

The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole
Community and Health Services
November 5, 2020

Report of the Commissioner of Community and Health Services

York Region's Response to Provincial Consultations on Supportive Housing

1. Recommendations

1. Council endorse the following recommendations to the Province of Ontario in response to the consultation to improve the supportive housing system, including that the province:
 - a. Strengthen and clarify existing roles in the system to address fragmentation, including establishing a lead ministry that would be responsible for strategic oversight and ongoing work to improve coordination, share best practices, plan for the future, and allocate provincial funding
 - b. Identify entities, in consultation with Service Managers, Ontario Health Teams and other stakeholders, to lead local system coordination and streamline access to provincial supportive housing to address challenges in system navigation
 - c. Provide dedicated funding for rent subsidies for provincial supportive housing programs to address the lack of supply and need for more affordable units
 - d. Maintain new and existing rent supplement programs to ensure funding is available to support residents in need, taking into account local market conditions
2. The Regional Clerk forward this report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and local Members of Provincial Parliament.

2. Summary

The province is currently consulting stakeholders on Ontario's supportive housing system. In response to the consultation, this report requests Council endorsement of staff recommendations to improve the system. Supportive housing, which is a provincial responsibility, combines housing assistance with clinical and other support services to enable people to live in their communities as independently as possible. The system is heavily fragmented, resulting in service gaps, difficulty in accessing and navigating supportive

housing programs, and a lack of supply. Continued provincial leadership and oversight is essential to improve coordination and access to supportive housing and provide dedicated funding for both services and affordable housing options.

Key Points:

- The province is reviewing the supportive housing system to identify opportunities to streamline and improve coordination, and is consulting with stakeholders, including Service Managers and supportive housing sector organizations.
- The province directly administers and funds supportive housing programs. Service Managers do not have a mandate or resources to lead and/or fund the supportive housing system.
- Regional involvement in supportive housing is ad hoc and a result of legacy programs and/or dedicated provincial funding streams.
- Opportunities for the province to strengthen the supportive housing system include renewed strategic focus, improved coordination under a clear, dedicated ministry lead, as well as dedicated provincial funding for both housing assistance and services.
- Staff recommend this report be circulated to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and local members of Provincial Parliament as part of the Region's engagement in the consultation process.

3. Background

The Province of Ontario is responsible for supportive housing

"Supportive housing" is an umbrella term that includes diverse housing and accommodation types and support models, designed to enable people who have a range of different needs to live in their communities as independently as possible. Housing can take many forms, such as congregate living with onsite services and scattered independent units with in-home and/or outside services. Supports often include a health and/or mental health component and should be available at all times. Key goals for supportive housing programs include assisting residents to develop skills, maintain stable housing, and manage their health. Many supportive housing programs are intended to provide long-term or permanent homes for individuals who will require ongoing assistance, although the depth and types of support required may change over time.

The province identifies 20 core programs that directly provide or contribute toward supportive housing and another 12 related programs, each with their own guidelines and funding rules, spread across three ministries, serving a wide variety of populations and needs. The majority of supportive housing programs in Ontario fall under the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) or the Ministry of Health (MOH), and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH). Some supportive housing programs are jointly funded and

administered by MCCSS and MOH. Table 1 summarizes the role of each ministry in delivering supportive housing for different populations.

Table 1: Supportive Housing Target Populations in Ontario, by Ministry

Ministry	Target Populations
MOH	High risk seniors People with physical disabilities People with mental health related needs, serious mental illness and/or problematic substance use People with acquired brain injuries People with terminal/chronic illness (e.g. HIV/AIDS)
MCCSS	People with developmental disabilities Youth Indigenous people People at risk of experiencing gender-based violence and human trafficking
MMAH	People who have a history of homelessness or are at risk of homelessness

According to the Province's [2019 Community Housing Renewal Strategy](#), 99% of the funding for supportive housing in Ontario comes from provincial dollars.

There are multiple partners involved in the delivery of supportive housing, resulting in a complex, fragmented system

Supportive housing in Ontario is delivered by many service providers, who have different program mandates, eligibility rules, service delivery models, and funding and accountability relationships with the three provincial ministries. People who need supportive housing may have to apply directly to several different service providers or agencies. These programs also often serve people who access multiple systems that are not well-coordinated with each other, such as housing, health and community services. This results in a complex and fragmented array of programs that can be challenging to access and difficult to navigate for residents. The diverse funding streams and program requirements can also be challenging for service providers seeking to develop or grow supportive housing programs.

