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COMMUNITY AND HEALTH SERVICES' RESPONSE TO THE PROVINCIAL LONG-TERM AFFORDABLE HOUSING STRATEGY CONSULTATION

The Community and Health Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated October 1, 2009, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council endorse the Community and Health Services Department's response, as set out in Section 4.0 of this report, to the Province's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Consultation.
2. The Regional Chair send this report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for consideration in the development of the Provincial Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy.
3. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to all local municipalities, York Region MPPs and MPs, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association.

2. PURPOSE

This report seeks Regional Council endorsement of the Community and Health Services Department's response, as set out in Section 4.0 of this report, to the Province's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Consultation.

3. BACKGROUND

The Province is developing a Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy to guide Social Housing Policy over the next ten years

Through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), the Province is seeking input from housing partners and stakeholders across Ontario on the development of a Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy focused on social housing. This was a key commitment in the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy and Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review. The proposed strategy will provide a framework vision, principles, and goals for affordable housing in Ontario over the next 10 years.

Attachments 1 and 2 provide a summary of the Province's approach and goals for the consultation, including background on existing housing programs.

Lack of affordable rental housing is a critical issue for many residents in York Region

As outlined in a recent report, Clause No. 8 of Report No. 4 of the Community Services and Housing Committee adopted by Council on May 21, 2009, housing affordability remains a persistent issue among York Region residents, particularly among tenant households due to the limited supply and construction of private rental housing, low vacancy rates, and high rental costs relative to income. Along with the impact of recent economic uncertainty on lower income households, these factors have resulted in increasing pressures on the Region's social housing waitlist for rent-geared-to-income housing.

The financial viability of building affordable rental housing also remains challenging for the private sector. Housing costs and lack of affordable rental housing also act as a barrier to attracting workers to live and work in York Region.

Addressing housing affordability will require efforts to both increase incomes and reduce housing costs. Affordable rental housing is an important step in housing progression (i.e., housing transitions throughout the life course) that can be out of reach for many lower income residents in York Region. With few other options, some may be entering into precarious home ownership, remaining in unaffordable and unsafe rental housing, or seeking lower cost housing in areas far from employment, services, and public transit.

Provincial housing policy to date has not always addressed local housing needs or York Region's role as municipal Service Manager

The Community and Health Services Department plays an important role in addressing housing affordability in York Region as Service Manager for:

- Social housing programs under the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000*.
- Federal and provincial homelessness prevention programs.
- Ontario Works through cost-sharing of participant shelter allowances and supports to emergency shelter operations.
- Long Term Care, including the provision of affordable supportive housing in partnership with community service providers.
- The Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program (AHP) and other provincial capital funding programs (e.g., the Developing Opportunities for Ontario Renters – DOORs).

Over the last several years, Community and Health Services has been able to maximize one-time federal and provincial funding opportunities to develop new affordable housing units. Steps have also been taken to implement the Regional Housing Supply Strategy.

However, the lack of predictable long-term provincial and federal funding and administratively complex housing program design continue to be challenges in addressing the on-going housing needs of residents.

The consultation provides a unique opportunity to identify York Region's priorities for the provincial strategy and build on the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review

Through its housing consultation, the Province is proposing a framework which, if implemented, would help address long-standing concerns of Service Managers. This framework includes principles and goals that recognize the critical importance of stable affordable housing as a foundational support for achieving other successful outcomes for residents in the areas of health, employment, child development, education, poverty reduction, social inclusion and strong communities.

The consultation also builds on the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review, which includes an agreement by the Province, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and the City of Toronto to work towards consolidating provincial housing programs into an integrated, municipally managed housing service. Under this scenario, the Province would set the overall framework and outcomes for housing policy and municipalities would have the flexibility to utilize provincial funding through municipal housing plans, implement programs based on local needs and streamline services to residents.

This proposed approach for a long-term affordable housing strategy is positive and offers an opportunity to provide, as Service Manager, a York Region specific perspective.

The consultation is focussed on how to move forward with pragmatic and specific solutions

The Province has specifically requested consultative feedback on the following key areas:

- Clarifying roles of all levels of government and other housing partners.
- Modifying and simplifying current housing and homelessness programs to better use resources and improve access to affordable housing.
- Changing the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000* to reduce the regulatory burden and improve the management of social housing.
- Creating innovative approaches in financing, planning tools and green technologies.
- Developing indicators for housing affordability.

The deadline for submissions is December 31, 2009. In addition to public consultations, the Province is also expected to hold more focussed discussions with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and other housing partners. It is anticipated the final strategy will be released in the spring of 2010.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Municipalities are key housing partners—a supportive policy and sustainable funding framework should be the overarching outcome of the provincial strategy

The proposed strategy recognizes the key role municipalities already have and will need to play in the housing system. Supporting municipalities in providing leadership at the local level should be an overarching goal of the provincial strategy.

There a number of actions needed to achieve this goal.

First, there needs to be a long-term provincial funding commitment. Municipalities have often filled the cracks in the housing continuum and continue to fund a significant part of social housing costs. However, cash-strapped Ontario municipalities have limited revenue sources (mostly property taxes, grants from senior governments and fees) to address affordable housing without multi-year provincial investments.

Second, locally-driven housing services need to be better integrated with other human services. The joining of various human services programs, including housing and homelessness, happens at the Service Manager level and facilitates improved outcomes for residents. However, improved integration by Service Managers will require resources to undertake community plans, engage the public, develop outcomes and continuously evaluate results.

