

# **Improving Supportive Housing and Community Housing**

## **Discussion Guide**

# Table of Contents

Introduction: .....	2
Context:.....	4
Supportive Housing:.....	5
Community Housing:.....	7
Share your ideas:.....	8
Improving Supportive Housing and Community Housing.....	10
1. Supply – Protecting, growing and improving supply .....	10
2. Access – Making it easier for people to be matched with the right housing and supports .....	13
3. Efficiency – Using current resources more efficiently to maximize their impact for people .....	16
4. Complex Needs – Better supporting people who need supports from multiple service systems .....	17
5. Program Models – Supporting best practice models of care .....	18
Improving Supports for All – Intersections with diverse populations .....	19
Your privacy matters.....	20

## Introduction:

The Ontario Government provides assistance to some of the most vulnerable people in Ontario through a range of supports (e.g., social assistance, mental health and addictions supports, housing and homelessness services). Vulnerable people also come into contact with the justice, broader healthcare services, education, and other sectors.

The government is working to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the services and programs it offers, with a view to ensuring investments have the most impact for people in need. There is a great deal of transformation underway, including, for example, healthcare transformation, to achieve these goals.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing has overarching responsibility for housing and homelessness policy in Ontario. It works closely with other ministries (e.g., Health, Children, Community and Social Services, Solicitor General, Seniors and Accessibility, Indigenous Affairs) to deliver a systems-wide response to housing and homelessness issues, which may be impacted by other issues, ministries and/or systems. The Ministry of Health and Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services also fund and play a key role in the delivery of supportive housing programs and services that are tailored to meet the needs of key vulnerable populations.

Within the housing space, the government has taken steps to address some of the most pressing challenges, including a lack of supply, affordability and sustainability. These steps include:

- Ontario's **Community Housing Renewal Strategy**, which focuses on sustaining, repairing and growing the community housing system. More information on the Strategy can be found at: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/community-housing-renewal-strategy>
- **More Homes, More Choice: Ontario's Housing Supply Action Plan** makes it faster and easier to build housing, and to build the right types of homes in the right places. More information on the Action Plan can be found at: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/more-homes-more-choice-ontarios-housing-supply-action-plan>

With respect to homelessness, the Ministry has paused the requirement for Service Managers to conduct homeless enumeration in 2020 because of gaps and limitations in the various methodologies used in 2018. Many Service Managers now employ real time data collection techniques – sometimes referred to as by-name lists<sup>1</sup> – which support coordination and

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<sup>1</sup> A by-name list refers to a “real-time” list of people experiencing homelessness in a community and includes information about their needs to help prioritize and triage them for housing services and supports in their area. “Real-time” means that information contained in the list is updated and used on a regular basis.

prioritization of service. The Ministry will introduce a by-name list approach across Ontario beginning in 2021.

Recognizing the critical role that supportive housing plays in the broader housing system and in helping vulnerable people, in 2019, the government committed to undertake a **comprehensive review of the province's supportive housing programs** to improve services for people, drive greater system efficiency and help prevent and address homelessness.

In support of this commitment, we are conducting a series of regional engagements across the province to hear from you on how we can improve Ontario's supportive housing system. We are taking advantage of the opportunity to speak with you to also seek your input on some areas of community housing.

This initiative is not about changing government's level of support for supportive housing. It is about ensuring existing resources are used efficiently and with the maximum impact to provide people with stable housing and tools they need to live independently.

**We want to hear your best advice in response to the questions we pose in this discussion guide. If you are not able to attend a regional engagement session, please feel free to email us your feedback at [housingpolicy@ontario.ca](mailto:housingpolicy@ontario.ca).**

## Context:

Supportive housing and community housing are important components of Ontario's housing system and provide assistance to some of Ontario's most vulnerable people.

**Supportive housing** refers to a combination of housing assistance (e.g., rent-g geared-to-income<sup>1</sup>, rent supplements, group homes) and support services (e.g., counselling, life skills training, activities of daily living) that enables people to live as independently as possible in a community setting.

