ONTARIO SUPPORTIVE HOUSING
POLICY FRAMEWORK

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Ontario

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Supportive housing is a key element in enabling people with complex needs to find stable housing, lead fulfilling lives and live as independently as possible in their community. Providing people with appropriate housing and supports also helps to reduce and prevent homelessness, unnecessary hospital admissions and involvement with the criminal justice system.

Recent initiatives have tried to better align supportive housing across different sectors, however, significant work is needed to create a well-coordinated system. As a result of a fragmented system, people with complex needs do not always access appropriate housing and supports. The Supportive Housing Policy Framework ("the Framework"), along with recent new investments in supportive housing, will help to transform the system into one that better meets people's individual needs and preferences.

The Framework is an aspirational document that sets out a common path forward to transform Ontario's supportive housing system. It will take time and contributions from all people and organizations involved in supportive housing to achieve this vision.

What is Supportive Housing?

Supportive housing generally refers to a combination of housing assistance and supports that enable people to live as independently as possible in their community.

This definition includes several forms of housing assistance (e.g., rent geared-to-income, rent supplements, housing allowances) and housing types (e.g., dedicated buildings, individual units). Supports also take a variety of forms and vary in intensity based on people's unique needs. A few examples of supports include counselling, personal support, case management, income support and assistance with applying for social assistance, assistance with medication, and life skills training (e.g., purchasing food/meal preparation, and money management). For the purposes of the Framework, supportive housing includes both permanent supportive housing and transitional housing.

There are also several programs that offer either housing assistance or supports (i.e., not both) that have linkages to supportive housing and are considered part of the broader supportive housing system for the purposes of the Framework.

Ontario's supportive housing programs serve a wide range of people, including:

- High risk seniors;
- Persons with mental health related needs, serious mental illness and/or problematic substance use;
- Persons with physical disabilities;
- Persons with developmental disabilities;

- Persons with acquired brain injuries;
- Persons with terminal/chronic illness (e.g., HIV/AIDS);
- Persons who have a history of homelessness or are at risk of homelessness;
- Youth at risk; and
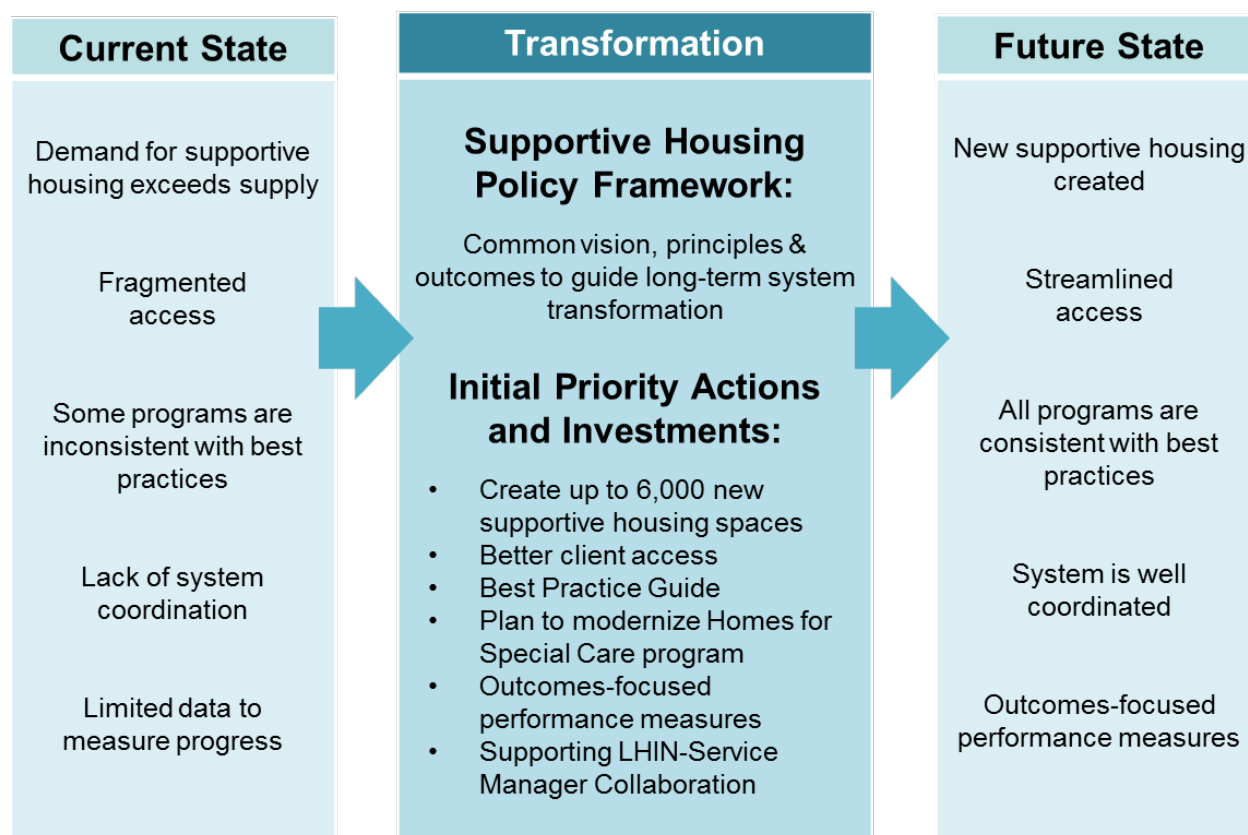- Survivors of domestic violence.