Third, silos within the provincial government need to be broken down. Service Managers are still too often allocating resources to excessive administrative reporting requirements across a range of provincial ministries. Creating a streamlined approach at the provincial level, improving inter-ministerial communication and providing more local flexibility in implementation would allow municipalities to put these resources to better use.

The following sections provide more specific input on how these components of a municipally supportive housing strategy can be translated into policy and program development. They also reflect York Region's experience as a Service Manager on how the provincial strategy can better support positive housing outcomes for York Region residents.

4.1 LONG-TERM AND FLEXIBLE FUNDING COMMITMENTS ARE NEEDED TO SUPPORT THE CAPITAL COSTS OF BUILDING NEW UNITS AND SUSTAINING EXISTING ONES

The Province needs to invest sufficient and stable funding to increase the supply of affordable housing

Through the Places to Grow legislation, York Region will experience an increasingly diversified and complex urban form over the next 20 years. Key goals include greater intensification and mix of housing to meet the needs of all residents. To meet these goals for residents unable to access affordable housing in the private market, York Region requires stable and higher levels of provincial funding for new social and affordable housing development. While the recent allocation of new federal and provincial economic stimulus funding is a positive start, the short-term funding timeframe and “use it or lose it” approach needs to be translated into long-term and predictable funding.

Municipalities recognize that federal funding commitments are needed to support this, which will require on-going advocacy by all housing partners in Ontario. However, the Province should take a leadership role through the provincial strategy and commit to long-term funding in the absence of federal contributions while continuing to press for a national housing strategy.

Additional funding is also required to make units truly affordable to lower income households

Funding commitments are also needed, either through rent supplements or higher levels of upfront equity contributions, to make a percentage of new units truly affordable to lower income households in York Region. Under earlier phases of AHP, this has proven difficult without significant regional contributions. Although the level of upfront equity has improved under the AHP extension, Community and Health Services has identified significant challenges in providing access to households on the rent-geared-to-income wait list without a stable long-term rent subsidy program.

Provincial commitments are also needed to sustain existing social and affordable housing

The recent allocation of federal and provincial dollars for social housing repair is a welcome start. However, longer term funding commitments are required for an increasingly aging social housing stock. Many community-based social housing providers do not have the available capital reserves or debt carrying capacity to finance major repairs.

Provincial funding under the Strong Communities Rent Supplement Program is currently capped. Without indexation, increasing rental costs will force York Region to reduce the number of rent-geared-to-income units it supports. Most of these are provided to

residents on the social housing wait list through agreements with private landlords and affordable housing providers.

Funding must also be flexible so Service Managers can meet local housing needs

Equally important is to provide Service Managers with greater flexibility under a simplified or consolidated envelope of affordable housing funding. Current programs are fragmented, overly prescriptive and do not always address local housing needs. In some cases, such as the AHP Housing Allowance, this has meant program elements which are very difficult to implement or poorly designed to maximize the available funding given York Region housing markets. The ability to re-profile or shift funding to more promising options at the Service Manager level should be an early priority for the proposed provincial strategy.

Flexibility needs to build on the demonstrated strengths of municipalities in managing and delivering housing programs over the last nine years

The Province should recognize that in some municipalities, including York Region, there is a strong capacity for program design and delivery to make the best use of available provincial dollars. Where this capacity exists, the Province should allow Service Managers to develop local housing plans which set clear objectives and outcomes, with the authority to design the appropriate mix of programs to address local needs. Where this will require changes to accountability arrangements, the priority should be to allow flexibility where this can be achieved quickly within existing frameworks or agreements.

The broader objective of consolidating all provincial housing programs into an outcomes focussed housing service at the municipal level will require more deliberate review through the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review implementation tables. Improving policy and program coordination between provincial ministries involved in housing and homelessness should be an early priority for this process.

4.2 HOUSING STRATEGY NEEDS TO ADDRESS AFFORDABILITY AND SUPPORTS ACROSS ALL HOUSING SECTORS

The Province must also address affordability through better income supports and homelessness prevention

There are over 110,000 York Region residents living in low income households based on the 2006 Census (i.e., persons living below Statistics Canada's Before Tax Low Income Cut-Off). Many can face challenges in finding and keeping housing that is safe, affordable and adequate for their needs.

Given the lack of affordable rental housing in York Region, many moderate income households often turn to home-ownership options. While this is a successful strategy for

many, it can also leave some in precarious financial situations and vulnerable to homelessness. Recent research has shown that this is often the case for recent immigrants who are struggling to settle and advance in the labour market. Many are unaware of the housing services and options available to them.

Adequate provincial income support programs and multi-year funding for homelessness prevention programs are critical so residents living in a variety of housing tenures do not face the dilemma of paying housing costs at the expense of other basic needs or are not placed at risk of homelessness due to a sudden loss of income.

In conjunction with the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Province has a unique opportunity to review and improve income support programs through the lens of housing affordability. For those facing chronic affordability issues, this could be achieved through Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program shelter allowances that are adequate to meet local housing costs, a tax delivered housing benefit for all low income households and continued provincial advocacy for better access to Employment Insurance for residents who are new or re-entering the workforce.

For households facing short-term crisis, support for more preventative approaches are needed. The recent announcement by the Province to provide annualized funding for the Provincial Rent Bank Program is an important first step. However, at the same time, the Province has added new rules that alter who can receive this funding, limiting the program's overall effectiveness. This places pressure on municipalities to fill gaps that these limitations create. In addition, increased funding for administrative costs to operate this program and enhanced provincial funding through the Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Program would also give municipalities greater flexibility to provide these important supports to vulnerable residents. The goal is to build on successful approaches to date by Service Managers in supporting both renters and homeowners to stay housed during periods of financial emergencies or personal crisis, as well as avoiding the higher costs of emergency shelter use and subsequent re-housing.

