



# Housing and Homelessness Plan Consultation Summary

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## Consultation Overview

As per the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy (LTAHS) recognizes that Service Managers need to understand and respond to the changing housing and homelessness needs of their specific communities.

Through new legislation, the Housing Services Act, 2011 (HSA), the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy requires Service Managers to create comprehensive, multi-year plans for local housing and homelessness services, to be in place by January 1, 2014. To this end, Grey County Housing has asked community members about their experiences with housing and homelessness.

## Community Engagement

Community member consultations took place in many forms:

A collaborative information session in Owen Sound discussed issues related to supportive housing needs and services for low income individuals, families' and seniors' households. Community members were asked to identify key housing/homelessness issues, barriers and opportunities/solutions and also identify a role for their agency to play. A mapping exercise captured the coverage of housing and support services across Grey County.

The Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force was consulted on inter-agency cooperation, priorities and goals for the Plan.

Non Profit Housing Providers had opportunity to comment on housing needs within the County of Grey.

Online surveys asked the general public to identify barriers and opportunities.


Interviews/surveys were carried out directly with people with lived experience, lower tier municipalities and focus groups.

## What we heard – Key Messages

- **Affordable, safe, accessible and well-maintained housing is a key social determinant of health.** Housing is an absolute necessity for living a healthy life and living in unsafe, unaffordable or insecure housing increases the risk of many health problems.
- **The demand for affordable housing exceeds the supply that is available.** Market rents are too high for low income households and utility costs are a huge struggle.
- **There is a lack of supportive housing for all populations, i.e. persons with a mental illness, addiction or disability; women and children, people living in poverty.**
- **There is a lack of safe transitional housing especially for people experiencing homelessness, people with additions or people recently released from incarceration.**
- **A lack of economic resources is a prime reason for people experiencing housing problems.** People do not have a 'living wage' - social assistance and minimum wage do not meet daily needs.
- **People are paying over 30% of income to housing** and having to turn to other supports to meet basic needs. People who are on assistance are spending up to 90% on housing; their allowance is not reflective of the current market reality.

*“You get to have a roof over your head or food, but not both.”*

- **People need housing first, and then combine that housing with supportive services** such as mental and physical health, substance abuse, education, and employment.
- **There is a lack of private/public partnerships to provide housing and support services.**

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- **A lack of available and affordable transportation services** breaks a critical link between housing to employment, healthcare, food, other basic needs, social activities, daycare, supports/counseling services.
  - **A lack of accessible transportation exists for seniors and persons with disabilities.**

*“Finding a place to live and be my own person – not much luck so far and [need] help to get moved back home.”*

- **There is a lack of accessible supportive and rental housing.** There are insufficient funds to make adaptations – wheelchair accessibility, steps in showers, etc. and a low number of ground floor units designated as accessible. There is a disconnection between the Aging At Home Strategy and meeting the accessibility housing needs of seniors’ homes.
- **The current available supportive housing is inadequate, of poor quality, aging and unsafe.** The Supportive housing stock is aging; inefficient and non-accessible. A number of Long Term Care homes and seniors’ homes are also in need of repair because of aging infrastructure.
- **A lack of resources exists for the education of landlords (private), tenants, and the community on landlords’ and tenants’ rights.**
- **NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) stereotypes exists in many communities.**
- **Seniors’ housing issues are going to increase as the population ages.** Seniors want to age at home but there is a lack of affordable and sufficient in-home care, transportation and funding to make housing accessible.

*“There is a need to better plan mixed housing needs across a person’s life span - and anticipate your housing needs as it changes.”*

## Recommendations

- **Address the root causes of people’s need for supportive housing** – poverty, abuse and trauma.
- **Social housing, supportive housing and below-market housing should be planned in a variety of neighbourhoods in ways that complement the broader quality of life goals of a town/city.**
- **Increase the number of affordable housing units and set mandatory ratios/legislation** of affordable and accessible housing in all communities (mixed land use, inclusionary zoning, accessibility, etc.) to meet different needs i.e. half-way house, transitional housing, geared to income, etc.
- **Provide more emergency housing for women with children and small pets.**
- **Increase the number of second stage housing units in and outside of Owen Sound for single women and accessible.**
- **Seek creative investment financing which benefits the vulnerable, the municipality and private/public investors** such as rent-to-own housing, reduction in planning fees and development charges.
- **Tap into under-utilized housing options** i.e. private nursing homes, etc. and models such as Habitat for Humanity and form private/public “foundations” to raise housing funds. Make changes to by-laws to allow for granny flats.
- **Increase funding to incentives** such as Ontario Renovates for home owner households to repair their home and increase the accessibility of their home thus keeping people in their homes longer.
- **Increase the Sustainable Housing Benefit in amount and number of subsidies to assist people to afford last month’s rent.**
- **Advocate for the removal of last month rent requirement** for those who can’t pay both as they have done in Quebec.
- **Educate landlords and tenants on their responsibilities.**
- **Provide Bridges Out of Poverty training/awareness** to landlords, politicians, municipalities and business communities.
- **Engage in solutions-focused journalism** – positive success stories – and increase public awareness.
- **Hear more from people with lived experiences** and other community members to improve the housing/homelessness situation.

*“There are lots of people looking for places [but] it seems like only the cream of the crop are able to secure nice housing.”*

- **Take a “wrap around” approach after people find housing first and combine that housing with supportive services.** Many struggle to maintain their housing. Thus additional life skills are needed.
- **Increase the number of intensive Housing Support Workers outside out of Grey County Housing staff.** Focus on relationship building, eviction diversion programs and collaboration between/by agencies. Identify populations at-risk in rural areas and have workers go to them.

*“Work closer with people to help them overcome their individual problems.”*

- **Educate youth in schools on the realities of renting before leaving home.**
- **Reduce roadblocks and red tape by examining “living wage”, social assistance rates and qualifying and wait list criteria.**

*“Don’t offer emergency help with HURDLES.”*

- **Advocate/assist with expanding rural transportation to/from locations where Grey County Housing exists.** Coordinate with Ministry of Health (MOH), Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS), Ministry of Transportation (MTO), and municipalities/city.
- **Implement the “No Wrong Door” approach** - Take a person-centered approach to creating a circle of care.
- **Continue to utilize the Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force** and create a housing action subgroup. Bring together agencies and continue to build relationships between them to breakdown silos.
- **Inter-agency cooperation and resource prioritization coupled with public education** and awareness may provide additional resources. Avoid duplication of services through education, networking and together seek to address gaps.