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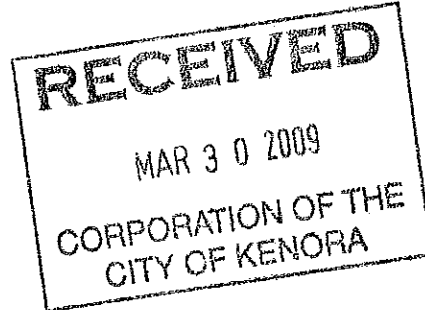
Kenora District Services Board

cc: LONDA Comm., Making Kenora Home

March 27, 2009

File No: B10-04

Mayor and Council
City of Kenora
1 Main Street South
Kenora, ON P9N 3X2



Dear Mayor and Council:

Re: Improving the Housing System in Northern Ontario

The Board of Directors is in support of a discussion paper commissioned by the Northern Ontario Service Deliverer's Association (NOSDA) on improving the housing system in Northern Ontario. The discussion paper contains a number of recommendations for improving the way the housing system is structured, funded and managed with the aim of improving the ability of the Province of Ontario and local service deliverers to achieve better outcomes from the investments made in a number of social policy areas.

As noted in the Paper "housing plays a significant role in all areas of social policy, from economic development to poverty reduction to pressures on acute and long-term care. Current approaches to housing policy and programs are too restrictive and limit the ability of Northern communities and Service Managers (KDSB) to meet the needs of their citizens and improve the outcomes of investments being made across the range of service areas."

The NOSDA Discussion Paper explores the role of housing and how it affects and is affected by social and economic conditions in Northern Ontario. The KDSB Board of Directors believe the Province needs to develop a more holistic and less restrictive approach to housing that encourages investments in social and health services and in the most cost-effective way. Respecting and supporting local decision-making in support of clearly defined goals and outcomes is perhaps the most effective tool for ensuring better outcomes for public investment in communities.

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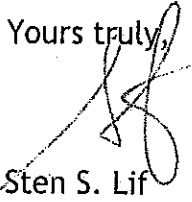
WEBSITE: www.kdsb.on.ca

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The Board of Directors is seeking the support of Kenora District municipalities through support and endorsement of the NOSDA Discussion Paper and would urge your municipality to consider support in the form of a resolution forwarded to the Honourable Jim Watson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Mr. Gary Scripnick, Chair of the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) c/o the Cochrane DSSAB, 38 Pine Street North, Unit 120, Timmins, ON P4N 6K6.

Attached is a copy of the NOSDA Discussion Paper and should you wish further information or clarification please do not hesitate to contact this office.

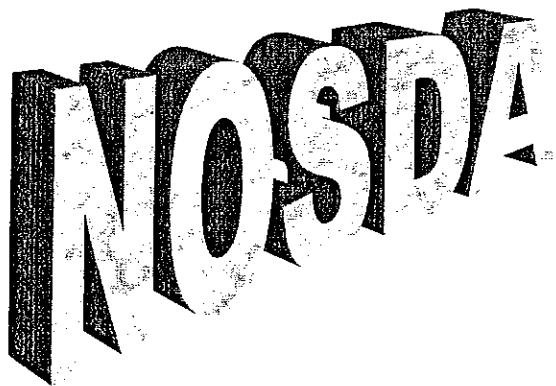
Yours truly,



Sten S. Lif
Chief Administrative Officer

/dls

Enclosure



NORTHERN ONTARIO
SERVICE DELIVERERS
ASSOCIATION

www.nosda.net

Improving the Housing System in Northern Ontario

A discussion paper of the
Northern Ontario Service
Deliverers Association

February 2009

Housing plays a significant role in all areas of social policy, from economic development to poverty reduction to pressures on acute and long-term care. Current approaches to housing policy and programs are too restrictive and limit the ability of Northern municipalities and Service Managers to meet the needs of their citizens and improve the outcomes of investments being made across the range of service areas. Investments in housing and supports can be a more cost-effective way of addressing these issues, but need to be geared to local conditions. The Province needs to develop a more holistic and less restrictive approach to housing that encourages investments in social and health services to be made in the most cost-effective way. Respecting and supporting local decision-making in support of clearly defined goals and outcomes is perhaps the most effective tool for ensuring better outcomes for public investment in communities.

Prepared for NOSDA by Russell Mawby, Places Group, Ottawa



Improving the Housing System in Northern Ontario

A discussion paper of the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association – February 2009

Executive Summary

The Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) brings together 9 District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSAB's) and 2 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM's) who are responsible for the consolidated municipal delivery of social services in Northern Ontario. NOSDA members are primarily responsible for the service system management of Land Ambulance, Social Housing, Child Care and Ontario Works.