Housing stability requires supports for some households

There is growing research that housing stability for residents facing more complex challenges (e.g., vulnerable seniors, persons with disabilities, families fleeing abuse, homeless youth or adults) is best achieved through the provision of support services, including home care, individualized case management, counselling, landlord relations, etc. Research also shows that these supports are effective in reducing higher downstream costs related to emergency health services, hospitals and long term care facilities, and crisis intervention services. The demand for these services is increasing in York Region as the population grows, diversifies and ages.

The provincial strategy should reinforce the importance of investing in support services that keep people housed and improve their well-being. Successful models include enhanced funding to the Aging at Home Strategy to support independent living for

seniors, a support service component to AHP which links capital funding with the required support services funding for seniors or persons with disabilities, and provincial expansion of the Hostels to Homes pilot project to support transitions from emergency shelters to housing for the harder to serve. As well, additional and flexible funding through the Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Program could support a range of housing stabilization services tailored to local needs.

Stabilizing emergency shelters through new funding models for basic operating costs is also a priority so this critical part of the housing continuum is available for people in crisis. Recent analysis undertaken by the Community and Health Services Department has shown that current per diem funding is insufficient to sustain the viability of emergency shelters in York Region. This is placing an increasingly larger burden on regional government to address funding short-falls.

4.3 MUNICIPALITIES NEED MORE AUTHORITY UNDER THE *SOCIAL HOUSING REFORM ACT, 2000* TO BETTER MANAGE SOCIAL HOUSING

Supporting the effective and efficient administration of social housing by municipal Service Managers should be the goal of legislative change

Under the current *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000* Service Managers have the sole responsibility for the administration and funding of social housing programs. However, in practice and in the language of the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000*, the Province has taken an overly prescriptive approach which has proven cumbersome and inefficient to the effective management of social housing at the local level. Over the past several years, there has been productive dialogue and resolution of some issues between the Province and Service Managers. The opportunity to build on these discussions through the housing consultation is welcome.

Legislative changes should focus on providing a more autonomous and outcomes based approach to how Service Managers exercise their responsibility under the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000*. This may require different tiers of relationships between the Province and Service Managers related to their capacity. The provincial role has too often been inconsistent, shifting between exercising oversight functions to excessive involvement or constraints placed on local decisions. Clarifying roles and providing greater flexibility to larger Service Managers with demonstrated capacity should be priorities.

Specific areas for *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000* changes include ministerial consents, special priority policy, local policies, and addressing long-term consequences of expiring operating agreements

Ministerial Consents

The number of ministerial consents required for municipal decisions under the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000* is excessive and impede the effective use of municipal

resources. The preferred option is to remove these ministerial consents in most areas under the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000* and if the Province chooses to retain the consents, the process needs to be streamlined with templates and steadfast deadlines for approvals or denials.

Special Priority Policy

Under the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000*, people facing domestic violence are provided priority access to rent-geared-to-income units so they are able to leave unsafe and abusive situations. Given the lack of available rent-geared-to-income units, this has meant that many social housing providers are filling their vacancies largely with Special Priority residents. This has challenged these providers in sustaining mixed housing communities. Important housing supports, such as counselling, are also lacking that would help both applicants and housing providers sustain successful tenancies.

Revisions to the Special Priority Policy are needed so Service Managers can better support housing providers with balancing the needs of Special Priority applicants and other applicants/tenants (e.g., allow exceptions to some housing providers when offering units to Special Priority applicants). Alternative options should also be explored, such as the provision of a portable housing allowance for victims of domestic violence tied to housing supports (e.g., counselling) or more second stage housing.

Local Policies (e.g., Rent-Geared-to-Income)

The *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000* is too prescriptive and does not allow Service Managers to administer rent-geared-to-income programs effectively. For example, if a household fails to complete a file update, the immediate result is to remove the household's subsidy regardless of the circumstances. To reinstate the subsidy, the household must submit an internal review to the Service Manager or its delegate, which is a very lengthy and administratively cumbersome task. Some discretion around the termination of subsidies and reinstatements would improve effectiveness. There is a similar need for more local discretion in the administration of the Centralized Wait List.

Operating Agreements

Under the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000*, municipalities are required to maintain prescribed levels of rent-geared-to-income units. This is achieved through operating agreements with social housing providers. A large number of these agreements will be expiring over the next two decades and will require Service Managers to find alternative providers to maintain rent-geared-to-income service levels. A long-term plan by the Province is needed on how rent-geared-to-income units can be preserved once the agreements expire.

4.4 OTHER ISSUES

The Province is looking for innovation in financing, green technologies, and planning as part of the consultation

Through the housing consultation, the Province is also seeking input and ideas on innovative financing options, promoting green technologies, and planning tools that would support affordable housing development.

Promising areas for the strategy to explore include:

- Strengthen inclusionary or conditional zoning powers to enable municipalities to effectively implement the housing goals and objectives of the Places to Grow Plan and Provincial Policy Statements, especially the provision of intrinsically affordable housing (e.g., modest amenities, standard materials, minimal details and flexibility within units).
- Encourage mixed-use development (e.g., housing, commercial, and community services) as part of AHP funded projects. This would support the Places to Grow goals of creating complete communities where affordable housing is located in close proximity to human services, employment and transit, particularly in designated regional centres and corridors.
- Introduce a revolving line of credit to landlords and non-profit housing providers to borrow interest-free or low-interest loans to make costly energy efficient upgrades. As these investments provide pay-back over the long-term, savings can be used to repay the lender.
- Streamline federal and provincial financial incentive programs for green retro-fits and upgrades to improve access for housing providers. This could include education and training on the environmental and financial benefits of making upfront investments in greener technologies. Many non-profit housing providers are reluctant to make green investments given the cost.
- Develop a “Housing First” approach to surplus provincial lands to meet broader Places to Grow affordable housing objectives and meet community needs for transitional housing, domiciliary hostels and emergency shelters. This could be enhanced through partnerships using federal and municipal lands where appropriate.
- Explore and develop a range of refinancing alternative financing options for social housing to both increase and maintain system capacity using the security of existing assets.

