

# Supportive Housing and Surveillance

Boyd, J., Cunningham, D., Anderson, S., & Kerr, T. (2016). Supportive housing and surveillance. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 34, 72-79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2016.05.012>

## Context of Study

Organizations in the unceded Coast Salish territory in Vancouver, Canada provide supportive housing (housing offered for **low-income residents**, and other at-risk populations), in the **Downtown Eastside (DTES) community**.

Less is known on the impacts of **surveillance** (i.e., video cameras, police presence, housing policies) on supportive housing residents.



## Data and Method

Between 2013 and 2015, researchers set out to determine the **relationship between surveillance and supportive housing sites** (i.e., converted single-room occupancy hotels, emergency shelters) by collecting data with participants' verbal consent on issues faced by urban residents



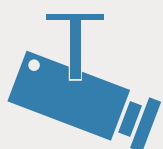
**Researchers collected qualitative, ethnographic fieldwork data** (taking notes from talking with the residents via unstructured conversations, observing and interacting with supportive housing tenants, examining the neighborhood, the outside and inside of housing locations, and the site's activities).

**“Research demonstrates that intrusive encounters with police and security can be stressful and potentially harmful to mental health as well as contrary to harm reduction and public health goals” (Boyd et al., 2016, p. 77).**

## Findings

**Supportive housing** risks undermining marginalized resident rights through **modes of regulation** (social control) often justified as necessary for “care.”

Researchers identified three forms of regulation in supportive housing:



**technological surveillance** (e.g., video cameras)



**police/security guard presence** (e.g., police entering buildings without warrants).



**site-specific coercion** (e.g., restrictive housing policies like required government ID for access; revealing of personal health records to staff members without consent)

## Recommendations

The authors argue that the regulation and surveillance of people should not be considered normal and instead be questioned.

Addressing poverty is key as is **including tenant experiences and ideas**.



While affordable housing is a **critical human right**, supportive housing risks undermining marginalized resident rights through **modes of regulation** (social control) often justified as necessary for “care.”

Residents say such restrictive measures are **controlling** and can undermine the goals of harm reduction initiatives, community care strategies of supportive housing and potentially **violate privacy rights** under Canadian law.

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