NOSDA was intended to create a political forum for reviewing and developing both policies and programs from a Northern perspective. This paper explores the role of housing and how it affects and is affected by social and economic conditions in Northern Ontario. A number of recommendations for improving the way the housing system is structured, funded and managed are offered with the aim of improving the ability for the Province of Ontario and local service deliverers to achieve better outcomes from the investments being made in a number of social policy areas.

Northern context

The main factors affecting the health, vitality and stability of Northern communities are geography, specifically great distances between population clusters; and a resourced based economy that is relatively more cyclical and volatile. These two factors result in a number of outcomes.

Public services are diffused throughout the region, and delivering these services is relatively more expensive.

People often have to move to access services, education or employment, which means that housing markets vary greatly across the North and from year to year.

The proportion of senior households is increasing relative to overall population, partly as younger people move out of the North in search of employment. Many of these households need supports to live independently.

The social housing stock in many communities is no longer appropriate, in terms of housing form, location or condition, e.g. built for family households where demand is from smaller senior households, and/or deteriorating condition with no capital reserves for repair.

The long-term impacts on the overall housing system likely include increased deterioration of housing stock, reduced market investment and increased pressure on social housing, long-term care and emergency services.

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This context suggests some significant changes to housing and social policy that would allow Northern municipalities and Service Managers to better meet the needs of their citizens and improve the outcomes across a range of social policy areas.

In general, the governments need to address the role that housing plays in all areas of social policy, from economic development to poverty reduction to pressures on acute and long-term care. Housing is infrastructure, and investing in affordable housing, by new development, acquisition or renovation contributes to the economic health of communities through construction, the buying of goods and services and the reduction of costs in other service areas. Housing outcomes need to be considered in all infrastructure and service investment decisions.

One-size-fits-all housing programs don't work. Housing markets and communities across the province vary greatly. In Northern Ontario, geography and resource economies greatly influence demand for housing, and programs developed in urban Southern Ontario do not work well in the remote North and rural areas. Provincial legislation should establish expected outcomes and service levels, not prescribe how to manage funding or programs. To truly help people, programs and policies must be flexible and permit locally appropriate responses. For example, increased portability of housing subsidies that can be applied in-situ or follow families as they move would better respond to the volatility of the Northern economy, and would support transitions between employment and social assistance. Better still, a Service Manager Plan model based on a District Affordable Housing Strategy would allow local responsiveness within an accountability framework. Ideally, funding would be provided as a block-grant that can be applied to fulfill Service Manager objectives.

Housing is a business, and providers need the flexibility to manage their portfolios not just the SHRA. The significant assets embodied in the existing housing stock need to be unencumbered. The provincial and federal governments must work together to facilitate and permit, where possible, existing social housing providers to lever the value of existing assets to address current and future needs and opportunities, whether selling unaffordable stock and replacing it with new or newly acquired housing, or converting unit subsidies to rent supplements.

More broadly, the range of funding, programs and legislation Service Managers have to work with often conflict or do not work well together to achieve better results for the money being spent or for the people being served. An integrated approach to policy and programs would ensure that investments are made in the right places rather than just where programs or legislation require. For example, providing generalized social and health care support to seniors in social housing reduces emergency room visits, hospitalization and pressure on long-term care beds. Better alignment of policies and programs across all social service Ministries would result in more cost-effective (e.g. supportive housing rather than long-term care beds) and more efficient (e.g. reduced administrative complexity) solutions to variable and complex community needs. Program funding needs to be structured so that the right agencies deliver programs regardless of which Ministry is providing the funding.

Finally, the unique situation of DSSAB's must be taken into account when policy and programs are being developed. Unlike other Service Managers, DSSAB's are not a level of government, and work cooperatively and collaboratively with, through and on behalf of their funding

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municipalities. All too often DSSABs are disadvantaged from their CMSM counterparts when special funding and infrastructure programs are announced and DSSABs are excluded from application. DSSAB's need the authority to receive and allocate funding for legislated programs and to help the Province meet program objectives.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Affordable Housing needs to be included in all of the Province's infrastructure investment programs and policies.
2. Fast-track the development of an Affordable Housing Strategy for Ontario.
3. Ensure that all Provincial policies support the development and retention of inclusive communities.
4. Build on the Success of the Affordable Housing Program by continuing to invest in building and retaining affordable housing.
5. Finance, tax, planning and community safety policies need to be aligned to help preserve the existing market housing stock.
6. Adopt and support an asset management approach to protect and reinvest in existing social housing assets.
7. Respect local authority for local decisions for local service delivery.
8. Move to a Service Manager Plan-based funding model that allows investments in housing and community supports to be targeted to local needs and opportunities.
9. Support local service delivery systems with training, access to expertise and funding for administration of provincial programs to ensure that the benefits of local service delivery can be achieved and sustained.
10. Adopt a cross-sectoral, integrated approach to investments in housing and supports with program funding structured so that the right agencies deliver programs regardless of which Ministry is providing the funding.
11. Align all human services to support an integrated approach to policy and program development and service delivery.
12. Adopt a "bottom-up" approach to policy development that is based on achieving identified outcomes so that programs work in, with and for the community.