Affordable housing indicators should support local service planning

Under the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Province has committed to developing a housing indicator that, when completed, will measure the percentage of Ontarians with access to stable and affordable housing. The Province has asked for more input through the housing consultation.

Building on work by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, the housing indicator will need the capacity to track trends in both the supply of affordable housing for lower income residents and the number of these lower income residents facing housing affordability issues. The supporting data and indicators should also be at a level of geography sufficient to support timely housing analysis by the Service Manager (e.g., Census Division or preferably lower).

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Region has a significant long-term financial obligation to social housing. This includes the costs related to maintaining housing assets, providing subsidies, and administering social housing programs. Sustainable provincial funding for social housing and affordable housing development would help reduce the burden on the regional tax base.

At the community level, affordable housing supports the economic viability of industries and, in particular, the small and medium sized business sector which relies heavily upon low and moderate income workers. More housing options will improve the competitiveness of regional businesses, as well as positively contribute to local economic development strategies.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Housing affordability is an issue across York Region municipalities, with the highest needs in the southern communities. The provision of affordable housing is a foundation for healthy communities and vital local economies. A long-term provincial affordable housing strategy that is responsive to local needs has the potential to improve housing outcomes of low and moderate income residents, as well as supporting municipalities in achieving affordable housing goals through the Places to Grow Plan.

7. CONCLUSION

The Province is undertaking broad consultations to develop a long-term affordable housing strategy that builds on the work of the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review and the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy and will guide the housing system over the next ten years.

As the Service Manager for housing and homelessness programs, the Community and Health Services Department has developed a response that identifies key priorities for the provincial strategy which will support regional government in improving housing outcomes for low and moderate income households in York Region. This includes the

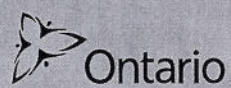
need for local flexibility in the design and implementation of provincial housing programs and stable long-term provincial investments.

For more information on this report, please contact Sylvia Patterson, General Manager, Housing and Long Term Care at Ext. 2091.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The two attachments referred to in this clause are attached to this report).

ONTARIO'S LONG-TERM AFFORDABLE HOUSING STRATEGY CONSULTATION



ontario.ca/housingstrategy

“We are listening and working with our partners to develop a new, long-term housing strategy to make it easier for Ontario families to find and maintain affordable housing.”

*The Honourable Jim Watson,
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing*

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Making a Difference

Making a Difference

The McGuinty government is calling on all Ontarians to take action and help give every Ontario household the opportunity to have a safe, healthy, affordable place to call home.

Stable and secure housing:

- Provides a foundation for people to escape from poverty and homelessness
- Reduces the need for more costly government services
- Attracts and keeps the skilled workers needed to improve our economic competitiveness.

Affordable housing is essential to our success as a province. Together, we need to work on ways to increase access to affordable housing for Ontarians.

The Government's Record

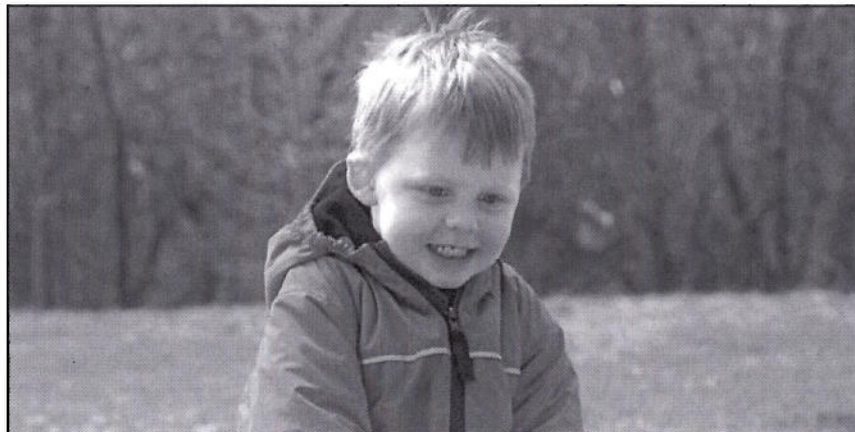
The McGuinty government has been acting on the recommendations of our municipal and affordable housing partners and is investing in affordable housing.

Together with our partners, we have built or repaired 22,000 units of affordable housing, provided rent supplements to almost 35,000 Ontarians and prevented over 18,000 evictions through the Provincial Rent Bank Program.

In challenging economic times, we are taking action to ensure Ontarians have better access to affordable housing. Our government is investing \$622 million to match funding announced in the federal government's 2009 Budget - a combined investment of \$1.2 billion for housing. Together, we are building an additional 4,500 units of affordable housing and repairing 50,000 social housing units.

Through these initiatives we maintain our commitment to make it easier for Ontario families to find and maintain affordable housing.

This is the time to look at the housing systems and programs we have in place and make sure they work for the people in this province, now, and in the future.





Housing in Ontario

Housing in Ontario

Ontarians and housing experts agree that adequate, suitable and affordable housing options lead to more opportunity in the lives of families and individuals across the province.