Both the province and the Region have roles in the housing system

As the Service Manager designated under the *Housing Services Act, 2011*, York Region is responsible for community housing and the homelessness and housing stability system. When the province transferred responsibility for community housing to municipal Service

Managers in the early 2000s, it retained responsibility for dedicated supportive housing programs.

Table 2 provides an overview of provincial and Service Manager roles in the housing system.

Table 2: Provincial and Service Manager Roles in the Housing System

Level of Government	Role
Province of Ontario (MMAH, MOH, MCSS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• System steward, setting the overall vision, and legislative and policy framework for community housing and homelessness• Funds and regulates supportive housing, including dedicated rent supplement funding• Funds time-limited housing and homelessness programs, either on its own or jointly with the federal government
Service Managers (47 designated municipalities across Ontario)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fund and administer community housing as mandated by the <i>Housing Services Act</i>, 2011• Develop and maintain 10-year housing and homelessness plans setting out objectives and targets to address local priorities and address matters of provincial interest• Maintain wait lists for subsidized housing• Fund rent subsidies and maintaining legislated minimum service levels• Ensure that community housing providers comply with provincial legislation and funding agreements• Administer contracts with homelessness and housing stability service providers• Allocate federal and provincial funding for housing and homelessness programs

The Region administers funding to some supportive housing providers under dedicated provincial funding streams

The Region's mandated role as Service Manager for community housing and homelessness, and housing stability services does not include administration, funding or delivery of supportive housing, with a small number of exceptions related to funding from senior levels of government. As some federal and provincial funding programs have included supportive housing components; as a result, the Region administers funding for the following:

- Two supportive housing providers received capital grants under the federal/provincial Affordable Housing Program and Investment in Affordable Housing program following a request for proposals. All non-profit housing providers who received funding under these programs also received conditional development charge grants from the Region
- Up to 59 rent supplements under the supportive housing stream of the provincial Strong Communities Rent Supplement program
- 30 rent subsidies were allocated to a supportive housing provider under the Regional Rent Assistance program

The Region has relationships with supportive housing providers that have entered into agreements to access community housing units or provincial funding programs. Some community housing buildings also have units set aside for residents who require supportive housing; however, community housing providers do not directly provide support services required by individuals with more complex needs, and their buildings and staffing models are not funded or equipped to provide on-site support services for residents who may require ongoing and/or complex assistance to live safely in their unit.

Municipalities also interact with the supportive housing system due to their key role in the delivery of homelessness and housing stability services

Many people who experience chronic homelessness need ongoing supports to remain housed. A number of the households who access York Region's homelessness and housing stability service system have complex needs related to mental health conditions, physical or developmental disabilities, and/or problematic substance use. For these individuals, permanent supportive housing has been shown to be effective in stabilizing their lives while reducing demand on other social services; however, there are long wait lists for these and other housing options.

Within its mandate as the Service Manager for homelessness and housing stability services, the Region administers two programs, Housing with Supports and Home Now, that the province considers to be supportive housing. In both cases, the majority of the funding is provincial.

- **Housing with Supports:** The Region enters into funding agreements with operators to provide a fee subsidy, on a per diem basis (\$55 as of January 1, 2019), for individuals who would not otherwise be able to afford this type of housing, including residents who receive Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), or low income seniors. The Region licenses and inspects Housing with Supports homes to ensure compliance with the Lodging House Bylaw, operating agreements, and standards of care.
- **Home Now:** This program helps people who are chronically homeless move into long-term housing and remain housed through active case management, personalized wraparound supports, and rent assistance.

In addition, emergency and transitional housing programs in York Region provide emergency housing, meals, programs and wraparound services to help homeless residents find and keep housing. These programs are traditionally a time-limited service; however, due to the lack of supportive housing and other permanent affordable options in York Region, individuals presenting with complex needs are staying longer in emergency and transitional housing. As a result, emergency and transitional housing providers are compelled to provide more supports.