Why a Policy Framework?

Supportive housing in Ontario involves several different sectors (such as housing, health community services and youth) that often have different mandates and areas of focus. This fragmented approach may result in people 'falling through the cracks' or being provided a type of housing and/or supports that do not best meet their needs. The Framework is intended to help foster a coordinated system where provincial ministries, local entities (e.g., Service Managers, Local Health Integration Networks, MCSS Regional Offices, MCYS Regional Offices and lead agencies and Indigenous organizations), housing providers, community agencies and people living in supportive housing work together towards a common vision and outcomes.

While there are many great examples of supportive housing that is person-driven and consistent with best practice, there are also some specific challenges with the current supportive housing system that the Framework will help to address:

- **Unmet demand:** The demand for supportive housing exceeds the supply and available funding

- **Fragmented client access:** People often have to apply directly to individual agencies/providers, requiring them to "tell their story" multiple times. In many cases, the same people are accessing multiple systems (housing, health, community services and children/youth) but these systems are often not well coordinated and aligned

- **Programs inconsistent with best practices:** Some programs focus on care and dependency rather than supporting recovery and independence. This is not consistent with best practices in supportive housing

- **Lack of coordination across systems:** Supportive housing can be difficult to develop and administer because funding for the housing component is often separate from the support component, creating a complex system for providers to navigate

- **Limited data to support evidence-based policy:** There are significant data gaps, including a lack of: regular and recognized process for collecting and tracking wait list data for some programs; outcomes-based performance measures; and system-level data (e.g., data is tied to individual programs rather than across programs serving the same population)

Long-Term System Transformation

The challenges and complexity of Ontario's supportive housing system make a long-term approach necessary to transform the system to one that is person-driven and responsive, particularly to people who have complex and changing needs. The Framework will provide a common foundation to guide both provincial and local program improvements and support coordination across sectors to better meet people's needs.

Current State	Transformation	Future State
Demand for supportive housing exceeds supply	**Supportive Housing Policy Framework:** Common vision, principles & outcomes to guide long-term system transformation	New supportive housing created
Fragmented access		Streamlined access
Some programs are inconsistent with best practices	**Initial Priority Actions and Investments:** • Create up to 6,000 new supportive housing spaces • Better client access • Best Practice Guide • Plan to modernize Homes for Special Care program • Outcomes-focused performance measures • Supporting LHIN-Service Manager Collaboration	All programs are consistent with best practices
Lack of system coordination		System is well coordinated
Limited data to measure progress		Outcomes-focused performance measures

Who is Involved?

The Framework is intended to be a resource for all individuals and organizations that are involved in supportive housing and related services/systems. The Framework recognizes that a successful supportive housing system is a shared responsibility among partners, including provincial ministries, local entities (e.g., LHINs and Service Managers), housing providers, community agencies and people living in supportive housing.

The Framework is the product of ongoing collaboration between the ministries of Housing (MHO), Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC), Community and Social Services (MCSS) and Children and Youth Services (MCYS) and engagement with housing, health, community services and youth stakeholders. In addition to direct

engagement with a range of stakeholders, the Framework is also informed by several stakeholder reports and publications (see list of reports in the References section).

The Framework will apply to 14 supportive housing-related programs (as well as programs that are developed in the future) and their related service systems:

MHO	MOHLTC	MCSS	MCYS
• Strong Communities Rent Supplement Program • Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative • Social Housing • Investment in Affordable Housing Program • Affordable Housing Program	• Dedicated Supportive Housing • Rent Supplement Supportive Housing Program • Homes for Special Care • Habitat Services Program • Assisted Living Services in Supportive Housing and for High Risk Seniors	• Dedicated Supportive Housing • Residential Supports for Adults with a Developmental Disability • Transitional and Housing Support Program	• Dedicated Supportive Housing

Each of these programs has their own purpose and objectives. The Framework does not replace existing program eligibility, rules and accountability.