Ontario homeowners - 3.2 million households

Ontario renters - 1.3 million households

20% of Ontario renters live in social housing

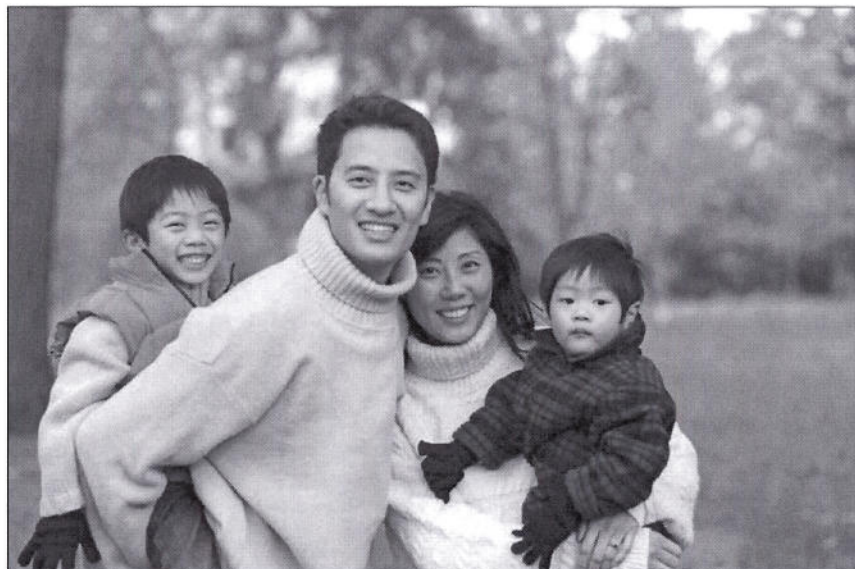
Approximately 6,000 Ontarians use shelters on a daily basis

Building Stronger Communities

Building Stronger Communities

Housing is important in building strong, sustainable communities. Adequate, affordable and suitable housing improves the social, environmental and economic well-being of Ontario families.

These consultations provide an opportunity for Ontario to build on recent initiatives and investments, including the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review, and the Review of the Roots of Youth Violence. Our investments in affordable housing and social housing renewal encourage neighbourhood revitalization through public, private and community partnerships that lead to stronger communities across Ontario.



Moving Forward

Moving Forward

The Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy will provide a framework vision, principles and goals for affordable housing in Ontario over the next 10 years.

The strategy will be scalable to adjust to fiscal realities and changing economic conditions.

We want your opinion on the proposed vision, principles and goals that will frame our strategy, and help us to identify initiatives that can be undertaken to support these directions.

We want to hear about what's working well in your community. We want your ideas on how to improve programs and better use our resources to ensure more Ontarians can access affordable housing.

This consultation is about how we make the housing system work better.

Between now and December 31, 2009, we encourage the public, our partners and stakeholders to provide pragmatic, specific and affordable solutions to assist in building this plan.

By working together, we can create a vibrant long-term affordable housing strategy for the province that reflects the values that all Ontarians share.

Visit ontario.ca/housingstrategy to provide your views on the development of a long-term affordable housing strategy.

Vision

Vision

“To improve Ontarians’ access to adequate, suitable and affordable housing and provide a solid foundation on which to secure employment, raise families and build strong communities.”



Principles

People-centred

Programs, services and supports will be responsive to need, and focus on positive results for individuals and families.

Partnership-based

Engaged individuals, families and communities work with all levels of government, Aboriginal partners, the not-for-profit, co-op and private sectors to build and maintain healthy, sustainable and inclusive neighbourhoods.

Key Partnerships





Flexible and Long-term

The strategy will respond to the diversity of Ontario's communities and the changing needs of Ontarians over the long term.

Coordinated

Policy objectives such as poverty reduction, economic stimulus, accessibility, energy efficiency and a green economy should be an integral part of housing policy.

Fiscally Responsible

Achieving the vision will require sustainable investments that are consistent with the fiscal capacity of each level of government.

Accountable

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all partners will help avoid duplication and overlap of services.

Market Supportive

The strategy will contain a mix of solutions to promote a healthy, diverse housing marketplace that helps Ontarians access affordable housing.



Goals

Goals

Opportunities for Ontarians to Achieve their Housing Goals

Families and individuals have opportunities and support to obtain affordable housing so that they can succeed and contribute to their communities.

Local Solutions in a Flexible Provincial Framework

Local governments can apply local solutions to local problems within a flexible provincial framework that links to provincial interests and objectives.

Innovative Financing and Sustainable Funding

Predictable, sustainable investment and innovative financing by all orders of government.

Strong, Engaged Housing Partners

Housing partners contribute to achieving our vision for housing in Ontario through innovation and by applying best practices.

A Healthy Private Marketplace

Ontario has a healthy private market for housing that meets the long-term needs of Ontarians.



How Can We Make Things Better?

Moving forward to meet the housing needs of Ontarians depends on collaboration with our partners. Your opinions will help us to develop a plan for the next 10 years.

Planning Tools

A range of planning authorities and tools at the local level could more effectively support the provision of affordable housing.

A number of partners have suggested using the zoning approval process to require developers to make a percentage of housing units in new developments available to low/moderate-income households.

Government Lands

The use of suitable government lands for the development of affordable housing could be considered within the larger growth and development objectives of Places to Grow. The Province could support the use of its lands for affordable housing, as well as partnering for the use of suitable federal and municipal lands.

Innovative Financing

Partners could identify new sources of capital for the acquisition, building and redevelopment of social and affordable housing.