The province is seeking stakeholder input to address fragmentation within the supportive housing system and improve outcomes for people

In 2017, the province released a [Supportive Housing Policy Framework](#) and [Best Practice Guide](#) identified challenges for supportive housing programs in Ontario, and set out a vision that included new supply; streamlined access; alignment with best practices; improved system coordination; and outcome-focused performance measures. The [2019 provincial budget](#) committed to a review of supportive housing programs, with the goal of identifying opportunities to streamline and improve coordination to ensure people get the services they need. MMAH and MOH are co-leading a review of programs and policies to identify opportunities to better coordinate supportive housing programs across ministries.

On September 25, 2020, the province launched a consultation on the supportive housing system to gather feedback from stakeholders, including Service Managers, District Social Services Administration Boards, and Indigenous Program Administrators; supportive housing providers; community housing providers; sector organizations; and community-based service providers. The consultation includes a survey that addressed five key themes: supply, access, efficiency, complex needs, and COVID-19. The province also requested feedback on MMAH funding programs including Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative and Home for Good.

4. Analysis

Supportive housing is essential to enable residents with a wide range of needs to live and participate in their communities

Housing is one of the key social determinants of health. For some people with complex needs, a flexible and well-funded supportive housing system is crucial to maintaining health and well-being. In York Region, residents at any age and stage of life may need a combination of housing assistance and support services to live in the community as independently as possible. In 2019, 35% of clients served in emergency housing and/or supportive housing were under 24 years of age, 61% were aged 25 to 64 years and 3.4% were 65 years and older. This includes people with physical or developmental disabilities, seniors – especially those who are unable to afford private retirement homes – and people living with serious mental illness or problematic substance use.

Given the wide range of needs, types of accommodation, and the breadth of supports residents in supportive housing may require, including counselling, personal support, case management, income support and assistance with medication, as well as primary health

care, it is essential the province continue to be responsible for funding and managing supportive housing in Ontario.

Provincial leadership is key to addressing the fragmentation in Ontario's supportive housing system in Ontario

There is no overall dedicated lead to service planning and investment for the supportive housing system as a whole in Ontario – or even within the three responsible ministries, although there may be planning to address supportive housing within specific sectors, such as services for people with developmental disabilities or serious mental illness. The provincial consultation survey emphasizes that the fragmented system is a challenge, because many people may have complex needs and require support in multiple areas. The lack of integrated service system planning has created gaps, and also contributes to challenges in accessing supportive housing and a lack of supply. Duplicated roles and overlapping responsibilities and systems create inefficiencies, further contributing to the lack of supply. This has become even more challenging during the pandemic.

As a designated Service Manager under the *Housing Services Act, 2011*, the Region must establish a 10-year housing and homelessness plan to identify local housing needs and sets objectives and targets to address those needs. In addition, the Region is required to develop a community safety and well-being plan, under the *Police Services Act*. A lack of stable, affordable, appropriate and sustainable housing is identified as a risk in the Provincial Community Safety and Well-Being Planning Framework. The Region can help to identify local supportive housing needs through these planning roles. Service Managers, however, set goals and allocate financial and administrative resources based on their legislated responsibility, and as previously noted, municipalities do not have a mandate or funding capacity to manage the supportive housing system. Provincial leadership of the supportive housing system is essential to guide needs assessment and service planning, investments and outcome monitoring across the three responsible ministries.

More coordinated access points for supportive housing programs would improve system navigation

Currently, the pathways for individuals and families to connect with an appropriate supportive housing program are not well coordinated and can be difficult to navigate. In York Region there are different entry points for supportive housing, depending on the responsible provincial ministry and target population, including:

- Developmental Services Ontario maintains regional wait lists for supportive housing for people with developmental disabilities
- Streamlined Access, administered by York Support Services Network, manages access to MOH-funded supportive housing programs
- The Region is implementing a Coordinated Access System to triage homelessness services based on individual need, and provide a unified approach to intake, assessment and referral to services to help residents who are experiencing

homelessness to obtain and retain housing, including access to MMAH-funded supportive housing programs

- Some supportive housing programs are accessed through application or referral to individual service providers

Many people who need supportive housing have overlapping needs, and the diversity of entry points creates challenges in identifying the most appropriate program.