Introduction

NOSDA Members

- ❖ Algoma
- ❖ Cochrane
- ❖ Kenora
- ❖ Manitoulin-Sudbury
- ❖ Muskoka
- ❖ Nipissing
- ❖ Parry Sound
- ❖ Sault Ste. Marie
- ❖ Greater Sudbury
- ❖ Timiskaming
- ❖ Thunder Bay

The Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) brings together 9 District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSAB's) and 2 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM's) who are responsible for the consolidated municipal delivery of social services in Northern Ontario.

NOSDA members are primarily responsible for the service system management of Land Ambulance, Social Housing, Child Care and Ontario Works, with the CMSM's also directly responsible for the full range of municipal services.

NOSDA was intended to create a political forum for reviewing and developing both policies and program delivery issues from a Northern perspective. Through the District Social Service Administration Board Act, (RSO, 1990), DSSABs were created as a response to the challenges of delivering services over the vast geographic distances of Northern Ontario. Like CMSM's, DSSAB's work cooperatively and collaboratively with, through and on behalf of their funding Municipalities; however DSSAB's continue to be treated differently from CMSM's and are excluded from some provincial programs.

Service Managers exist at the interface of provincial legislation and community outcomes. They understand that housing is not just bricks and mortar, not just legislation, and not just a funding program. It is a human service, an essential element in the planning of healthy, prosperous communities.

Service Managers also see the results of not investing in housing and community services, including the increased pressures on other social and health services and programs.

Through their municipalities, Service Managers fund, administer and provide a range of programs and services that make Ontario's communities physically, socially and economically healthy places to live.

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The range of funding, programs and legislation Service Managers have to work with often conflict or do not work well together to achieve better results for the money being spent or for the people being served.

This paper explores the role of housing and how it affects and is affected by social and economic conditions in Northern Ontario. A number of recommendations for improving the way the housing system is structured, funded and managed are offered with the aim of improving the ability for the Province of Ontario and local service deliverers to achieve better outcomes from the investments being made in a number of social policy areas.

Northern context

It can take 3 or 4 days to visit all of the social housing communities in some Districts.

- Geography, specifically great distances between population clusters, is the defining characteristic of Northern Ontario. The North has over 85% of Ontario's land mass, with 6.5% of the total population. This means that services are diffused throughout the region, and that people have to travel great distances, or sometimes move, to access specific services they may need. Delivering these services is also relatively more expensive.
- Northern communities are generally more immediately and severely affected by economic and demographic changes. There is relatively high mobility of families across the region and into and out of the North in search of education and employment. This creates great variability and volatility in housing markets across the region, with clusters of high housing demand in the larger urban areas and relatively weaker or declining housing demand in other areas. It also creates relatively sudden increases in demand for Ontario Works assistance in areas where employment is in decline as well as the places people move to seeking work.
- Market investments in housing are relatively low, even in areas with relatively high housing demand and low vacancy rates. Little or no new rental housing has been built in the past few decades, and a general imbalance between supply and demand exists throughout the North, with some areas seeing declines in housing

A room in North Bay rents for over \$500 a month. Nipissing University has built over 250 new units of housing for 1,000 students to keep up with demand.

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A recent study by the North East LHIN showed that over 30% of the population in the region will be over the age of 65 by 2031.

- prices and utilization, and others with high demand, low vacancy rates and increasing unaffordability.
- The proportion of senior households is increasing relative to overall population. Part of the reason is that younger people are tending to move out of the North in search of employment, while older people tend to stay in their communities, or are coming to Northern communities to retire. Special needs households (e.g. ODSP recipients) are also increasing as a proportion of the population. Many of these households need supports to live independently. Many are choosing Long Term Care as a means of accessing the necessary supports.
- An aging population combined with mobile and declining younger households has many consequences, including difficulty in finding younger people to deliver the services seniors need. The long-term impacts on the overall housing system are not clear, but likely include increased deterioration of housing stock, reduced market investment and increased pressure on social housing, long-term care and emergency services. Certainly, the social housing stock in many communities is no longer appropriate, in terms of housing form, location or condition, e.g. built for family households where demand is from smaller senior households, and/or deteriorating condition with no capital reserves for repair.
- 10% to 12% of the population in the North is Aboriginal, representing about 40% of all aboriginals in Ontario. While jurisdictional concerns create some separation between populations, the reality is that many Aboriginal people rely on off-reserve services, particularly in larger centres. There is an increasing proportion of aboriginals in all social housing, especially seniors, who move to larger centres because of need to be closer to health and social services.