Flexible Framework

The provincial framework for affordable housing could allow local governments to develop housing plans that work best for them, while reflecting provincial interests and objectives. Local governments would be best positioned to recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their communities, and housing partners would promote innovation and best practices.

Streamlining Services

The Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review report recommended the consolidation of housing and homelessness-related programs. Programs should be focused on outcomes and be managed at the municipal level. A streamlined system could help local governments better coordinate service delivery through community human services plans.

Legislative Reform

Many in the housing sector have suggested that adjustments are required to the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000* (SHRA). The Act should balance partners' interests and work better with the current needs and requirements of social housing. These adjustments would allow local governments and housing providers to better manage their housing assets and respond to different circumstances across the province, including changing economic and demographic conditions.

Promoting Greener Housing

Households are a significant source of greenhouse gases. The residential sector in Canada consumes 17 per cent of the country's energy and produces approximately 16 per cent of Canada's greenhouse gases. Building on initiatives taken under Go Green: Ontario's Action Plan on Climate Change would reduce the carbon footprint of Ontario's affordable and social housing sector and reduce energy costs for tenants.

Questions for Discussion

Questions for Discussion

The answers to these questions will help us develop a long-term affordable housing strategy for Ontario.

1. What specific roles should each of the housing partners play in the delivery of affordable housing?
2. What changes are needed to our housing programs to better use resources and improve access to affordable housing? Changes could include modifications to the Affordable Housing Program or the simplification of housing and homelessness programs.
3. What changes are required to the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000* to reduce the regulatory burden and improve the management of social housing?
4. What creative new ideas could improve the current housing system? This could include new planning tools, innovative financial options and new green technologies.
5. What should be used as the housing indicator for Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy? In this context, what do terms like affordable, adequate and suitable housing mean to you?

How to Participate

There are a variety of ways to have your say. Between now and December 31, 2009, we encourage the public, our partners and stakeholders to provide pragmatic, specific and affordable solutions to assist in building this plan.

1. Complete the online questionnaire at ontario.ca/housingstrategy.
2. Attend a consultation session and express your views in person. For session locations and dates, visit the consultation web pages at ontario.ca/housingstrategy.
3. Mail, fax or email your comments to:
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Housing Policy Branch
14th Floor, 777 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M5G 2E5
Fax: 416-585-7607
Email: housingstrategy.mah@ontario.ca

Have questions?

You can call us at 416-585-6377 or toll-free 1-877-224-7271 (TTY 1-866-220-2290). You can also reach us by email at housingstrategy.mah@ontario.ca.

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FACT SHEET

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Social Housing Reform Act, 2000

The *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000* (SHRA) was introduced to implement the transfer of funding and administration of social housing programs to municipalities – referred to as Municipal Service Managers. The SHRA provides a legislative framework within which 47 Municipal Service Managers fund and administer social housing in Ontario.

KEY FACTS:

- There are over 270,000 units of municipally-administered social housing in Ontario, including:
 - public housing,
 - non-profit and co-operative housing,
 - modified and supportive units, and
 - rent supplements.
- The government is investing **\$622 million** to match the funding announced in the federal government's 2009 budget – a combined **\$1.2 billion** for social and affordable housing.
- Through this combined investment, Ontario will provide approximately **\$704 million** to repair social housing units and make them more energy efficient.

HOW DOES THE SHRA AFFECT ME?

Social housing tenants:

- Are required to meet minimum eligibility criteria set by the Province and the local Service Manager.
- Must comply with the local application and waiting list rules set out by the Service Manager.
- Must provide documentation required by the Service Manager for the purpose of determining initial and ongoing eligibility for Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) subsidy assistance.
- Have their RGI rent calculated in accordance with the SHRA's rules.
- Are provided assurances that the personal information collected by Service Managers and housing providers to determine eligibility will be kept secure.

Social housing providers/managers:

- Are required to manage and maintain housing projects in compliance with the policies and procedures set out in the SHRA (e.g. internal transfer, guest policies, confidentiality, conflict of interest, waiting lists, and internal reviews).
- Are subject to the SHRA's reporting requirements to Service Managers (i.e., Annual Information Return).
- Are required to follow the rules and procedures for mortgage re-financing.

Service Managers:

- Are required to provide funding for social housing costs (e.g. operating costs, RGI assistance).
- Must administer a centralized waiting list for social housing applicants.
- Are required to ensure that housing providers are in compliance with specific roles and responsibilities, including: operating standards, capital reserves, corporate governance, etc.
- Are required to maintain service level standards (minimum number of RGI and modified units).
- Are required to adhere to provincial Special Priority Policy for victims of domestic violence.
- Must report on social housing obligations to the province (i.e., Service Manager Annual Information Return).

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Social Housing?

- Social housing is rental housing developed with government assistance and subsidized by government.
- Social housing is intended for people with low-to-moderate incomes and forms an important part of the "social safety net" for those who cannot afford market rents.
- The majority of social housing tenants receive rent-geared-to-income (RGI) assistance, calculated at 30 per cent of household income. Many non-profits and co-ops also have market rent units that are not RGI-based.

What is the SHRA?

- The Social Housing Reform Act, 2000 (SHRA) was passed to facilitate the transfer of administrative responsibility for social housing from the province to the municipal sector. The transfer occurred between January 1, 2001 and May 1, 2002. Local Service Managers are responsible for funding and administering social housing.
- A Service Manager can be a regional government, county, or a separated city, depending on local circumstances. Service Managers are also responsible for administering other social programs, such as Ontario Works.

How do people apply for RGI assistance?