**Community housing** is housing owned and operated by non-profit housing corporations, housing co-operatives, municipal governments and district social service administration boards. These providers offer subsidized or low end of market rents – housing sometimes referred to as “social housing” and “affordable housing”.

<sup>1</sup> Rent-g geared-to income assistance can be provided to different types of tenants, including those living in community housing and supportive housing.

This initiative is focused on seeking feedback on specific and tangible opportunities to improve the supportive housing and community housing systems.

There are some common challenges impacting both supportive housing and community housing. This includes demand that exceeds supply, access mechanisms that can be difficult for people and their families to navigate, and people with complex needs who have difficulty accessing supports offered by multiple service systems.

It is also acknowledged that the supportive housing and community housing systems are essential to preventing and addressing homelessness.

The government has taken steps to address these challenges and support Ontario's housing vision that *every Ontarian should be able to find a home that meets their needs and their budget*.

We are looking to improve both the supportive housing and community housing systems and foster better connections between them. We are bringing a broad spectrum of stakeholders together to discuss both common issues, as well as system-specific challenges.

Supportive housing and community housing also have important connections to other service systems, including healthcare, mental health and addictions, developmental services, social assistance, among others, and there are initiatives underway in many of these areas (e.g., healthcare transformation).

## Supportive Housing:

### Supportive Housing Key Facts

- Three provincial ministries oversee and fund supportive housing: Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.
- The province invests over \$2 billion annually on 20 supportive housing programs.
- Ontario's supportive housing programs serve approximately 45,000 people annually.

Supportive housing helps keep vulnerable Ontarians healthier and appropriately housed in their home communities. This form of stable housing with community supports is a service that has been shown to improve outcomes for those who require both housing and support services to live as independently as possible. It also supports government priorities, such as improving healthcare and ending hallway medicine.

Supportive housing helps a diverse range of Ontarians, including:

- People with mental health and/or addictions issues.
- People with developmental disabilities.
- People experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- People with physical and other disabilities.
- Indigenous people with support needs.
- Frail/at-risk seniors.
- People with HIV/AIDS
- Youth transitioning out of care.
- Survivors of domestic violence.
- Survivors of human trafficking
- People with Acquired Brain Injuries.
- People transitioning from correctional facilities, hospitals and other systems.

### Supportive Housing Policy Framework

In 2017, the province released a Supportive Housing Policy Framework and Best Practice Guide. The Framework establishes a vision for a modernized, person-centred supportive housing system:

#### Ontario's Supportive Housing 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.*

The framework was developed in close collaboration with stakeholders and partners in the housing, health, community services and youth sectors, and people living in supportive housing.

The Best Practice Guide is a companion document to the Framework and is intended to be a resource for all individuals and organizations that are involved in supportive housing and related services/systems.

The Framework serves as a foundation to guide the province’s work on improving supportive housing. The framework and the guide can be found at:

<http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=15986>

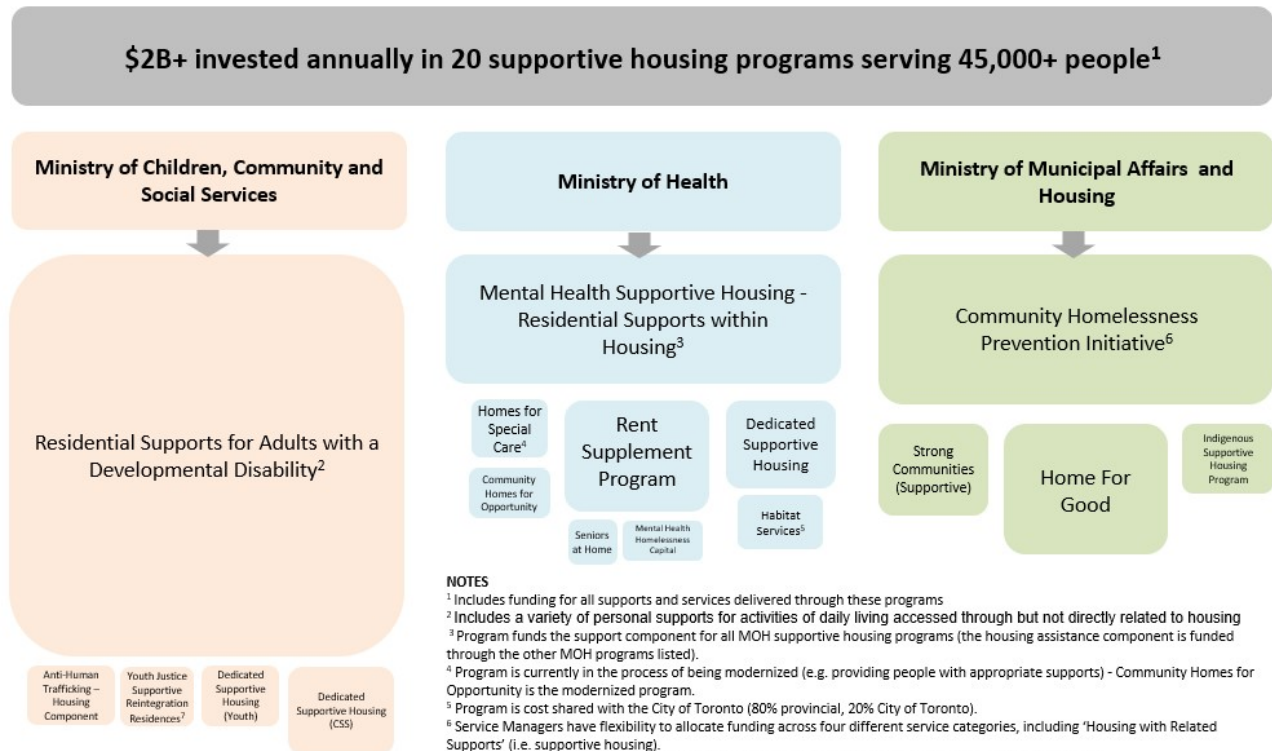
<http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=15988>

## System Overview

The delivery of supportive housing in Ontario involves a wide range of partners, including:

- Service Managers and Indigenous Program Administrators.
- Local Health Integration Networks/Ontario Health Agency and Regions.
- Developmental Services Ontario offices.
- Housing providers.
- Community agencies.

The image below is a high-level overview of Ontario’s supportive housing programs. Boxes have been scaled to roughly reflect differing funding levels.



## Community Housing:

### **Community Housing Key Facts**

- Service Managers are the primary funders of community housing and are responsible for its administration.
- Social housing, which is one type of community housing, serves over 250,000 families and individuals across Ontario. Of these, about 185,000 pay a geared-to-income rent and the rest pay a moderate market rent.
- Community housing comprises more than 20% of all purpose-built rental housing in Ontario.

In April 2019, the Community Housing Renewal Strategy was released, which outlines how the government will work with partners to stabilize and grow the community housing sector.

Community housing is a vital community resource. While most Ontarians find housing in the private market, there are many low-income households who require some form of assistance through the community housing system.

Social housing was originally developed through federal or provincial government programs from the 1950s through 1995.

Since 2002, affordable housing programs have led to the construction of about 21,800 rental units with rents maintained at or below 80% of Average Market Rent for at least 20 years. These units have been built in both the community housing and market housing sectors.



## Share your ideas:

Both supportive housing and community housing share a common goal of helping vulnerable Ontarians achieve housing stability, whether they be individuals with low income in need of affordable housing, are experiencing challenges such as mental health and/or addictions issues, experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The government is interested in receiving feedback from stakeholders and partners on opportunities to make supportive housing and community housing work better for people and ensure that resources are used with the greatest impact possible.