This context suggests some significant changes to housing and social policy that would allow Northern municipalities and Service Managers to better meet the needs of their citizens and improve the outcomes across a range of social policy areas:

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- Ability to reposition, renovate and relocate existing social housing assets to adjust to changing demographics both within and between Districts.
- Ability to direct housing investments to meet local needs, whether new rental housing including market housing or repairs or redevelopment of existing housing stock.
- Portability of housing subsidies (directly or via a new Provincial Housing Benefit-type program) that can be applied in-situ or follow families as they move would better respond to the volatility of the Northern economy, and would support transitions between employment and social assistance.
- More investments in supported housing (supportive housing and more supports to tenants in general).
- Alignment of policies and programs across all social service Ministries so that more cost-effective (e.g. supportive housing rather than long-term care beds) and more efficient (e.g. reduced administrative complexity) solutions to community needs can be developed.

Housing is not just a program, it is where we live.

Governments need to look at the role that housing plays in all areas of social policy, from economic development to poverty reduction to pressures on acute and long-term care. Housing markets across the North are greatly affected by economic and demographic volatility, but the demand for affordable housing remains whether for displaced families or students or seniors needing supportive places to live. Investments need to be made in the most cost-effective way to address issues across the housing system as a whole. Hospitals and health care providers, seniors advocates, educators and employers are increasingly advocating for making those investments in housing and related supports.

1. Include Affordable Housing in the Province's Infrastructure investment programs:

A new affordable housing unit generates up to \$180,000 in direct spending and business activity and at least 3 times that value in economic spin-off.

Public capital investments of 30% to 50% of value leverages market financing while ensuring reasonable affordability to tenants.

- Housing is infrastructure, and investing in affordable housing, by new development, acquisition or renovation contributes to the economic health of communities, the province and the nation through construction, the buying of goods and services and the reduction of costs in other service areas. Further, unlike many other economic stimulus programs, investments in housing stay in the communities the investments are made in. Now is the time to make these investments.
- Any funding programs need to be flexible to address local issues. For example, in many parts of Northern Ontario repairs or renovations to existing housing are more important than adding new units to the housing stock. New construction is important in other areas, but so is the ability to renovate existing market housing to preserve and improve affordability.

2. Fast-track the development of the Ontario Affordable Housing Strategy:

- The recently released Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy acknowledged the importance of affordable housing as an effective way of reducing poverty and of building healthier and more vibrant communities. The government should undertake the development of a comprehensive provincial Affordable Housing Strategy that addresses the role of housing in the full range of policy areas. Consultations for the Strategy need to move forward with a sense of urgency. The government should consult widely and ensure the strategy involves all Ministries involved in delivering housing programs and policies, including (but not limited to) Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Ministry of Community and Social Services, and the Planning Policy section of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.
- Of equal importance is the development of local housing strategies that can link together policies and programs in all service areas to ensure a more joined-up approach to service delivery. The Province should complement the implementation of a provincial strategy

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by facilitating the development of local strategies in each Northern District.

- To be truly effective the Ontario effort should be dovetailed with the creation of a National Housing Strategy under the leadership of the federal government. But Ontario should take leadership and act in the event of federal inaction or indifference.

3. Inclusive communities are healthier:

Buildings that are 100% RGI could convert some units to market rents, increasing the population diversity while addressing the need for more market rental in some communities.

The displaced RGI subsidies could be applied as rent supplements in other parts of the community, thus increasing inclusion throughout the community.

- The growing pressure on social housing in most areas of the province is a direct result of the lack of market investment in rental housing over the past few decades. Some urban areas in the north are experiencing high demand for market rental, with resulting high rents. Some of the market stock is being lost to conversion or redevelopment, putting more pressure on social housing for both RGI and market needs. The province needs to align economic development strategies with housing objectives to encourage investments in private sector housing so that workers have places to live.
- In many parts of the North, relative unaffordability means that some households are choosing to stay in more remote communities further from services in order to remain in housing they can afford. In other Districts, particularly in southern parts of the NOSDA region, the continued demand for vacation and resort properties is making housing for long-term residents less affordable.

In Whistler, BC and Canmore, Alberta, new resort and condo developments must contribute to providing resident affordable housing so that resident workers can afford to live there.