Supporting the Provincial Goal to End Chronic Homelessness

In 2015, Ontario committed to end chronic homelessness by 2025 (chronic homelessness refers to people who are currently homeless and have been for six months or more in the past year). Supportive housing is widely recognized as a key element to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and often face multiple barriers to housing stability, including mental illness, substance use and/or other disabilities.

Increased Supportive Housing Funding

To support its goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2025, Ontario is increasing its previously announced operating funding for housing assistance and support services to $100 million annually, beginning in 2019-20. This will bring the total investment beginning in 2017 to $200 million by 2019-20, assisting up to 6,000 families and individuals.

Supportive housing funded under this investment will be consistent with the Supportive Housing Policy Framework and will support a range of innovative supportive housing options based on locally-developed solutions.

Related Strategies and Initiatives

Several provincial strategies and initiatives have shaped the development of, and are complementary to, the Framework, including:

- Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy (LTAHS) Update
- Phase 2 of the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy
- Poverty Reduction Strategy
- Patients First: Action Plan for Health Care
- Developmental Services Transformation

VISION

Every person in need has quality, safe and affordable supportive housing, feels empowered to live as independently as possible, and flourishes in the community of their choice.

This is intended to be a common vision for all those who are involved in supportive housing – this vision is a shared responsibility across sectors, levels of government, provincial ministries, housing providers, community agencies and people living in supportive housing. While there may be differences in the roles and contributions of these organizations and individuals, there is a need for a common foundation for all involved to make significant progress in achieving this vision.

PRINCIPLES

The following aspirational principles will influence the way in which the province and its partners and stakeholders develop and implement supportive housing policies, programs and services.

1. Programs, services and supports are person-driven and foster independence, respect, dignity and inclusion

People should have individualized and person-driven supports and meaningful opportunities to participate in community life. Services should recognize and build on people's strengths.

Housing and supports should foster personal development and autonomy. This includes creating and supporting opportunities for personal growth, including work, education, recreation and relationships. People should be empowered to identify their own needs and the services that best support them.

Supportive housing should encourage and facilitate involvement from family, support networks and peers (where appropriate). Peer support, through connections with people who share life experiences, is an important part of the range of supports that people should be able to access.

Housing and supports should enable people to live with dignity in their community. Supportive housing should be an inclusive and safe space for everyone. Housing and supports must be free of discrimination and respectful of people's values, identities, beliefs, cultures and life experiences. This includes ensuring that supportive housing is free from discrimination on the grounds listed in The Ontario Human Rights Code.

First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples experience unique housing challenges. Indigenous people in need of supportive housing should have access to supports that are inclusive of Indigenous cultures and perspectives[1].

Supportive housing should foster shared and transparent decision-making between people living in supportive housing and service providers – embodying the principle 'no decision about me, without me'. People living in supportive housing should also have an opportunity to provide input into potential changes to programs and services. Communication with people living in supportive housing should be in plain language and they should be provided information on their rights and responsibilities as tenants.

Supportive housing should be guided by housing first and recovery-based principles, where appropriate, that focus on positive outcomes for people, their families and their communities. Housing first assists people who are homeless to quickly obtain and maintain permanent, affordable housing and assists those who are at risk of homelessness to remain housed. Under this approach, people have the opportunity to access flexible and individualized support, and housing is not contingent upon 'readiness' or 'compliance' (e.g., sobriety).

For persons with mental health needs, housing and supports can be critical in assisting them in their personal recovery. Recovery is the personal process that people with mental health needs experience in gaining control, meaning and purpose in their lives. Recovery involves different things for different people. For some, recovery means the complete absence of symptoms of mental illness. For others, recovery means living a full life in the community while learning to live with ongoing symptoms (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2014). Recovery is not merely about reducing symptoms – it is about wellness in relation to one's personal hopes, dreams, and goals (Waterloo Regional Homes for Mental Health, 2014).

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[1] More in-depth work on approaches to Indigenous-specific supportive housing is being undertaken as part of the development of an Indigenous Housing Strategy.

2. Housing and supports foster choice, portability as appropriate (follow people if they move), and flexibility to accommodate changing needs

People should have meaningful choice in where they live and in the type of housing and supports they receive. A range of housing and support models is needed as people have different needs and preferences. This includes supportive housing that is tailored to the unique needs of different populations served and appropriate to household composition (e.g., units that can accommodate larger households). People in different parts of the province should have the opportunity to access supportive housing.

