

Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Consultation  
West End Urban Health Alliance (WEUHA) Submission  
December 1, 2009

A special meeting of the West End Urban Health Alliance (WEUHA) was held on June 26, 2009 to address the issue of affordable, accessible and supportive housing in the community. Below are some of the points made by the membership at this meeting which are offered in response to the Ontario government's five key questions in their long-term affordable housing strategy consultation:

*1. What specific roles should each of the housing partners play in the delivery of affordable housing?*

Governments need to recognize that housing is a public good and an investment in a healthy society by making a long-term, permanent financial commitment to building and maintaining affordable housing so that the supply meets the demand.

Governments need to seek out and nurture partnerships among the various government departments, not-for-profit agencies, for-profit housing providers, and tenants at the local level to ensure needs are being heard and addressed.

Governments at the municipal, provincial and federal level need to coordinate their efforts more to ensure funding is available and accessible at the local level and align with a national housing strategy.

*2. What changes are needed to our housing programs to better use resources and improve access to affordable housing? Changes could include modifications to the Affordable Housing Program or the simplification of housing and homelessness programs.*

There is much confusion among community agencies as to how to best help clients to access affordable housing. A housing 'broker' role would assist both agencies and clients in determining the current availability of housing and the best fit for their needs.

Coordination among the various ministries and levels of government that administer the housing programs is sorely lacking and would certainly improve the process of placement.

Build mechanisms where information can be shared – e.g. healthcare providers have information on rent supplements that housing providers can leverage

Put a premium on providing better customer service, better building maintenance and a better understanding of the rights social housing tenants have.

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*3. What changes are required to the Social Housing Reform Act, 2000 to reduce the regulatory burden and improve the management of social housing?*

The Social Housing Reform Act, 2000 is overly prescriptive. A more community-centered approach that allows more autonomy for housing providers at the local level is needed.

The Act needs to be re-visited to ensure it supports the subsidies needed for current and new housing projects and the long-term viability of those already in place.

*4. What creative new ideas could improve the current housing system? This could include new planning tools, innovative financial options and new green technologies.*

Build a tool that allows individuals and agencies to assess what housing is available, what types of clients it best serves, and how to access it.

Provide incentives to local builders to include affordable housing in their design and development proposals.

Emulate the experiences of other jurisdictions where inclusionary housing zoning has allowed for a successful influx of affordable housing.

Provide a 'housing benefit' as a monthly rent supplement paid to all low-income Ontarians based on their rent and income so that they begin to approach the financial norm of not spending more than 35% of income on rent.

Look at existing success stories and build on these types of initiatives (e.g. CAMH Stepping Stones, St Clare's, Family Service Toronto, etc.)

Hire the people who live in social housing to work on the maintenance, revitalization or 'greening' of the property.

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5. *What should be used as the housing indicator for Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy? In this context, what do terms like affordable, adequate and suitable housing mean to you?*

Possible indicators include:

- Number of affordable housing units built
- Number of affordable housing units available
- Length of waiting lists for affordable housing
- Percentage of income paid on rent
- Percentage of people placed in housing situations that meet their needs and not just the first available spot
- Percentage of seniors who need to move to an institution because there are not enough supports to allow them to age at home