

# FAQ: Co-living for Washington State

Understanding an affordable, flexible, community-forward type of housing that serves diverse needs for people in all stages of life.

## What is co-living?

Co-living is a low-cost housing option in which each resident has a private bedroom or living quarters but shares with other residents a common kitchen, bathroom, recreational room, or other facilities.<sup>1</sup>

## Why do we need state legislation?

Statewide legalization of co-living will help bring back a sorely missing, economical form of housing while also mitigating the state's severe shortage of homes. Local laws [ban co-living](#), denying Washingtonians housing options they need. Many cities prohibit co-living homes outright on most of their residential land or else enforce restrictions that make it effectively impossible to build them.

## How affordable is co-living?

Co-living homes are affordable to tenants with moderate to low incomes, without requiring any public subsidy. Rents in newly constructed, market-rate co-living homes in the Puget Sound region are commonly affordable to people earning as low as 50 percent of the area median income. Rents in older co-living buildings can be even lower.

## Is co-living healthy and safe?

Yes. Modern building and fire codes have established standards to ensure that co-living meets all the same health and safety measures that apply to any housing.

## How big are co-living buildings?

Co-living buildings can range from house-sized up to medium-sized apartment buildings. They are especially well-suited for urban infill on narrow lots. State legislation can leave to local authority the option to limit building size.

## Who opts to live in co-living?

- ✓ Renters who want a small, low-cost rental, possibly while saving to purchase a home
- ✓ Residents who wish to trade off square footage for location in a neighborhood they couldn't otherwise afford
- ✓ People who like shared community spaces that facilitate social connections
- ✓ Single seniors who want to downsize and appreciate the alternative mobility options often available near co-living homes
- ✓ Individuals who want a more private alternative to living with roommates in a traditional rental, which frees up larger rentals for families with children

## What kinds of special uses are well-suited for co-living?

- ✓ Unsubsidized workforce housing near jobs to meet the huge deficit most communities face
- ✓ Supportive housing, recovery housing, and "housing first" homes for the formerly homeless
- ✓ Subsidized affordable housing; co-living's lower cost, as opposed to standard affordable housing types, means it needs less subsidy to reach low-income affordability
- ✓ Conversions of commercial buildings to housing, because co-living's shared kitchens and bathrooms require less plumbing and fixtures than standard unit types

## What are the environmental benefits of co-living?

Co-living options help the state reduce sprawl, improve energy efficiency, and lessen car traffic and pollution by creating more housing options for people who want to live near transit hubs, job centers, shops, and schools, rather than in car-dependent homes on the urban fringe.

## What is the history of co-living?

Co-living was once far more common in most Washington communities and provided a healthy inventory of rental homes on the most affordable end of the private housing market. By the 1950s, co-living composed up to 10 percent of the rental stock in some cities. Soon after that, however, local governments began adopting restrictive zoning and other exclusionary rules that increasingly banned co-living or made it impractical to build or operate, and its numbers plummeted.



## What do modern co-living homes look and feel like?

Most of Washington's new co-living construction has been in Seattle and nearby cities. See examples in Seattle ([here](#) and [here](#)), [Kirkland](#), [Redmond](#), and [Shoreline](#).



## Have other states passed co-living legislation?

Yes. In 2023 Oregon passed [HB 3395](#), which includes a provision legalizing co-living (they use the term "single room occupancy," or SRO) on all residential lots in urban areas throughout the state.

## What local regulatory barriers need reform?

In addition to local zoning rules that specifically ban co-living, the two main local barriers to building more co-living housing options are mandates for off-street parking and limits on dwelling unit density.

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<sup>1</sup> Also known as rooming houses, micro-housing, residential suites, single-room occupancy, or congregate housing.