People should also be supported through a range of flexible community-based services appropriate and adjusted to their needs and preferences. This includes people having the right type and level of supports, and supports that are nimble to address needs as they change over time. Where possible, people should also have an opportunity to maintain their housing subsidy even if they no longer access supports (assuming they continue to qualify) and maintain their supports even if they no longer receive a housing subsidy (assuming they continue to qualify), but need the supports in order to live independently in their home.

3. System encourages local innovation to explore new approaches to better meet people's needs

The system should support innovation by reducing unnecessary administrative barriers. The system should foster an entrepreneurial spirit in exploring and evaluating different approaches to supportive housing – focused on improving outcomes for people.

The system should provide sufficient flexibility for local entities (e.g., LHINs, Service Managers, MCSS Regional Offices, MCYS Regional Offices and Lead Agencies, and Indigenous organizations) and providers/community agencies to develop local solutions, recognizing that they are best positioned to identify and meet the unique needs of their communities.

4. Services are well coordinated across systems (housing, health, community services, and children and youth) with a common commitment to help people thrive

People should be able to find and apply for appropriate housing and supports as quickly and easily as possible. This could include coordinated access systems to help people find the right housing and supports in their community. People should be assessed in a fair and equitable way when applying for supportive housing. The

system should support clear and direct referrals to and from other services and systems, as appropriate. This includes supporting transitions from correctional facilities, child and youth licensed residential services (e.g., group homes, foster homes and youth justice settings), hospitals, emergency shelters and domestic violence shelters.

Supportive housing partners should work to achieve shared goals. Programs and services in the housing, health, community services and children and youth sectors should be coordinated and aligned across all levels of government and sectors. This includes coordination between providers/agencies, local/regional entities, and ministries (both policies and programs). This includes ongoing system coordination in the design, development and delivery of new supportive housing initiatives.

Local entities should collaborate and explore partnerships to leverage available resources in responding to supportive housing needs in their communities. Collaboration is especially important at the strategic planning stage so that organizations can identify common priorities – over the short and long-term – and collectively develop solutions.

Homelessness services and prevention programs should be well coordinated with supportive housing programs. As part of Ontario's goal to end chronic homelessness by 2025, the province has prioritized action to reduce homelessness in four areas: youth, Indigenous, chronic homelessness and homelessness following transitions from provincially-funded institutions and service systems, such as jails and hospitals. Many people that are served by, or in need of, supportive housing are also at higher risk of homelessness. Supportive housing is therefore an essential part of the solution to end homelessness.

The system should support the sharing of relevant information, both within and across sectors – with appropriate confidentiality protections – to provide better services for people and inform program development.

5. Programs and services are evidence-based, committed to continuous improvement, and support the long-term sustainability of the system

Programs should have clearly defined outcomes, meaningful performance measures and demonstrate value for money invested. Programs and services should be continually monitored and evaluated with a focus on quality improvement to ensure the long-term sustainability of Ontario's supportive housing system. Programs should also reflect evidence-based best practices and innovations should be shared across the system to support knowledge exchange.

People's input and preferences should inform service planning at both the individual and community levels. Data (for people receiving and waiting for service) should be

used to inform system-level planning to ensure that programs and services are responsive to people's needs. People's satisfaction with their housing and supports should be measured to identify areas for improvement and create a truly person-driven system.

OUTCOMES

Outcomes For People Living in Supportive Housing

1	**People achieve and maintain housing stability**	Supportive housing helps people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to access and maintain stable housing.
2	**People are supported to meet their physical and mental health needs**	Supportive housing helps people to access services to improve and/or maintain their health and well-being. In some cases, supportive housing helps to lessen the rate of health decline (e.g., age-related health issues, degenerative illnesses).
3	**People have greater independence and control of their housing and supports**	People have choice of where to live, type of housing and supports that they receive.
4	**People have appropriate housing and supports**	The right housing and supports help to reduce institutional care and homelessness.
5	**People are satisfied with their housing and supports**	Satisfaction with housing and supports has a positive impact on people's quality of life and housing stability.
6	**People have greater social and community connections**	Supportive housing helps people to develop connections to their community and build social networks.

