



A collaborative and evidence-based approach to addressing the centralized waitlist for community housing in Niagara region



Introductions

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 - Project Manager / Policy
- Jeanette McKay, Housing Access Unit Supervisor
 - Subject Matter Expert – Housing Services
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 - Subject Matter Expert – Homelessness Services

Presentation Agenda

- Overview of our Review Framework
- Highlight key learnings at each step of the review
- Learnings from policy change implementation
- Where we are now and next steps

Niagara Region Background

- Population: 496,059 (2022)
- Urban / rural mix, twelve municipalities
- Average age: 44.4 years
- Social assistance: 12,825 OW cases and 16,510 ODSP cases
 - Over 42,000 people (approximately 8.5% of the population)
- Community Housing Centralized Waitlist: 11,007 households
- By-Name List of Homelessness: 1,209 individuals (656 chronic)
- Community Services Dept: 5 divisions
 - Homelessness & Community Engagement, Housing, Social Assistance & Employment Opportunities, Childrens, and Seniors

Why review the local priority groups?

- The need for community housing far surpasses the amount of housing available, causing the waitlist to grow considerably
- The local priority groups did not align with community need
- There were challenges with the existing priority groups: groups were outdated (the last revision was in 2014) and challenged staff with decision making
- Local priority groups (especially 'homeless status') did not align with coordinated access / Niagara's By-Name List (BNL)

Local Priority Groups – Before

1. Special Priority Policy (SPP) Provincially Mandated
2. Overhoused (OVH) Local Priority
3. Urgent (URG) Local Priority
 - a) Mobility Barrier
 - b) Extreme Hardship
4. Homeless (HML) Local Priority
 - a) Rotational: 1 in 10 vacancies
5. Chronological (CHR) based on date of application

Local Priority Groups – After

1. Special Priority Policy (SPP) *Provincially Mandated*
2. Overhoused (OVH) *Local Priority*
3. **Urgent (URG) Local Priority**
 - a) Mobility Barrier only
4. **Homeless (HML) Local Priority**
 - a) Eligibility requirements aligned with coordinated access (at application and at offer)
 - b) 1 in 5 vacancies

Approach to Review



Jurisdictional Scan Findings

- Across the province, municipalities are changing policies to re-prioritize urgent populations such as individuals experiencing homelessness, and to align with coordinated access
- Trends
 - By-Name List matching
 - Ensuring supports are in place at move-in
 - Tighter rotation or no rotation

Current State Review

- What did each priority group look like:
 - Who is being housed
 - How many, trends
 - Demographics of applicants applying to local priorities
 - Average wait time for housing
 - Challenges within existing groups

Current State Review – Statistics

- In 2022:
 - Priority groups made up 21% of the waitlist and received 74% of units
 - Chronological group made up 79% of the waitlist and received 21% of units

Breakdown of Households Housed in 2022

Priority Status	Number of Households Housed	% of Total Housed
SPP	205	37%
OVH	19	4%
URG	135	24%
HML	48	9%
CHR	118	21%
Total	553	95%*

Note: The remaining 5% were households that were selected for market rent units within community housing locations.

Special Priority Policy (SPP) Group

- Provincially mandated
- Definition / eligibility: individuals who identify as being abused by someone they live with or have lived with. This group also covers human trafficking.
- In 2022, 205 households were housed (**37% of total**)
- Average wait time: **approximately nine months** however many households receive an offer within several weeks of approval
- At time of review, there were 176 households in this category

Considerations with SPP

- Many providers only house SPP
- Almost all one-bedroom units go to SPP households which doesn't allow opportunity for any other priority groups
- This priority group is mandated; thus, no real change can be made here

Overhoused (OVH) Priority Group

- Local priority, second priority group after SPP
- Definition / eligibility: those households that occupy a unit that is larger than their household composition requires
- In 2022, 19 households in this category were re-housed into smaller units (4% of total):
 - 11 were seniors moving into a seniors mandated building
 - 3 were single non-seniors (16-54 years)
 - 5 were housed in 2-bedroom units
- At time of review, there were 155 households in this category

Considerations with OVH

- Individuals and households in this category do not want to move
- Moving overhoused households to smaller units creates less opportunity for other priority groups to obtain one-bedroom units
 - However, it creates flow through for the rest of the system
 - Shows we are using a scarce resource more responsibly
- Niagara Region provides a deeper subsidy than it would if the tenant were housed in an appropriately sized housing unit