While there are many areas of intersection between supportive housing and community housing and the people who rely on them, there are also key differences in structure, funding and administration that you will see reflected in the background and questions presented in this guide.

Your input is sought in five key areas:

1. **Supply** – Protecting, growing and improving supply.
2. **Access** – Making it easier for people to be matched to the right housing and supports.
3. **Efficiency** – Using current resources across multiple ministries to more efficiently to maximize their impact on people.
4. **Complex Needs** – Better supporting people who require supports from multiple systems.
5. **Program Models** – Bringing outdated models of care towards current best practice.

Supportive housing and community housing serve diverse populations. On each of the above areas, government is interested in receiving feedback on how supportive and community housing can better serve diverse populations, including:

- People with mental health and/or addictions issues;
- People with developmental disabilities;
- People experiencing or at risk of homelessness;
- People with physical or other disabilities;
- Indigenous people;
- Francophones;
- Frail/at-risk seniors;
- People with HIV/AIDS;
- Youth transitioning out of care;
- Survivors of domestic violence;
- Survivors of human trafficking;
- People with Acquired Brain Injuries; and
- People transitioning from correctional facilities, hospitals and other systems.

We are also interested in hearing how programs can be more responsive to other diverse and often intersecting identities (e.g., racialized communities, LGBT2SQ+<sup>2</sup> communities).

This discussion guide provides information about supportive housing and community housing and sets out questions for your input.

**Share your ideas with us by emailing [housingpolicy@ontario.ca](mailto:housingpolicy@ontario.ca) by May 31, 2020.**

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<sup>2</sup> LGBT2SQ+ is an acronym that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning and Two-Spirit

# Improving Supportive Housing and Community Housing

In the sections that follow, we are looking for input on how the supportive housing and community housing systems can be improved to better help people with various needs access and maintain appropriate housing.

## 1. Supply – Protecting, growing and improving supply

The demand for supportive housing and community housing exceeds the supply available. People often wait several years to get the housing they need. In addition, many people require supportive housing on a long-term basis, resulting in few openings for new tenants.

Much of Ontario's community housing stock is old and needs major repairs. This issue is also impacting some areas of Ontario's supportive housing system, specifically Dedicated Supportive Housing, where all units in a building are supportive.

In addition, original program obligations for community housing and Dedicated Supportive Housing are expiring and some housing providers are not sure about what will happen when they end. The government is looking to identify opportunities with these providers and Service Managers and Indigenous Program Administrators to sustain and grow supply.

### **What do you think?**

#### *General:*

1. What are the barriers you have faced when creating and maintaining supply in your community?
2. Apart from new investments, what specific actions could the province take to help protect and grow the supply of supportive housing and community housing?
  - a. Are there any changes to current program rules that could promote supply?
  - b. How could municipal or provincial approval processes be streamlined to create supply?
3. How can government help housing providers to better leverage their existing capital assets to protect and grow supply?
4. Are there cross-sector partnership opportunities that could help create new supply? What is needed to facilitate such partnerships?

#### *Supportive housing:*

5. Has your organization developed or explored opportunities to create new supportive housing? Please describe the innovative opportunities you leveraged (e.g., utilizing surplus municipal lands, conversion/repurposing of existing properties, innovative cross-sector partnerships) and/or the challenges that you faced. If your organization has not explored such opportunities, what has prevented it from doing so?

6. When supportive housing tenants no longer need supports or wish to move, what are some approaches/opportunities to incent/facilitate their smooth transition into other types of housing, keeping in mind the provisions of the *Residential Tenancies Act* (e.g. security of tenure)?

