

Ontario Housing Policy Statement

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Preamble

Ontario's vision for affordable housing is to improve access to adequate, suitable and affordable housing, and provide a solid foundation on which to secure employment, raise families and build strong communities.

The housing system in Ontario includes market and non-market housing options, and related services, which can support Ontario's objectives of economic prosperity and social and environmental well-being. Housing initiatives should be planned and implemented with a view to these broader goals.

The province's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy focuses on transforming the way housing and homelessness services are delivered in order to achieve better outcomes for people. The goal of integrated local planning is to create opportunities for people that foster independence and enable participation in the community and economy.

Since 2000, Ontario's 47 Service Managers have been responsible for delivering and administering social and affordable housing, other social services programs such as Ontario Works and childcare, and in many cases also deliver homelessness initiatives. The term Service Manager includes Municipal Service Managers that may 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.

The province recognises that Ontario's Service Managers serve communities with diverse needs, resources and capacities. The province also recognises that Ontario's municipalities are the largest contributors to funding for housing and homelessness services and that the future of affordable housing depends on sustained funding. An affordable housing framework with a long-term funding commitment from the federal government that is fair to Ontarians is vital to help Ontario's Service Managers and housing providers to plan and develop more cost effective and efficient housing programs and open the door to better futures for Ontarians.

In 2008, the consensus report of the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review observed that the province and municipalities would achieve better results for people by working together to build locally-managed housing services, simplify the delivery of income assistance supports, and better focus on positive results for people. In 2010 the province set out a strategy to transform the provincially controlled social housing system to a flexible, community-centred system, addressing the entire housing continuum, in partnership with Service Managers and municipalities.

The Housing Services Act, 2011 ("the Act") requires that Service Managers prepare local housing and homelessness plans that address matters of provincial interest and are consistent with policy statements issued under the Act. The Act also provides that

the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (“the Minister”) may be able to exercise remedies in certain situations.

Under the Act, there are provincial interests in a system of housing and homelessness that:

- (a) is focussed on achieving positive outcomes for individuals and families;
- (b) addresses the housing needs of individuals and families in order to help address other challenges they face;
- (c) has a role for non-profit corporations and non-profit housing cooperatives;
- (d) has a role for the private market in meeting housing needs;
- (e) provides for partnerships among governments and others in the community;
- (f) treats individuals and families with respect and dignity;
- (g) is co-ordinated with other community services;
- (h) is relevant to local circumstances;
- (i) allows for a range of housing options to meet a broad range of needs;
- (j) ensures appropriate accountability for public funding;
- (k) supports economic prosperity; and
- (l) is delivered in a manner that promotes environmental sustainability and energy conservation.

It is also a matter of provincial interest that the Service Manager’s housing and homelessness plans be consistent with other plans that may be prescribed under the Act.

The province recognises that Service Managers and stakeholders in the delivery of housing and homelessness services share these interests and the understanding that an improved system will result in better outcomes related to health, education, and community building and will contribute to Ontario’s long-term economic prosperity.

The Ontario Housing Policy Statement is intended to provide additional policy context and direction to Service Managers to support the development of locally relevant plans. Strong partnerships and collaboration between the province, Service Managers, municipalities, housing providers and other stakeholders are essential to its successful implementation.

Policy Direction

1. ACCOUNTABILITY AND OUTCOMES

1.1 Background

Responsibility for housing and homelessness is shared among multiple partners including federal, provincial and local governments, as well as not-for-profit service

providers, the private sector, volunteers, individuals and families. The Act sets out certain responsibilities for Service Managers and the province. The Act provides Service Managers with the flexibility to use funding, tools and other resources to better address the unique housing needs of their community across the housing continuum. While the province will review local housing and homelessness plans, the Service Manager will approve the plan and the accountability for identifying and addressing need is between the Service Manager and the public it serves. Both the province and Service Managers will provide annual progress reports to the public. The Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy committed to a series of performance measures, including the Ontario Housing Measure and the Rental Affordability Indicator which will be reported on by the province, as well as Social Housing Tenant Satisfaction Surveys and local metrics, reported on by Service Managers in order to track progress in meeting local needs.

