

Consensus Recommendations
To Improve the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000* and Related Regulations
Pertaining to the Special Priority Program

Issue	Background	Recommendation
1. Request for Special Priority Status Service Managers are only allowed to require verification for one of the three special priority eligibility criteria.	To be eligible for special priority, an applicant must state that: - a household member has been abused by another individual; - that the abuser is or was living with the abused individual or is sponsoring the abused person as an immigrant; and - that the abused person intends to live permanently apart from the abuser. The applicant is only required to verify that a member of the household was abused.	Service Managers should be able to verify that an applicant meets all of the special priority eligibility criteria.
2. Verification of Abuse Service Managers are required to accept verbal statements from professionals verifying abuse.	Verbal statements do not leave an audit trail, nor do they result in a real sense of accountability for people who provide verification of the need for special priority status for an applicant.	Written, signed statements from qualified professionals should be required to verify abuse.

Issue	Background	Recommendation
3. Qualified Professionals The list of professionals who can provide verification of abuse is not complete.	The Regulation provides a list of individuals who are qualified to verify abuse. Transitional support workers, who support abused women in the community, are not listed.	The Regulation should be amended to include “transitional support workers” to the list of professionals who are qualified to provide verification of abuse.
4. Review of Special Priority Status Once special priority status has been approved, Service Managers cannot review eligibility.	While a special priority applicant is waiting for housing, their circumstances can change such that they may no longer need special priority status. For example, the abuser may be incarcerated, deceased, or living in outside the province. Alternatively, the applicant may form a new household with a new partner.	Service Managers should have the flexibility to review special priority status at six to twelve month intervals. Service Managers should be able to remove special priority status if it is no longer required because: • the abuser is deceased; • the abuser is incarcerated for longer than two years; • the applicant adds the abuser to the application; • the applicant establishes a permanent relationship with a new partner; • the applicant accepts an offer of rent-geared-to-income housing as a special priority applicant in another service area; • the applicant accepts a special priority internal transfer from the current housing provider.

Issue	Background	Recommendation
5. Removal of Special Priority Status The Service Manager may not revoke the special priority status under any circumstances, regardless of whether the applicant ceases to qualify or is found to have misrepresented their circumstances.	Currently, the applicant retains special priority status even if they reconcile with the abuser. In that case, the abuser is essentially given priority for affordable housing too. Given the long waiting lists that face applicants without special priority status, some applicants may creatively look for means to fit into the special priority category. As a result service managers may sometimes find that a special priority household misrepresented their circumstances.	Service Managers should have the ability to remove the special priority status if the Service Manager receives information that contradicts the verification of abuse. In the event that an applicant who reconciled with the abuser subsequently decides to leave the relationship, service managers should have the flexibility to restore special priority status with the original eligibility date.
6. Internal Transfers Special priority can also be given to applicants on a housing provider's internal transfer list. Housing providers must assess eligibility for these requests.	Special priority eligibility assessments and review procedures are complex. Decision making processes should be consistent for internal transfers and the centralized waiting list.	Service Managers should be given the responsibility for determining eligibility for special priority status for internal transfers.