Urgent (URG) Priority Group

- Local priority established in 2014 when staff recommended moving away from the Health & Safety priority group at the time
- Definition / eligibility: a member of the household has physical limitations and their health is compromised (Mobility Barrier); the applicant's situation puts them at extreme risk (Extreme Hardship)
- In 2022, 135 households were housed (**24% of total**)
- Average wait time: **approximately ten months**
- At time of review, there were 274 households in this category

Considerations with URG

- Everyone believes their situation is urgent
- There are considerable challenges determining and confirming eligibility in the Urgent Priority status category including:
 - Primary care signing off on requests without proper review of the criteria
 - **Staff are challenged with decision-making in the extreme hardship category given the vagueness of the criteria**
 - Given the changes in the housing market, clients are becoming more desperate and are requesting Urgent status for reasons outside of the established criteria
- In 2022, Housing Services received 523 requests for Urgent Priority status; **59% were denied**

Homeless (HML) Priority Group

- Local priority, fourth priority on the centralized waitlist
- Rotational: housing providers offer one in 10 vacancies to applicants with HML status
- Definition / eligibility: verification of homelessness by approved professional
- In 2022, 48 households were housed (**9% of total**)
- Average wait time: **approximately 5.6 years**
- At time of review, there were **1,561 households** in this category

Considerations with HML

- Very few homeless individuals get housed in community housing
 - Largest wait time amongst priority groups
- Homeless priority requests are the most common priority request type
- Difficult to keep homeless status current as the individual's situation is constantly changing
- The list of individuals on the CWL with **homeless status does not match the list of individuals on the BNL**
- 16% of applicants with HML Status are from outside Niagara

HML Analysis

- Households with Homeless Status do not match the BNL breakdown when examining client type

CWL Breakdown

Household Type	Number
Family	506 (32%)
Single	632 (41%)
Senior 55+	423 (27%)
Total	1561

BNL Breakdown

Household Type	Number
Family	67 (6%)
Single	816 (79%)
Senior 55+	148 (14%)
Total	1031

- Only 87 of 1561 households with HML Status were on the BNL

Engagement – Potential Impact

- Housing Providers & Lived Experts
 - Concerns about complexity of homeless households
 - Concerns about additional costs (arrearages, damages)
 - Concerns about eviction and not knowing what they don't know
- Housing Services
 - Greater need for support by Community Program Coordinators
 - Even longer wait for chronological list
- Homelessness Services
 - Increase in individuals accessing the system to get on the BNL

Applying the approved policy changes

- Households with Urgent (Extreme Hardship) status were grandfathered
- Homeless status was removed for households that were not:
 - On the By-Name List (of homelessness) in the past year
 - On the transitional housing by-name list in the past year
 - Indigenous and in HIFIS
- Priority group went down to 403 households
- Households that were losing their Homeless status were mailed letters
 - Could appeal decision

Applying the approved policy changes

- Appeal committee
 - Homelessness Services consultation
- Affected parties
 - Families, out of region, those not accessing services
- Supports required
 - Housing Services receives daily list of eligible individuals
 - By-Name Lists 3 month-end plus same-day
 - Current transitional housing by-name list
- Communication roll-out

New Homeless Status Eligibility

- Eligible applicants for this status must meet both of the following:
 - Requirement 1 – Currently experiencing homelessness
- AND
- Requirement 2 – Actively working with one of these types of organizations in Niagara region that support people experiencing homelessness to find housing:
 - Emergency or domestic violence shelters
 - Transitional or supportive housing programs
 - Homeless prevention and rehousing services
 - Street outreach services
 - Indigenous organizations

New Homeless Status Process

Previous

- Applicant applies for community housing
- Applicant completes homeless status form and gets it verified (multiple verifiers)
- One in ten vacancies offered to someone with HML status

Now

- Applicant applies for community housing
- Agency staff complete referral form (requirements 1 & 2 met)
- Active or added to HIFIS
- One in five vacancies offered to someone with HML status

By-Name List and HIFIS

- Applicants with referrals for homeless status are added to HIFIS
- Greater reach to identify individuals and households experiencing homelessness
- Greater understanding and coverage of homelessness providers not currently part of funded system / using HIFIS
 - Predominantly transitional housing

Housing CWL Current State

As of May 1, the total active waitlist is 11,007 households

- Special Priority = 273 households
- Overhoused = 208 households
- Urgent = 278 households
- Homeless = 383 households

The Path Forward

- Online application and IHS rollouts
- Broader system supports for individuals and households experiencing homelessness
- Ensuring individuals and households are supported post move-in
- Evaluating:
 - How households gain and lose HML status
 - New wait times
- Is the process working for agencies sending in referrals

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