1.2 Policy Direction

Service Managers will ensure that local housing and homelessness plans:

- a. demonstrate a system of coordinated housing and homelessness services to assist families and individuals to move toward a level of self-sufficiency;
- b. include services, supported by housing and homelessness research and forecasts, that are designed to improve outcomes for individuals and families;
- c. are coordinated and integrated with all municipalities in the service area;
- d. contain strategies to increase awareness of, and improve access to, affordable and safe housing that is linked to supports, homelessness prevention and social programs and services;
- e. contain strategies to identify and reduce gaps in programs, services and supports and focus on achieving positive outcomes for individuals and families;
- f. contain local housing policies and short and long-term housing targets;
- g. provide for public consultation, progress measurement, and reporting.

1.3 Anticipated Results

Measurable, improved outcomes for individuals and families will be achieved through increased access to locally relevant programs, services, and supports that are coordinated and address identified needs. Service Managers will be able to demonstrate accountability for achieving these results in a fiscally responsible manner.

2. GOAL OF ENDING HOMELESSNESS

2.1 Background

The province's policy for ending homelessness puts a primary focus on helping people who are homeless, or at-risk of homelessness, to quickly access safe, affordable and stable housing. This approach, referred to as Housing First, is linked to the provision of a variety of flexible supports based on clients' needs that can assist people in sustaining their housing, and with re-housing when necessary. A Housing First approach also

assists people who are homeless, or at-risk of homelessness, to address other challenges and needs, with a goal of connecting them to community supports and improving social inclusion.

2.2 Policy Direction

Service Managers will ensure that housing and homelessness plans:

- a. provide measures to prevent homelessness by supporting people to stay in their homes including eviction prevention measures and the provision of supports appropriate to clients' needs;
- b. are based on a Housing First philosophy and developed in consultation with a broad range of local stakeholders including those who have experienced homelessness;
- c. support innovative strategies to address homelessness;
- d. include the provision of supports prior to and after obtaining housing to facilitate transitioning people from the street and shelters to safe, adequate and stable housing.

2.3 Anticipated Results

Communities will have strategies to prevent and to reduce homelessness and assist people who are homeless to find and keep housing and be able to demonstrate that these strategies have a measurable impact on at-risk and homeless individuals and families.

3. *NON-PROFIT HOUSING CORPORATIONS AND NON-PROFIT HOUSING CO-OPERATIVES*

3.1 Background

Non-profit housing corporations and non-profit housing co-operatives have an important role in helping to deliver effective housing services and fostering inclusive communities. They provide a significant amount of affordable housing and play a key role in developing and managing housing and homelessness solutions. This includes non-profit housing organizations owned by community groups, municipal non-profits and local housing corporations controlled by Service Managers. Through active tenant involvement, they engage in community-building and create a pride of place that can serve as a foundation for every person to achieve his or her full potential, and contribute to and participate in a prosperous and healthy Ontario. Non-profit housing corporations and non-profit housing co-operatives play a significant role in the housing continuum.

3.2 Policy Direction

Service Managers will ensure that their housing and homelessness plans:

- a. reflect the active engagement of non-profit housing corporations and non-profit housing co-operatives in current and future needs planning;
- b. include strategies to support non-profit housing corporations and non-profit housing co-operatives in the delivery of affordable housing;
- c. include strategies to support ongoing access to affordable housing by preserving existing social housing capacity.

3.3 Anticipated Results

Community-based approaches to social housing are maintained through the continuous engagement and support of non-profit housing corporations and non-profit housing co-operatives, so that affordable options that exist today will continue to be available in the future.

4. THE PRIVATE MARKET

4.1 Background

In Ontario, most of the housing need and demand is met by the private market, through private home ownership and private market rental. This includes a role for the private market in preventing and addressing homelessness, where private market capacity is present. When combined with housing allowances, rent supplements and rent supports, private market capacity can prevent the marginally housed from becoming homeless. Service Managers have employed a variety of strategies and programs to assist people in affordable home ownership. Through careful land use planning, municipalities can regulate their private market housing growth and development while satisfying important social, economic and environmental concerns. The legislative framework under the Planning Act includes processes and tools to help municipalities plan and control private development or redevelopment.

