by the provincial government to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Section 11: **Conclusion**

Affordable rental housing is a pertinent issue that each level of government must thoroughly address. Given the projected lasting impacts of COVID-19 on the economy, it is reasonable to assume that rental housing will continue to shift to respond to the current instability. I chose to examine affordable housing because this has been an ongoing discussion in Toronto and Canada as a whole for decades. I have illustrated the varying definitions of affordable housing and how using these definitions does not help secure affordable housing in the City. Exploring the rental market in particular is necessary as tenants are often forgotten about in discussions around housing affordability. Some obstacles to achieving affordable rental housing include:

- The transition from public housing to privatized housing which allowed the private market to develop minimal purpose-built rental housing
- The supply of purpose-built rental housing is not enough to meet the demand in Toronto
- Affordability is relative – tenants are the individuals affected the most by rental prices yet, their perspectives on affordability is not used when implementing housing policy

Until some (or most) of these obstacles are tackled utilizing grassroots input to inform public policy and financial reinforcements from governments, developing affordable rental housing will continue to be challenging.

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to expose rental housing inequalities and the need for the City of Toronto to take action in securing and enforcing affordable rental options. Currently, as I write this analysis the price of rental units within the City of Toronto has steadily begun to increase (as of June 2021) in comparison to the cost of rental units during the months of March 2020 to December 2020. COVID-19 continues to remain present in the City and there is still a shortage of available jobs, which means financial insecurity and instability is still a pressing issue. It is reasonable to assume that rental prices would not and should not increase during a global pandemic, but this is not the case. Tenants continue to face inequities and are susceptible to volatile rental prices, which is why the need for affordable rental housing (especially during COVID-19) is necessary.

Future Considerations

As COVID-19 persists, it is important to mention that this study is subject to change based on any new developments. This study is meant to act as a guide for how changes in the rental market sparked by COVID-19 are affecting both tenants and landlords. I acknowledge that my study has limitations, and more research should be conducted in the future. Some considerations for future research on this topic include:

- Implementation of interviews – I chose not to include interviews in my study due to the nature of COVID-19 and time constraints. However, I think interviews of both tenants and landlords would help provide a deeper detailed perspective of some of the troubles that occurred throughout COVID-19.
- Race-based analysis – Understanding rental housing discrimination during COVID-19 may be important as research on minority populations have been increasingly valued throughout COVID-19.
- Post-pandemic research – this research topic is not complete until COVID-19 ceases to exist. Further research should be conducted post-pandemic to determine whether the current issues with affordable rental housing persist.

There is still a need for innovative affordable housing programs – particularly affordable rental housing – from all levels of government to help curb Toronto’s affordable housing crisis. It is the public sector’s responsibility to ensure that housing is treated as a right and a necessity for life, not a commodity. As such, the public sector must continue to allocate funding for the development of affordable rental housing. The public sector must also continue to conduct research with communities and value the voices of tenants as they are impacted by affordable rental housing. Lastly, the private sector must continue to educate themselves on the importance of affordable housing developments and work alongside the public sector to ensure that accommodating affordable housing is a requirement for all new developments.

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