In Western Canada, the United States and United Kingdom, municipalities have the legislated authority, and in some cases, legislated requirement for developers to include affordable rental housing in new development. Often, these units are purchased, owned and operated by non-profits to ensure long term affordability. Ontario Planning Legislation does not currently fully support inclusionary planning. Changes to the Planning Act enabling municipalities to require affordable housing in new developments would take some of the burden off of the limited social housing resources as the only tool for dealing with affordability.

Investing in housing is more cost-effective than not investing in housing.

Governments need to develop a more complete and comprehensive approach to housing because of the role that housing plays across a wide range of policy and program areas, especially health and long term care. Affordable housing is essential for successful economic development and increased employment. Supports to help people live in the community are more cost-effective than building new institutional housing. In the North, some of the public investment in social housing is being lost because existing policies limit the ability to make best use of the housing stock, and approaches to health and social programs remain fragmented, ignoring or duplicating the significant assets that already exist. Provincial policies across all program areas need to be driven by “joined-up” outcomes across Ministries, and where necessary, across jurisdictions, and resources targeted appropriately.

4. Build on the Success of the Affordable Housing Program:

- Ontario must continue to take steps to “get back into the housing business” that go beyond delivering on the commitments made in 2003. With the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program now nearing its end (March 2009), it is time to renew the government commitment to a similar but better initiative. If new Federal funding is available, the province should also be contributing across all program streams to maximize the reach of these resources.
- Moving forward there is an urgent need to create new housing opportunities by building new rental homes, helping first time homebuyers, rebuilding social housing communities, or providing rental assistance or housing benefit initiatives. Investments must be flexible and adaptable to meet local needs and conditions.
- New and renewed development is necessary, but in some communities with high vacancies, rent supplements could literally make the difference

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between landlords closing their units or keeping them open. Options for using capital funding to provide rent supplements need to be available.

- While more funding over longer periods of time is necessary, there are other things the Province should do to support the increased availability of affordable housing. In addition to policy changes like inclusionary planning, a provincial “housing first” policy for publicly owned lands (school sites included) would ensure that additional public resources are being directed to meeting housing needs in our communities.

5. Preserve the existing market housing stock:

- Funding for new development is important, but lower-cost market housing is being lost across the province due to conversions or just increasing costs to put units into the market. Allowing acquisition of existing housing as long as it is converted to long-term affordable housing should be allowed. Provincial tax regulations could assist with this process by reducing capital gains or providing other tax-based incentives to encourage long-term preservation of existing affordable housing stock. In general, providing funding that can be used to meet local needs and opportunities rather than program specific criteria would enable communities to maximize the outcomes of these important investments.
- The North faces disproportionately higher utility costs due to climate, and in some cases poorly built market and social housing. Investments in energy saving retrofits would improve affordability to tenants and support both private and public property owners, and could be funded from energy savings, particularly for electric heating systems.

6. Protect and invest in existing public assets:

- It is time to reclaim social housing as the real asset that it truly is in Ontario. The properties themselves are worth in excess of \$40 billion, not to mention the social benefits these communities provide. The provincial and federal governments must work together to facilitate

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In some districts, family units are sitting vacant because households cannot afford to pay the utilities. Refinancing these units now would allow the Service Manager to reduce costs to tenants without increasing subsidies. However, refinancing requires Provincial and Federal governments to agree to amend or replace old operating agreements.

- and permit, where possible, existing social housing providers to lever the value of existing assets to address current and future needs and opportunities.
- A related concern is the continued ambiguity and potential "conflict" that arises at expiry of mortgages and operating agreements. When agreements expire, Federal and Provincial involvement in projects ends, but Service Manager involvement continues. Service Managers should be allowed to make decisions based on long-term asset management, including making capital investment decisions now that make sense for the future. This may include selling unaffordable stock and replacing it with new or newly acquired housing, or converting unit subsidies to rent supplements.
- The province must address on an urgent basis the existing \$1-\$3 billion shortfall in funding to repair and recondition the stock across the Province. This includes more funding to bring poorly built social housing units up to reasonable standards of energy efficiency. Meanwhile, the federal government is set to withdraw \$6.5 billion in social housing investment out of Ontario by 2032. The province should vigorously oppose this disastrous federal disinvestment.
- The Province should restructure the relationship between Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Supports and the social housing system to create a fairer and more integrated approach to providing access to subsidized housing. The "rent scales" should be abolished - the full shelter allowance amount should be paid regardless of whether a tenant lives in social or private market housing.
- A Provincial housing benefit that provides shelter assistance to the working poor would increase housing options for lower-income tenants and, if structured with reform to RGI legislation, would improve the ability of social housing providers to meet the need for lower-cost housing in the community.