*For Ministry of Health-funded supportive housing agencies:*

7. The Auditor General has recommended that the Ministry of Health work with stakeholders to develop a model or program that would enable supportive housing tenants to move to other types of housing. Recognizing that any such program would be grounded in tenant choice and respect security of tenure, please share your thoughts on:
  - The components that would be necessary to make such a program successful (e.g., housing subsidy, transitional supports, etc.);
  - How such a program could be designed to reflect tenants who are housed in a rent supplement-based program vs a dedicated supportive housing-based program;
  - The level of interest you think that your tenants would have to access such a program (i.e., have tenants expressed an interest in moving into other housing?); and
  - The challenges and/or barriers that you foresee such a program encountering.
8. Expiring operating agreements for dedicated supportive housing programs are an opportunity for non-profits to evaluate the options and opportunities before them. If your agency has an expiring operating agreement with the Ministry of Health, please tell us:
  - a. What are your future plans for the properties? (e.g., continue to operate as-is, redevelop, sell and re-invest the proceeds into new housing).
  - b. What factors influenced your decision? (e.g., responding to clients' needs, organizational priorities).
  - c. How can the Ministry of Health incent your agency to continue to use existing properties for the delivery of supportive housing programs or encourage the reinvestment of the proceeds of sale in the creation of new housing? Please consider legislative, policy and programmatic incentives in addition to financial ones.
9. Different communities are facing different pressures when it comes to supportive housing. In your opinion:
  - a. What types of programs would deliver the supportive housing that is most needed in your community?
  - b. What types of supportive housing programs is your organization interested in delivering in the future?
  - c. Are there client populations that should be prioritized for investment?
10. Who are the key supportive housing players in your community? Are there other local entities that you think could play a strong role in the deliver of supports and/or housing? Who are they and what role(s) do you think that they could fill? In your opinion, what

role(s) can the Ministry of Health play in encouraging them to develop and/or deliver supportive housing programs?

*Community housing:*

11. Other than funding, what specific actions could the province take to incent community housing providers to stay in the community housing system at the end of their original program obligations?
12. What are the building blocks for a successful relationship between a housing provider and Service Manager/Indigenous Program Administrators to maintain community housing supply? Is there a role for the province in fostering these relationships?

## 2. Access – Making it easier for people to be matched with the right housing and supports

### **Coordinating Access to Housing and Supports for People Experiencing Homelessness**

Homelessness is not just a housing issue. Supporting people experiencing or at risk of homelessness requires action through multiple systems (e.g., health, social services, justice). In order to effectively support people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, there needs to be a high degree of coordination across these systems at the provincial and local level.

Many communities do not have coordinated access systems in place. This can lead to:

- People having to “tell their story” several times and applying to multiple service providers across different sectors.
- Information being held by one part of the community that is helpful to another.
- Administrative inefficiency for providers, with less time available to directly support people.
- Outdated, duplicative or inaccurate waitlist data, preventing a clear understanding of overall housing need and required supports.

This lack of coordination can result in people not receiving the most appropriate housing and/or supports based on their individual needs.

A coordinated access system is a community-wide system that streamlines the process for people experiencing homelessness, or at risk of homelessness, to access the housing and individualized supports they need to become stably housed.

Coordinated access systems typically involve several components established at the community level, including:

- Information about available programs and services.
- An agreed common process and structure for intake.
- Common assessment and prioritization.
- Referral processes to match people with appropriate housing and supports.

Many communities have taken positive steps to address this issue, for example, the development of coordinated access systems (e.g., Ottawa’s Housing Registry coordinates access to community housing and supportive housing). In addition, Toronto’s Access Point is a centralized point where people can apply for mental health and addictions support services and supportive housing. It provides coordinated access to several services through one application and intake assessment process.

### **Better Access to a Range of Housing Options**

An integral part of supporting people who need supports is ensuring better access to a range of housing options, from market housing, to portable housing benefits, to community housing.

Many people have difficulty accessing the community housing system. The current waiting list model for community housing is outdated and does not always do a good job of matching those in greatest need with the housing that is best for them. It also is often not coordinated with access to other types of community housing, like affordable housing programs, or to support services that some people require.