- An application for RGI assistance can be made through the Service Manager that administers social housing in the region where the household resides. Many Service Managers provide web access and can accept online applications.
- The length of time before a unit comes available will vary depending on the locations you choose. The waiting lists are generally chronological and based on date of application. However, victims of domestic violence have priority access to social housing. If you are a victim of domestic violence, you can apply for priority access with your Service Manager.

Who can apply?

A household is eligible for geared-to-income assistance in the Province of Ontario if:

- Each member of the household is a Canadian Citizen, landed immigrant (permanent resident) or refugee
- At least one member of the household is 16 years old or older and able to live independently
- No removal order has become enforceable against any member of the household
- No member of the household owes money to a housing provider, under any program administered by a SM or the Ministry
- No member of the household has been convicted of misrepresentation of income or a crime under the Criminal Code regarding the receipt of rent-geared-to-income assistance.

How is RGI assistance calculated?

- Social housing rents are generally 30 per cent of income (or else set from a prescribed scale for persons on social assistance) with adjustments for heat, hydro and services offered by the housing provider. Gross or pre-tax income is used for the calculation of geared-to-income rent, but there are exclusions and exemptions that are taken into consideration, including a deduction for those with employment income.

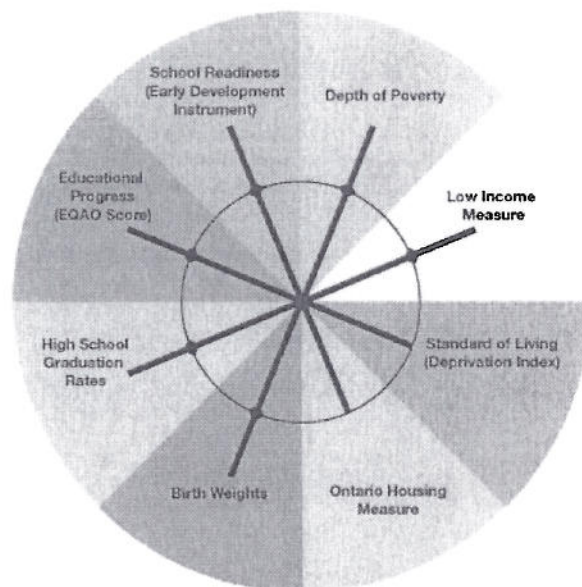
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HOUSING INDICATOR FOR THE POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

ONTARIO'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

- "Breaking the Cycle - Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy", released December 4, 2008, sets a target of reducing the number of children living in poverty by 25 per cent over the next five years.
- The Strategy also commits to eight indicators to track progress through the Child and Youth Opportunity Wheel, including:
 - school readiness
 - educational progress
 - high school graduation rates
 - birth weights
 - depth of poverty
 - a low income measure
 - Ontario housing measure
 - standard of living (deprivation index).
- The Strategy states that the Ontario housing measure, when completed, "will measure the percentage of Ontarians with access to stable and affordable housing".

CHILD AND YOUTH OPPORTUNITY WHEEL



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- The housing indicator for the Poverty Reduction Strategy should have the following characteristics:
 - Clear linkage between housing and poverty;
 - Readily available data;
 - Data available annually;
 - Timely – reasonable delay between collection and release;
 - Reliable data source; and
 - Sufficient sample size drawn from across the province.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PROGRAMS IN ONTARIO

The Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review report directed the province and municipalities to work together to streamline housing and homelessness programs into a housing service managed at the municipal level. This service should focus on better long-term results for the people who use it.

Traditionally, the federal government, provincial ministries, municipalities*, and private and non-profit partners share the funding and delivery of housing and homelessness services.

Ontario funds more than 20 programs, involving three ministries: Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) and Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC).

The following is a list of provincial housing and homelessness-related programs:

PROGRAM NAME	PROGRAM DESCRIPTION	LEAD MINISTRY
Affordable Housing Programs		
Social Housing	Subsidized rental housing for people with low to moderate incomes provided in a public, non-profit or co-operative housing development, or in private rental units through a rent supplement agreement. Most social housing tenants receive rent geared-to-income (RGI) assistance.	MMAH
Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program (AHP)		
• Rental & Supportive	Funding to create new affordable housing for low and moderate income households, persons living with mental illness, and victims of domestic violence.	MMAH
• Northern Housing	Renovation and development of affordable housing units for low-income households in Northern Ontario.	
• Homeownership	Assists rental households to purchase affordable homes.	
• Housing Allowance / Rent Supplement	Temporary housing allowances to make rental housing more affordable for low-income tenants in markets with high vacancy rates. Assistance is provided for up to five years.	
Strong Communities Rent Supplement Program	Long-term RGI subsidized rents in private, non profit and co-operative units.	MMAH
Strong Communities Housing Allowance – Toronto Pilot	Pilot project to create temporary housing allowances to improve housing affordability in Toronto – approximately 400 units targeted to low-income senior and urban Aboriginal households.	MMAH
Rental Opportunity for Ontario Families (ROOF)	Temporary housing allowances to make housing more affordable for low-income working families with children. Provides up to \$100/month to families for a maximum five years.	MMAH
Aboriginal Housing Trust	Funding provided for new rental and ownership housing, and repair/rehabilitation, targeted to Aboriginal communities.	MMAH
Rural and Native Housing	Subsidized rental and ownership housing in rural and remote areas.	MMAH
Homelessness & Eviction Prevention		
Emergency Hostels	Board, lodging and money for personal needs to homeless adults, families and youth, on a short-term and infrequent basis. Funding is provided under the <i>Ontario Works Act, 1997</i> .	MCSS
Ontario Works - Hostels to Homes Pilot (H2H)	Pilot project in six sites provides supports to assist chronic users of hostel services to find and maintain stable, affordable and appropriate housing.	MCSS
Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Program	Funding for homelessness prevention programs administered by municipalities.	MCSS