4.2 Policy Direction

Service Manager housing and homelessness plans will set out a strategy to generate municipal support for an active and vital private ownership and rental market, including second units and garden suites, as a necessary part of the housing continuum including affordable home ownership, where appropriate.

4.3 Anticipated Results

Current and future housing needs within the service area that can be addressed by the private market are identified, targets are established, and progress is measured. Second units and garden suites are promoted and supported.

5. CO-ORDINATION WITH OTHER COMMUNITY SERVICES

5.1 Background

A human service system includes the organizations, groups and individuals involved in administering and delivering a set of interdependent supports and services that meets the defined needs of people. Service Managers occupy a unique position as system managers and major service providers in the areas of income support and allied employment services, early learning and child care services, social housing, and homelessness initiatives. While the level of system integration varies across the province, there are opportunities to build on existing strategic planning for housing, homelessness and other human services that many Service Managers have already undertaken. The particular form taken by a community's human services system depends upon the services available in that community, the local needs and the local commitment to the integration of human services. Improved integration of human services planning and delivery would enhance administrative efficiency and provide for the more effective coordination of services. As a result, people would be better able to access the range of services they need.

5.2 Policy Direction

Service Manager housing and homelessness plans will demonstrate how progress will be made in moving toward integrated human services planning and delivery.

5.3 Anticipated Results

Improved integration of housing and homelessness plans and services with other human services planning and delivery will result in better outcomes for the people accessing services.

6. A BROAD RANGE OF COMMUNITY NEEDS

6.1 Background

The province remains committed to its Special Priority Policy that helps victims of domestic violence and their families escape unsafe and abusive situations, and to improving accessibility for people with disabilities in key areas of daily living. The regulations under the Act include a requirement that these matters be addressed in local housing and homelessness plans. The province is committed to building stronger, more positive relationships with Aboriginal people in Ontario and to improving their quality of life. The identification of a broad range of community needs, and working to develop services, supports, programs and protections that address these needs, will

result in a better experience for people who require assistance. This will satisfy the broader goal of allowing people to live with respect and dignity in their homes and thrive in their communities.

6.2 Policy Direction

a. Accessibility

Service Manager housing and homelessness plans will contain an assessment of needs that identifies and sets local requirements for accessible housing and homelessness services for people with disabilities, including those who have mental health needs or illness and/or substance use issues.

b. Special Priority Policy

Service Manager housing and homelessness plans will include a strategy setting out how the housing needs for victims of domestic violence will be addressed and managed at the local level, in coordination with other community-based services and supports.

c. Aboriginal Peoples Living Off-Reserve

Service Manager housing and homelessness plans will identify and consider the housing needs of Aboriginal Peoples living off-reserve.

d. Community Needs

Service Manager housing and homelessness plans reflect the evolving demographics of their community and address the needs of specific local groups. Local groups might include: seniors, youth, women, immigrants, persons released from custody or under community supervision, Crown Wards, and Franco-Ontarians.

6.3 Anticipated Results

Community integration and diversity will be reflected through meeting the needs of people with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, Aboriginal Peoples living off-reserve, and those in other locally defined groups.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND ENERGY CONSERVATION

7.1 Background

Across Ontario there is increased awareness of the importance of developing sustainable and energy efficient housing. The province is committed to being a leader in building renewable energy, encouraging energy and water conservation and creating green jobs by supporting investment that builds a stronger, cleaner economy. Energy

efficient housing is less expensive to operate, less vulnerable to increased energy costs, and provides for higher quality living environments. Housing located near public and community transit options can provide access to schools, health services and employment centres which would improve social inclusion, build economic prosperity, and further reduce energy consumption and cost.

7.2 Policy Direction

Service Manager housing and homelessness plans will demonstrate a commitment to improve the energy efficiency of existing and future publicly funded housing stock. This includes support for energy conservation and energy efficiency through operating programs, tenant engagement, housing located near transportation choices, and innovative investment decisions such as the installation of renewable energy and low carbon technologies.

7.3 Anticipated Results

Service Managers will provide specific strategies to build a more energy efficient publicly funded housing portfolio while helping create a stronger, cleaner economy that better protects our environment.