In 2017, the Auditor General noted that applicants are not being prioritized on the waitlist according to their actual need for housing and that other provinces do a better job of integrating housing and employment supports.

The province's Community Housing Renewal Strategy committed to explore ways to transform the current waiting list model for rent-geared-to-income assistance into one that better matches applicants with housing that meets their needs.

In addition, the province committed to explore opportunities to improve tenants' economic self-sufficiency and support tenant transitions out of community housing, where appropriate.

### **What do you think?**

#### *General:*

1. What does a good coordinated access system look like? What are some of the key elements (e.g., assessment, prioritization, referrals)?
2. For Service Managers that have implemented coordinated access systems:
  - What challenges did you experience and how did you overcome them?
  - Are there specific leading practices that have emerged?
3. How does a by-name list – a “real-time” list of people experiencing homelessness in a community – support the development of coordinated access systems? How does the Province implement a by-name list approach across Ontario beginning in 2021?
4. Recognizing that many Service Managers are moving towards coordinated access (particularly those working with the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness), how could the province support their broader adoption?
5. For those Service Managers that have not implemented coordinated access systems, what are the perceived barriers? What role could the province have in helping to overcome these barriers?
6. What role do data systems play in relation to coordinated access? Are better data systems leading to better outcomes?

#### *Supportive housing:*

7. Thinking about supportive housing, what does effective coordination with other systems look like?
8. How can government make it easier for people to access the services they need across different service systems (e.g., housing, health, developmental services, justice)?

*Community housing:*

9. What changes could make the community housing system easier for people to navigate?
10. Are there rules the province could change to help reduce waiting times and help people access housing in a timely way?
11. How can we move to a needs-based approach in community housing? How should housing need be identified and prioritized?
12. How can we help households that are well-positioned to transition out of the community housing system to other appropriate housing options (e.g., portable housing benefit, market housing)?



### 3. Efficiency – Using current resources more efficiently to maximize their impact for people

The government wants to ensure that its investments in homelessness services and supports, including supportive housing, are focused to the greatest extent possible on preventing homelessness from occurring in the first place and help people to achieve long-term housing stability.

As noted earlier, this initiative is not about changing government’s level of support for supportive housing. It is about ensuring existing resources are used efficiently and with the maximum impact to provide people with stable housing and tools they need to live independently.

There are currently 20 provincial supportive housing programs funded by three provincial ministries. These programs have been developed over time in response to specific challenges and specific populations in need of assistance. As such, programs and the associated supports are often tailored to meet the needs of different client groups. However, there are often different rules and reporting requirements across programs. This can limit the ability of service system managers and service providers to help people in the most effective and efficient way.

Similarly, Ontario’s community housing system has developed over decades and can be a maze of complex rules and red tape. Through the Community Housing Renewal Strategy, the government has taken initial steps to improve efficiency by simplifying the rules for rent-geared-to-income calculations – but there is more that can be done. Providers, Service Managers and Indigenous Program Administrators tell us they spend too much time on reporting and administration and not enough time directly helping tenants. Old, inefficient rules can make it difficult for housing providers to manage their assets, build new housing and offer innovative services for the people who need them.

#### **What do you think?**

##### *General:*

1. Are there opportunities to encourage greater innovation in both supportive housing and community housing? Are there opportunities to reduce administrative burden for Service Managers/Indigenous Program Administrators, providers and tenants?
2. Are there rules or requirements that could be changed or removed to promote more efficient service delivery?
3. Over the long-term, how can we ensure value-for-money with efficient and sustainable supportive housing and community housing systems?

*Supportive housing:*

4. What are the challenges and/or benefits associated with Ontario's current approach to supportive housing programs and services (e.g., multiple tailored supportive programs delivered by three provincial ministries)?
5. Are there opportunities to streamline supportive housing programs to better meet people's needs and create a more efficient, client-focused system (e.g., establishing common reporting requirements, clearer roles and responsibilities, greater provincial direction around system-level and cross-sector service coordination)?