There is a need for a more standardized process to connect residents who need supportive housing with the most appropriate program; however, the Region's Coordinated Access system and the subsidized housing wait list are not designed to coordinate access to all supportive housing programs. Administration of the subsidized housing wait list is currently heavily prescribed by the province and requires significant staff resources, and does not have the capacity to also allocate access to supportive housing programs or coordinate housing subsidies with support services. The Region's Coordinated Access system supports residents who may be eligible for both MMAH-funded supportive housing programs and MOH- and MCCSS-funded supportive housing; however, many residents who need supportive housing do not experience homelessness.

Should the province want to offer centralized access to provincially-administered supportive housing programs, Ontario Health Teams may be an option. The Ontario Health Teams in York Region partner with community organizations to provide a continuum of health care to residents, which will include, at maturity, system navigation services. Ontario Health Teams are groups or networks of health care providers and organizations that will ultimately be clinically and fiscally responsible for the delivery of the full continuum of care to their patients including, but not limited to, primary care services, home care, acute care, long-term care, mental health and addictions services, and palliative care services. York Region is a signed/collaborative partner on two of the three Ontario Health Teams in York Region.

Dedicated provincial investment is needed to ensure the supply of supportive housing is affordable to residents who need it

Appropriate pairing of support services and housing assistance is essential for a range of different groups and is key to creating welcoming and accessible communities. The provincial Supportive Housing Framework states that, as a best practice, housing subsidies and support services should be separate, as this model provides greater choice and flexibility in where to live. In York Region, however, there is a lack of supply for both support services and subsidized units, especially units affordable to recipients of OW or ODSP. As of October 2019, the private apartment vacancy rate was 1.2% (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Rental Market Survey). In addition to the limited stock of affordable rental units, those that are available are out of reach for many vulnerable residents in York Region. According to the 2019 Rental Market Survey, the average rent for all unit types in York Region was \$1,368, which is significantly higher than OW and ODSP shelter allowances, which, for a single person, are \$390 and \$497 respectively. As a result, residents who need supportive housing can face long waits, and depending on the program and their needs, they may be connected with support services but not to an affordable place to live.

Some supportive housing programs provide funding for support services, but limited or no dedicated funding to address housing affordability through rent supplements. The province considers capital funding programs such as the Affordable Housing Program and Investment in Affordable Housing program to be related to supportive housing. Iterations of these programs sometimes included targets for affordable units to be set aside for supportive housing, but did not provide direct funding for support services or rent subsidies for households requiring a deeper level of affordability. For example, previous federal and provincial affordable housing programs took a supply-based approach to increase the number of affordable units. These programs did not provide dedicated long-term funding for rent subsidies or support services. Instead, the province encouraged Service Managers to work with local health entities and community agencies to coordinate support services with units created by these programs.

As a result of this ad hoc approach to creating and funding subsidies for supportive housing residents, coordinating and matching support services with housing assistance is a challenge. A dedicated provincial funding stream to offer subsidies within supportive housing programs that meets the actual level of need is required. Updating the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program shelter allowances, taking into account local housing market realities, would also help recipients to afford safe, stable housing whether in dedicated supportive housing projects, or in the market. While the Region welcomes joint federal/provincial investment in the new [Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit](#) there are a limited number of benefits available to address several different priorities, including households currently on the subsidized housing wait list. It is anticipated the program could support approximately 300 households by 2022.

The fiscal and administrative capacity that rests with senior levels of government is necessary to fund and oversee the supportive housing system

Supportive housing providers do not receive adequate funding to provide affordable housing, either through rent supplement agreements or their own units. At the same time, Service Managers, including York Region, lack the fiscal and administrative capacity to address this gap through the community housing system.

Over the past several years, some supportive housing providers and sector organizations have advocated for Service Managers to set aside community housing units or rent supplements for their clients. As the Service Manager for community housing, the Region is responsible to maintain and administer a wait list for subsidized housing. As of December 31, 2019, there were 17,457 households on the subsidized housing wait list, and demand continues to increase. Just 245 subsidized units became available in community housing in 2019. In 2019, a single, non-senior adult who received a housing offer had waited an average of 11.5 years for a housing subsidy; an individual applying to the wait list in 2020 will likely wait much longer. Dedicating a portion of subsidized units for supportive housing programs would increase pressure on the limited supply of housing subsidies and further extend wait times for applicants.