Local Service Delivery is best.

While the question of how income stabilization programs should be funded remains, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario

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has adopted a principle that local administration of services is best. Local governments are closer to the clients, and could ensure that programs and policies are better aligned to meet local needs.

However, although responsibility for social housing was downloaded to municipalities and Districts, much of the authority for how social housing is managed remains with the Minister. Social housing legislation is more concerned with administering operating agreements than ensuring that people get the housing services they need.

If the Province is going to uphold a local service delivery model, local decision-making needs to be respected and supported. Local authority is undermined by prescriptive and conflicting program management rules that disable the ability of service deliverers to meet desired outcomes that address local needs.

Provincial legislation should define expected outcomes and service levels rather than how to manage programs. Provincial policy and program rules need to respect and support local service delivery by allowing flexibility and responsiveness to local needs and opportunities.

7. Authority for local decisions:

- The unique situation of DSSAB's must be taken into account when funding for housing and other programs is provided. Unlike other Service Managers, DSSAB's are not a level of government (Municipality, County or Region) but work cooperatively and collaboratively with, through and on behalf of their funding municipalities. As the service manager for municipal social services, DSSABs receive and allocate funding for legislated programs based on local need and to help the Province meet its program objectives. All too often DSSABs are disadvantaged from their CMSM counterparts when special funding and infrastructure programs are announced and DSSABs are excluded from application. DSSAB's need the authority to receive and allocate funding for legislated programs and to help the Province meet program objectives.
- Housing is a business, not just a program, and Service Managers and providers need the flexibility to manage their portfolios not just the SHRA. Provincial

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Conversion of units from 1 to 2 bedrooms has improved vacancy rates in some areas.

In other areas, vacancies are best dealt with by assigning larger units to smaller households.

legislation should establish expected outcomes and service levels, not prescribe how to manage housing or housing units. As long as local decisions respect mandated service levels and do not create additional liability for the provincial or federal governments, they should be respected and allowed. An example is the requirement to match unit sizes to household size. This means larger units sit vacant because the majority of applicants are single or two person households.

In one District, vacant seniors units have been rented to community agencies and businesses, including a barber who provided hair care services to residents.

In another District, the Ministry of Natural Resources is willing to pay market rents for vacant social housing units, but these units are encumbered by RGI requirements.

- Increased portability of housing subsidies within a District is necessary to address the continued movement of families and change in populations in some communities. Portability means that RGI subsidies should be targeted to the household, not the units, and could therefore be provided in-situ when needed or follow a household as they move to seek education and employment. Inter-District portability would require significant changes to legislation, including how DSSAB's are structured, to make administration of subsidies and costs equitable and accountable.
- Portability includes the ability to repurpose housing assets originally built under social housing programs. In some communities, social housing units are sitting vacant while other housing needs are not being met. Converting social housing to market housing or supportive housing makes more sense, and can ensure the continued use of those publicly funded assets. Service levels would be met by transferring those subsidies to rent supplements where demand for RGI housing is higher.

8. Move to a Service Manager Plan-Based Funding Model:

While often not as visible as in the South, Northern communities experience many similar problems, including "hidden" homelessness, where single men are couch-surfing, and not accessing the services they may need.

- One-size-fits-all housing programs don't work. Housing markets and communities across the province vary greatly. In particular, policies developed in urban Southern Ontario do not work well in the remote North and rural areas. To truly help people, programs and policies must be flexible and permit locally appropriate responses. Each Service Manager would develop its own plan from a District Affordable Housing Strategy, while working under a long-term provincial funding

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and accountability framework. Ideally, funding would be provided as a block-grant that can be applied to fulfill Service Manager Plan objectives. The Ministry should advocate such an approach within the Ontario government.

- Program funding needs to be distributed based on local needs. An evidence-based approach to funding allocations based on agreed indicators of need would ensure that northern urban centres facing housing shortages and remote areas needing housing renovation or repair funding get the programs they need. Notwithstanding need-based funding, there has to be an equitable distribution of funds based on unit counts, population, wait list pressures and other demographic factors.
- Ontario Works, Child Care and Land Ambulance programs are cost shared by the Province, and include funding for administration and delivery. Social Housing is neither cost shared nor has administration and delivery funding support from the Province. Administration of the Home Ownership Program, for example, approaches \$1,000 per unit, including legal costs, significantly in excess of the funding provided to deliver the program. The Province must fund service providers to deliver provincial programs.

9. Local systems need Provincial support:

Although the Provincial literature for the 2007 ROOF program for housing allowances was translated into over 15 languages, there was no literature available in Ojibway, the first language of up to 30% of residents in some Northern Districts.