#### 4. Complex Needs – Better supporting people who need supports from multiple service systems

People in need of supportive housing can sometimes need support from multiple service systems and programs. For example, someone may have a mental health and addictions issue, a developmental disability and be experiencing homelessness.

However, Ontario's supportive housing system is largely designed to help people with discrete or singular needs. For example:

- The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing's programs primarily assist people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and Indigenous peoples.
- The Ministry of Health's programs predominantly assist people with mental health and addictions issues, but also serve at-risk seniors, people with HIV/AIDS, people with physical disabilities, and people with acquired brain injuries.
- The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Service's programs predominantly assist people with developmental disabilities but also serve people experiencing or at risk of experiencing gender-based violence and human trafficking, youth and Indigenous people.

#### **What do you think?**

1. What are some of the current challenges to developing cross-sector supportive housing projects that serve people with complex needs?
2. Are there examples of innovative local supportive housing projects that are helping people with complex needs? What were the critical success factors?
3. How can the province provide greater direction on cross-sector service coordination to better help people with complex needs?

## 5. Program Models – Supporting best practice models of care

Some forms of supportive housing operate under models that do not always meet current best practice.

Some providers operate under the domiciliary hostel<sup>3</sup> model and focus on providing assistance with daily living (e.g., meals, housekeeping, laundry, medication support) and social or group activities. However, some people living in this form of housing may have other support needs (e.g., mental health and/or addictions issues) that are not always well met.

Some Service Managers and service providers have taken steps to move this portfolio toward best practice, including developing individualized supports plans for residents and providing supports tailored to people's unique needs.

The government is interested in your ideas for how these best practices could be adopted more broadly.

### **What do you think?**

1. For Service Managers that have modernized their portfolio of former domiciliary hostels:
  - How did you modernize your portfolio? What specific actions were taken?
  - What resources were required?
  - How could MMAH encourage modernization in all communities?
2. For Service Managers where modernization has been limited:
  - What are the barriers you see with respect to modernization?
  - How could the province help you move towards best practice?
3. Are there any other effective program models or other best practices you would like to share?

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<sup>3</sup> Former domiciliary hostels are funded by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing under the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (i.e., "Housing with Related Supports" service category).

# Improving Supports for All – Intersections with diverse populations

Ontario's supportive housing programs help diverse populations, including:

- People with mental health and/or addictions issues;
- People with developmental disabilities;
- People experiencing or at risk of homelessness;
- People with physical or other disabilities;
- Indigenous people;
- Francophones;
- Frail/at-risk seniors;
- People with HIV/AIDS;
- Youth transitioning out of care;
- Survivors of domestic violence;
- Survivors of human trafficking;
- People with Acquired Brain Injuries; and
- People transitioning from correctional facilities, hospitals and other systems.

The government is interested in receiving feedback specifically from these diverse populations and the organizations that serve them.

While this engagement is intended to be inclusive, we recognize that some populations have unique perspectives on how supportive housing can work better for them. We are interested in how supportive housing and community housing can be more responsive to the diverse and often intersecting identities of Ontarians (e.g., racialized communities, LGBT2SQ+ communities).

## **What do you think?**

1. Are there barriers or challenges specific to you or the people you serve that you have not been able to share in responding to other questions?
2. How could supportive housing or community housing better meet the specific needs of diverse populations?

## Your privacy matters

Your privacy is important to us. By participating in this engagement, you may be sharing some personal information with the Ontario Government. Any personal information collected will be handled according to our [Privacy Statement](#) and used only for research and housing policy development purposes. This information is collected pursuant to section 4 of the *Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing Act*. Questions about the collection of personal information may be directed to:

Director, Community Housing Policy Branch  
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
777 Bay Street, 14th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2J3  
Phone: 416-585-7544  
Email: [housingpolicy@ontario.ca](mailto:housingpolicy@ontario.ca)