System Outcomes

1	**System provides people with the right service, at the right time, in the right place**	The system provides the right level of supports and is responsive to individual needs. Some individuals require less intensive support than they currently receive and could be more appropriately served by models of housing and supports that encourage independence.
2	**System enhances housing stability, contributing to the province's long-term goal to end chronic homelessness**	Better aligned housing and supports helps people maintain stable housing over the long term and helps people at risk of homelessness remain housed.
3	**System is better coordinated and easier for people and providers to navigate**	Programs, services and access systems are better coordinated among provincial ministries, regional entities, local housing and service providers and other partners and service systems to improve opportunities to develop and enhance supportive housing.
4	**System reduces pressure on institutions and service systems, including emergency services**	When people have access to supportive housing, their use of hospitals, long-term care homes, correctional facilities, violence against women shelters and emergency shelters often decline.
5	**Discharges from institutions and service systems (e.g., health, corrections, child welfare) are made easier by providing appropriate supportive housing**	Supportive housing assists people transition back into the community and enables them to build and maintain social and community connections.
6	**Better data and performance measures support strong accountability and help to improve programs**	More robust data and performance measures will help to develop more responsive and appropriate services and supports for people.

INITIAL PRIORITY ACTIONS

Supportive Housing System Transformation

The Supportive Housing Policy Framework provides the foundation for current and future provincial initiatives to improve Ontario's supportive housing system. These include several initiatives announced in the LTAHS update:

- **Supportive Housing Investment,** Ontario is increasing its previously announced operating funding for housing assistance and support services to $100 million annually, beginning in 2019-20. This will bring the total investment beginning in 2017 to $200 million by 2019-20, assisting up to 6,000 families and individuals.

- **Improving access** to supportive housing programs and increasing awareness of housing and homelessness programs and services

- **Developing a Best Practice Guide** that, together with the proposed Supportive Housing Policy Framework, could help the supportive housing sector bring existing programs up to best practice

- **Developing a plan to modernize the Homes for Special Care program** toward evidence-based, best practice supportive housing, with a focus on supporting independence and recovery

- **Developing common outcomes-focused performance measures** to better understand the impact of supportive housing programs and to improve our ability to measure progress in meeting people's needs

- **Provincial direction promoting collaboration between Service Managers and LHINs** to coordinate social and affordable housing and homelessness services with LHIN-funded services, through the updated Policy Statement: Service Manager Housing and Homelessness Plans and an amendment to the MOHLTC-LHIN Accountability Agreement

FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

Vision

Every person is need has quality, safe and affordable supportive housing, feels empowered to live as independently as possible, and flourishes in the community of their choice

Principles

1. Programs, services and supports are person-driven and foster independence, respect and dignity and inclusion
2. Housing and supports foster choice, portability as appropriate (follow people if they move), and flexibility to accommodate changing needs
3. System encourages local innovation to explore new approaches to better meet people's needs
4. Services are well coordinated across systems (housing, health, community services, and children and youth) with a common commitment to help people thrive
5. Programs and services are evidence-based, committed to continuous improvement, and support the long-term sustainability of the system

Outcomes

PEOPLE	SYSTEM
1. People achieve and maintain housing stability	1. System provides people with the right service, at the right time, in the right place
2. People are supported to meet their physical and mental health needs	2. System enhances housing stability contributing to the province's long-term goal to end chronic homelessness
3. People have greater independence and control of their housing and supports	3. System is better coordinated and easier for people and providers to navigate
4. People have appropriate housing and supports	4. System reduces pressure on institutions and service systems, including emergency services
5. People are satisfied with their housing and supports	5. Discharges from institutions and service systems (e.g., health, corrections, child welfare) are made easier by providing appropriate supportive housing
6. People have greater social and community connections	6. Better data and performance measures support strong accountability and help to improve programs

Local Entities Involved in Supportive Housing

Service Managers/District Social Service Administration Boards: Service Managers are responsible for delivering and administering social and affordable housing, other social services programs such as Ontario Works and childcare, and local homelessness services. Service Managers can be regional governments, counties or separated cities, and District Social Services Administration Boards, which are boards established in each of the 10 districts in Northern Ontario.

Local Health Integration Networks: Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) are not-for-profit crown agencies funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to plan, fund and integrate local health care services delivered by hospitals, long-term care homes, and a variety of other community agencies.

MCSS Regional Offices: MCSS' five regions oversee delivery of services by administering Ministry funded agency contracts, performing strategic community outreach and engagement, and providing direct service delivery to families for specific programs including those related to social assistance, developmental disabilities and violence against women. They support the responsiveness of local service systems and improve outcomes for adults and families.

MCYS Regional Offices: MCYS contracts with and monitors agencies that provide services to children, youth and their families through five regional offices across Ontario. Services include, but are not limited to, mental health, special needs, autism, youth justice, and child welfare through 38 children's aid societies and nine Indigenous child well-being societies. MCYS has a number of mechanisms to support monitoring and oversight, including transfer payment contract management and licensing of children's residential services.

MCYS Lead Agencies: Responsible for planning and delivery of community-based child and youth mental health core services in local service areas across the province.

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