- The Province must commit to collaborative program and policy development with all stakeholders so that programs can work effectively and efficiently.
- While local administration of housing and related services has great potential to improve service delivery and outcomes for clients, the lack of provincial support for the service systems continues to frustrate that goal. Housing provider Boards and staff are faced with managing increasingly complex and difficult tenant needs, with little or no support services and a challenging legal environment. Service Manager staff are focused on meeting the needs of their communities, but the bigger picture of the housing system across the Province sometimes gets lost. The Province needs to support on-going and consistent training and other

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When social housing was administered by the Province, the Ministry provided experienced legal, financial and risk-management resources with expertise in managing social housing. Individual Service Managers are having to recreate those skills, and typically have to build-in time and costs to educate lawyers and financial experts to understand the complexities of social housing before any advice can be provided.

supports for service providers across the province. This is particularly an issue in the North, with vast distances relatively less Service Manager capacity and relatively higher operating and administrative costs due to distance.

- The unique situation of DSSAB's must be taken into account. DSSAB's are not a level of government (Municipality, County or Region), but exist to fulfill mandates of those levels of government. DSSAB staff need access to skills and resources that in a Regional or Municipal government are often located within the same administration. One suggestion is that the Province create and fund a pool of consultants or program experts to assist particularly smaller Service Managers with research, policy development, program implementation, and project development. Alternatively, supporting (larger) DSSAB's to establish capacity to provide expertise in these areas to other DSSABs would be equally effective.
- Delivering Provincial Housing programs has proven to be very expensive to Service Managers across the Province. In the North these costs are relatively higher, due to dispersed populations across huge distances as well as higher utility and operating costs due to the colder climate. Many social housing providers in the North are small and isolated and do not have the internal capacity to manage their housing business without assistance. The Province needs to recognize these costs, with funding as well as streamlined administration focused on outcomes rather than process and decision-making. A common point of application, common property management system tools, and common financial administration tools would be very helpful and ensure consistency in administration across the Province.
- Some Districts are exploring consolidation of providers to maximize capacity, improve efficiencies and reduce liability to volunteer Boards as well as Municipalities. The Province needs to encourage and support moves to improve the capacities of housing providers and their Service Managers to manage housing or risk seeing increasing numbers of Projects in Difficulty. The proposed Asset Management Centre would be an important element in ensuring better management of

housing assets, but needs to have the ability and funding resources to actively support Service Managers and housing providers to learn and undertake better asset management practices.

An integrated system of policies and services results in better outcomes.

At the local level, housing is a human service. Service Managers see, and often manage, the inter-related social and economic development programs that provide supports to lower-income households.

The Northern Service Managers are moving towards administrative integration of those programs with the aim of providing ‘one-stop’ access to services for clients. Clients can be assessed for a range of service at the same time. Siloed and conflicting policies and programs are the main barrier to fully achieving that goal.

Provincial policies and programs across a range of Ministries and program areas need to be deliberately aligned to ensure best outcomes for citizens, service providers and tax-payers. Integrated systems can also be more cost effective across the range of programs. For example, providing generalized support to seniors in social housing reduces emergency room visits and hospitalization.

The Province should adopt a “bottom-up” approach to policy development that is based on achieving identified outcomes so that programs work in, with and for the community. Program funding needs to be structured so that the right agencies deliver programs regardless of which Ministry is providing the funding.

10. Investments in housing and supports are more cost-effective than emergency or acute-care interventions:

- New funding is needed to fill the gaps in supports and services to residents. But much of the funding already in the social and health services system is being wasted because of competing, inflexible and poorly conceived policies and programs. Examples include programs that

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A recent study for the North East LHIN indicated that up to 35% of current residents of Long Term Care homes could and probably should be in their own homes with support services.

Some Districts are developing proposals with their LHIN to utilize social housing assets as community hubs to deliver supportive services to help seniors remain in their homes and avoid accessing the long-term care system.

encourage or even require service agencies to develop new services such as housing management skills rather than allowing existing service agencies in other sectors to deliver services with existing expertise. Better alignment of policies and programs, with local authority and flexibility across sectoral silos, would help maximize the benefits of existing spending and improve the outcomes for both clients and service deliverers.