While York Region could consider directly delivering additional programs and services, this would come at a higher cost to the Region and require significantly more staff. This would include both housing staff, and staff with expertise in a wide range of health and mental

health services. In 2019, staff in Homelessness Community Programs supported approximately 4,700 people directly on an annual basis, guiding service providers to deliver services in accordance with provincial requirements, providing and coordinating the delivery of homelessness prevention and housing stability services. The Housing Services Branch is also experiencing a significantly increased workload as a result of new federal/provincial programs that are within the mandated responsibility for community housing, including the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit.

Funding envelopes from other levels of government for homelessness and housing stability services, such as Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative and the federal Reaching Home funding, do not permit funds to be used for ongoing rent supplements or housing allowances. These programs are also narrowly targeted at people who have experienced or who are at risk of homelessness, in alignment with Service Managers' mandated responsibilities. The broader supportive housing system in Ontario includes significant clinical and income support components that cannot be funded through the property tax base, and is most appropriately funded and managed at the provincial level.

Building a holistic, coordinated supportive housing system requires strengthening existing roles and considering the needs of residents and providers

A well-funded and coordinated supportive housing system is a key element in creating inclusive communities that meet the needs of residents at every age and stage of life. Although the Region welcomes the province's move to strengthen and transform the supportive housing system to ensure that it meets residents' needs while providing independence and choice, it must be led by the province. Staff recommends the province maintain responsibility for this system and, further, that the province should:

- Strengthen and clarify the existing roles, including establishing a lead ministry that would be responsible for strategic oversight as well as ongoing work to improve coordination and share best practices, plan for the future, and allocate provincial funding
- Identify entities, in consultation with Service Managers, Ontario Health Teams and other stakeholders, that can lead local system coordination and streamline access to provincial supportive housing
- Provide dedicated funding for rent subsidies for provincial supportive housing programs
- Maintain new and existing rent supplement programs to ensure funding is available to support residents in need, taking into account local market conditions

The provincial consultation on supportive housing aligns with key Regional priorities, and the Region will partner with the province within its mandate

Although Service Managers, including York Region, are not in a position to take a leading role in a modernized supportive housing system, there may be opportunities to build on the areas where the Region is already coordinating housing assistance and support services, particularly in the area of homelessness and housing stability.

5. Financial

The financial implications of the provincial consultations on supportive housing are currently unknown. The province's direction in addressing challenges in the supportive housing system may have financial implications for the Region.

In March 2020, the Ontario government announced the Social Services Relief Fund, which provides funding for municipalities to provide supports and services aimed at protecting the health and safety of vulnerable residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Region was allocated \$4.9 million under Phase One, and has a preliminary Phase Two allocation of \$8.42 million. Under Phase Two of the Social Service Relief Fund, capital costs are permitted as a new area of eligible expenses. This funding can be used to enable the acquisition of new, or modifications to existing facilities such as emergency shelters, supportive housing, transitional housing, and related facilities. The Social Services Branch is exploring ways to leverage these funds to help address some of the supportive housing capacity needs; however, with the level of funding available and because it is time limited, opportunities will be very limited.

The recommendations outlined in this report to strengthen the provincially-led supportive housing system would improve cost efficiency and result in better outcomes for people, as a more coordinated system that is easier for residents to navigate would enable more funding to be directed to addressing their needs.

6. Local Impact

Housing affordability and limited access to appropriate supports continue to be challenges for residents across the Region. Strengthening the provincial role in coordinating and funding supportive housing and ensuring services are available for persons with disabilities will support residents in all nine local cities, townships and towns.

7. Conclusion

The consultation on the supportive housing system in Ontario represents an opportunity to clarify and strengthen the existing roles of the province, supportive housing providers, and Service Managers to improve services for people and be more cost efficient, directing available funding to those in need. As a Service Manager for community housing and homelessness and housing stability services, the Region will continue to partner with supportive housing providers where appropriate and within its mandate; however, Service Managers do not have capacity to fund and administer supportive housing. Dedicated provincial leadership and funding are required to ensure that the supportive housing system is well-coordinated and has sufficient supply to meet needs.

For more information on this report, please contact Kathy Milsom, General Manager, Housing Services at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 72091 or Cordelia Abankwa, General Manager, Social Services at 1-877-464-9675 ex. 72150. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Recommended by: **Katherine Chislett**
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

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Chief Administrative Officer

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Attachment (1)
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