

NDP Response to Housing Network of Ontario Letter dated August 26, 2011

Please find below our party commitments related to the five policy goals proposed by the Housing Network of Ontario

1. Bold targets & sustained funding

Ontario must ensure an adequate supply of liveable, affordable housing, supported by multi year financial commitments.

A long-term commitment to building housing is needed to allow housing providers to effectively plan and implement affordable housing projects. A growing number of Canadian and US jurisdictions have ten-year plans. For too long, housing policy in Ontario has been driven by Ottawa – with the province simply following the federal government’s lead, often with several years delay – with cost-sharing agreements.

The NDP recognizes the need for stable and predictable funding and supports long-term funding for the expansion of affordable housing. We will announce details soon. We will proceed with our long term commitment whether or not the Federal government joins as a partner. However, we will work with our Federal NDP counterparts to put pressure on the federal government to develop, fund and implement a national affordable housing strategy.

2. Make housing truly affordable and equitably accessible

Ontarians of all income levels should be able to access housing they can afford, and supports should be provided to ensure equitable thriving, inclusive communities.

Rents are becoming less and less affordable for Ontarians. We believe that the implementation of a housing benefit for low-income people facing unaffordable housing costs can be an effective tool in reducing poverty and homelessness. A carefully designed, fiscally prudent benefit would be a smart policy for helping low-income renters make ends meet and take pressure off subsidized housing waiting lists. We will announce our specific policy intentions pertaining to a housing benefit soon.

Energy costs have soared for Ontarians. Many lower-income Ontarians simply can’t pay their hydro and gas bills. The NDP is committed to helping lower energy bills for low-income Ontarians. We will remove the HST from home heating and hydro. And we will implement a \$980 M energy retrofit program which will include grants of \$3-\$5,000 to help 75,000 low-income tenants and homeowners to save on energy bills by weatherstripping, insulating and installing energy efficient appliances in their homes.

3. Reform housing legislation to build stronger communities

Key legislation that governs municipal planning, social housing and the private rental market must be reformed to promote growth in affordable housing, better protect the housing rights of tenants and provide flexibility for non-profit and co-operative housing providers.

Our past actions show that we support many of the reforms that the Housing Network is calling for.

This spring, the NDP introduced an amendment to the Affordable Housing Act calling for an independent review of decisions affecting tenants and people seeking housing to ensure impartiality. Our amendment was voted down by government members.

In 2010, we introduced a private member's bill to strengthen tenants rights by removing the loophole in the Residential Tenancies Act that allows landlords to impose exorbitant rent increases on vacant units. The bill was not supported by the government.

Inclusionary housing is an effective, cost-free way for the government to significantly increase the supply of below-market rent housing. Municipal planning commissioners have been calling for inclusionary housing powers from the province for years. Last year, the NDP also introduced a private members' bill that would have allowed municipalities to require a minimum number of affordable housing units in new developments. The Bill passed second reading but then died on the order paper.

The NDP remains committed to taking action to strengthen the rights of tenants and provide more tools for municipalities to increase the supply of affordable housing. We will announce details soon so check our website at www.ontariondp.com.

4. Measurement

Effective policy requires a solid foundation of accurate evidence about the scale of housing insecurity and homelessness in Ontario and a clear way to measure progress.

The NDP is committed to setting concrete, long term housing targets so that we can effectively monitor progress on new affordable housing, housing repairs and housing affordability. We agree that progress amongst high risk groups such as Aboriginal people, people of colour, and people with disabilities should also be monitored.

5. Accountability

Each party's plan must remain accountable to the people it intends to serve.

We are committed to regular information sharing on progress and consultation with stakeholders and community to update and receive feedback on our long term plan.