- More funding needs to be allocated to providing supports where people live, including Aging At Home strategies, in-home mental health and physical disability supportive services are a much more cost-effective way of providing these services than building new long-term or acute care beds.
- Many jurisdictions have shifted the focus from emergency or acute care solutions to a housing-first approach. Programming is co-coordinated and people are helped to find and keep permanent housing. This is proving to be far more cost-effective than traditional approaches that often put people into crisis before they can access necessary services. Ontario should adopt and support a similar approach across all Ministries.
- Many Districts are experiencing an increase in aboriginal households moving to urban centres in order to access health and social services. By definition, they tend to need a higher level of support services, and are straining already stretched resources. Better alignment of Federally and Provincially funded support services is needed to ensure these services are available to people wherever they choose to live.

11. Human services integration requires policy and program integration:

The North East LHIN has established Local Health System Roundtables with each District to work on policy and program issues across sectors, including Social Services.

- Human Services Integration is a concept of aligning the complex web of human services in a community to achieve better outcomes for the people needing those services. Policies and programs remain fragmented, often competing with each other; for example, access to one service affects access to another, with different rules for how the same household income is treated. A related example is RGI claw backs, re-entry rules, and uncoordinated policies with OW/ODSP benefits that

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The Provincial ROOF housing allowance was delivered by the Ministry but relied on local Service Managers to promote the program. It could have been more effectively delivered in the North by functionally integrating the application process with OW and housing administration.

An Ontario Service Manager has developed partnerships with local Colleges and the University to create student placements in family housing projects to develop and deliver programming.

The program could be expanded to include nursing, recreation, engineering, etc., with benefit to students, tenants and Service Managers alike.

create little incentive to becoming employed. Multiple points of access to the services system – ODSP offices separate from OW service centres separate from social housing registries – means that households often do not get access to all of the services they need and are eligible for.

The complexities of the administrative overhead involved costs CSM's and DSSAB's time and money, with scarce resources going to paperwork rather than housing or other services. The Province should adopt an integrated human services approach to policies and programs in all service areas that reduces administrative complexity between and with programs, and ensures that Service Managers are empowered to be responsive to local situations with the aim of improving the outcomes for the people who need the services.

- Policies and programs should be structured to support defined outcomes based on a few key indicators of need. Programs guidelines should specify intended outcomes – e.g. “housing and supports” – rather than prescribing how funds must be allocated.
- Human services integration is not just about how programs are administered. Programs need to be “joined-up” for mutual reinforcement. Trades skill development should be aligned with housing renovation and building programs. Increased investment in home-based supports requires more people to deliver the services. Employment and Financial Assistance programs as well as Ontario Works benefits should be aligned to encourage labour market development in defined policy areas.
- A provincially funded (but locally administered) Housing Benefit would address many of the issues identified in this paper. A portable benefit would follow families as they move and, if integrated with Ontario Works, would provide a continuum of support for families as they move from employment to assistance and back again.

12. Well intentioned policies need well designed programs that work in the community:

Shelter Providers have much better experience in managing crisis and high support needs than most housing providers, but lack the resources to follow clients into housing.

A portable subsidy with funding to shelter service providers for continuity of supports is needed.

- Good policies can be disabled by bad program design. An example is the Special Priority Program that gives priority access to social housing to households in abusive situations. The policy goal is laudable, but in practice, this creates costs and strains on communities, and exacerbates the stress these households are already dealing with. Even with priority access, waiting times to be offered a social housing unit can be long. A better policy would provide a housing allowance to SPP households so that they can be housed quickly anywhere in the community. Follow up supports also need to be provided so that their relocation is successful for all concerned.
- Social housing used to be about building better communities, and included households with a range of incomes, abilities and needs. Increasingly, social housing is serving only the most vulnerable and poorest members of our community. Poor communities have relatively worse health outcomes, a higher rate of crime, low employment status and high numbers of high school drop outs. Some social housing communities are clearly more readily able to be revitalized and made more inclusive through redevelopment, but many more will need additional investment and resources. Exemptions from program rules are needed so that providers have the ability to manage their housing stock to meet changing needs.
- Social housing was designed for households able to live independently, but many households in social housing need additional supports to succeed in the community. Housing providers do not have the staff, time or often the necessary skills to support vulnerable households. Often this results in "challenging tenancies" that incur additional costs to the social services and health care system responding to crises. Funding for increased community care services, including training and supports for housing provider staff, is a much more cost-effective way of ensuring people are able to remain in their communities, and is essential to ensuring that social housing can continue to play the role it was designed for.

The North East LHIN is supporting the North East CCAC to develop a common referral and assessment tool for all service agencies in the community, including housing providers. This will allow initial assessment of needs at any point of intake into the services system, with trained staff who can help clients get the services they need.

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- Notwithstanding the need for more services, local inventories of support service agencies should be developed and shared with housing providers to ensure the right resources can be called on and that the system of housing and supports works for everyone. Provincial funding to support and partner with “211” services would be a good investment in serving Northern citizens.