PROGRAM NAME	PROGRAM DESCRIPTION	LEAD MINISTRY
Provincial Rent Bank	Emergency loans/grants to tenants facing eviction due to short-term rental arrears.	MMAH
Emergency Energy Fund	Financial assistance to low-income Ontarians experiencing an energy-related emergency (e.g. hydro cut-off).	MCSS
Housing with Supports		
Dedicated Supportive Housing (MOHLTC)	Subsidized rental accommodation and support services to help people with special needs live independently (includes frail seniors, physically disabled, acquired brain injury, addictions, serious mental illness, HIV/AIDS).	MOHLTC
Dedicated Supportive Housing (MCSS)	Subsidized rental accommodation and support services to help people with special needs live independently.	MCSS
Homes for Special Care	Room, board, supervision and assistance with daily living to people with serious mental illness.	MOHLTC
Habitat Services	Permanent residential care housing provided in Toronto to improve the quality of private-sector boarding homes.	MOHLTC
Mental Health Supportive Housing Rent Supplements	Subsidized rental accommodation and support services for people with a serious mental illness who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness.	MOHLTC
Domiciliary Hostels	Provides permanent housing with limited supports for vulnerable adults who require some supervision and support with activities of daily living but who are not eligible for long-term care.	MCSS
Violence Against Women (VAW) Emergency Shelters	Shelters offer a range of services to help women achieve increased safety and increased well-being and empowerment.	MCSS
Second Stage Housing	Safe, affordable transitional housing with ongoing support services for women who have experienced abuse and their children. MMAH supports the housing component and MCSS funds the support services.	MCSS MMAH
Other Housing-Related Assistance		
Home Vehicle Modification Program	Provides home or vehicle modifications to eligible individuals and families for adults and children with disabilities.	MCSS
Provincial Social Assistance Programs		
Social Assistance – Ontario Works (OW) / Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)		MCSS
• Shelter Component • Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit	Basic financial assistance includes a shelter component which covers actual shelter costs up to a specified maximum amount (benefit based on unit size). Benefit to help eligible social assistance recipients establish a new residence or maintain an existing residence.	

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* The term "municipalities" includes both Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs).

AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN ONTARIO

April 16, 2009

In the 2009 Provincial Budget, Ontario announced that it is investing **\$622 million** to match the funding announced in the federal government's 2009 budget, resulting in a joint investment of **\$1.2 billion** for housing.

This investment will fund the rehabilitation of **50,000** social housing units, and the construction of **4,500** new affordable housing units.

The investment will create **23,000** jobs province-wide over the course of the program.

BUILDING AND REPAIRING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- Ontario's new capital investment will help to create and repair housing units and includes:
 - **\$87.5 million** to extend the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program;
 - **\$183 million** to create new affordable housing for low-income seniors and persons with disabilities; and,
 - **\$352 million** to renovate **50,000** social housing units and make them more energy efficient.
- Since 2002, the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program has provided funding for nearly **15,000** affordable housing units and approximately **3,700** housing allowances for low-income Ontario households.
- In 2007, the Ontario government provided **\$127 million** for the Delivering Opportunities for Ontario Renters (DOOR) program to fund the creation or rehabilitation of affordable rental housing units.
- In 2008, the Ontario government provided **\$100 million** to the 47 municipal service managers to enable the repair of about **4,000** social housing units, helping nearly **10,000** Ontarians.

RENT SUPPLEMENTS AND HOUSING ALLOWANCES

- The Ontario government is delivering close to **35,000** rent supplements that will help make rent more affordable for Ontario families, including:
 - The government is investing up to **\$185 million** to create up to **27,350** housing allowances for low-income working families under the Rental Opportunity for Ontario Families (ROOF) program. The program provides an allowance of up to **\$100** per month for a maximum of five years to low-income working families with children that are not receiving social assistance or rent subsidy. Approximately **21,500** clients have benefited from the program, as of March 2009.
 - The government is providing **\$50 million** per year for 20 years to the Strong Communities Rent Supplement Program for **6,933** units.
 - As of March, 2009, over **3,700** rent supplements from the AHP Housing Allowance/Rent Supplements (HARS) have been provided to low-income families. Ten per cent are being dedicated to victims of domestic violence.

THE RENT BANK

- Funding to the Provincial Rent Bank is being provided at **\$5 million per year**, providing temporary financial assistance to people who are facing eviction from their homes.
- As of March, 2009, the government has invested **\$23.8 million** in the Rent Bank and helped over **18,700** Ontario families stay in their homes.

ABORIGINAL HOUSING

- The government is providing **\$80 million** for off-reserve Aboriginal housing.
- Since 2006, the Ontario Aboriginal Housing Support Services Corporation has been administering the Rural and Native Housing Program on behalf of the province. The program's assets consist of over 1,560 rental housing units and approximately 700 assisted homeownership units in remote and rural locations across the province. **Thirty-five per cent** of units under the Rural and Native Housing Program are designated Aboriginal Housing.

OTHER PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

- Enabling not-for-profit and co-op housing providers to apply for Infrastructure Ontario loans for the development and renewal of capital projects.
- Providing **\$1 million** to establish a Social Housing Asset Management Centre of Excellence with the Social Housing Services Corporation.
- Passing the *Residential Tenancies Act*, which provides balanced protection for both tenants and landlords, ensures fairer rent increases, and promotes investment in rental housing.

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