



Briefing Note

Tackling the Housing Gap for Ontarians with Developmental Disabilities

Background

- **There is an urgent need to address the deepening housing crisis for people in Ontario living with developmental disabilities.**
- Previous governments did not provide targeted, sustainable funding for developmental services housing.
- **The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated this housing crunch**, as individuals and their families face worsening personal health & financial crises that put them in dire need of supportive housing.
- The National Housing Strategy Bilateral Agreement between Ontario & Canada commits a \$4.2 billion investment in affordable housing over 10 years, in three distinct phases.
 - The initial three-year phase (Phase 1) launched in 2019-2020, and will continue through 2021-22.
- **As Ontario evaluates progress to date and prepares for Phase 2, there is an immediate and growing need to ensure that ongoing investment expands the supply of available supportive housing for these Ontarians.**
- People living with developmental disabilities are one of the most vulnerable groups in Ontario, and are identified as a priority in the Bilateral Agreement. Individuals who have lived with a disability from birth need active support to stay safe and be contributing members of their communities. **They have no alternatives.**
- Many rely on care from parents and family well into adulthood, but the reality of aging parents means that many are unable to continue to provide the necessary care and housing for their adult children.
- Investing in developmental services housing will directly contribute to the province's goal of ending hallway medicine.

- The lack of appropriate housing means that individuals living with developmental disabilities are occupying alternate level of care (ALC), long-term care (LTC) and shelter beds that are badly needed, when they could and should be in more appropriate & cost-effective supportive housing.

Recommendations

- Through the National Housing Strategy, there is an opportunity to solve the past under-investment in developmental services housing and resolve the new housing pressures faced by individuals and families due to COVID-19.
- We strongly recommend that the Ontario Government prioritize investment in housing for individuals living with developmental disabilities by **committing 10% of National Housing Strategy funding to this critical need in the implementation of the forthcoming phases** (Phase 2 & 3) of the Agreement.
- This level of investment, which is proportional to the percentage of individuals living with developmental disabilities on Ontario's affordable housing waitlists, will:
 - Build more than 2,400 new units of housing – at least 1,200 new units province-wide in each of Phase 2 & 3, demonstrating Ontario's national leadership and exceeding the province's benchmark target under the National Housing Strategy;
 - Help maintain the 12,691 units currently housing adults with developmental disabilities; and
 - Repair more than 2,500 – 20% - of these existing units to bring them up to a good state of repair.

What are Developmental Disabilities?

- Development disability is characterized by life-long limitations in daily living and cognitive skills, and includes diagnoses such as Down's Syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.
- Though highly varied, a technical definition of developmental disability includes individuals with an IQ below 70-75 and significant limitations in two or more skills that are needed to live, work, and play in the community, such as communication or self-care.
- In the past, people with developmental disabilities lived on the margins of society, including in government-run institutions in Ontario. The community living movement successfully advocated for the closure of these institutions and the importance of keeping people in our communities.

- With this move, the need for supportive housing and community-based support services has steadily increased, including employment and life skills training.

COVID-19 & Developmental Services Housing

- The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic is creating a surge of additional need for developmental services housing.
- Developmental services housing providers are fielding an exceptionally high volume of calls from families seeking housing for their loved ones living with developmental disabilities.
 - Individuals that were managing to live at home or in the community are struggling with reduced community supports as a result of COVID-19, and require the more direct support provided in a supportive housing environment.
 - Families are dealing with the economic impacts of the pandemic, and cannot afford to independently provide the range of care and supports that their loved ones living with developmental disabilities need.
 - The pandemic is also putting a tremendous strain on caregivers, many of whom are seniors caring for adult children living with developmental disabilities, and many are struggling to deal with chronic health issues and physical limitations.
- Following the initial community outbreak in Ontario, developmental services housing providers, in close consultation with the government, acted decisively to mitigate and prevent further outbreaks in these multi-resident settings.
 - This included restricting staff mobility between residences, limiting external visitors, and emphasizing training and preparedness.
 - Developmental services housing is designed to promote semi-independent living with appropriate levels of individualized supports. Residents benefit from private rooms, or apartments, unlike in many LTC settings where many residents live in shared rooms.
 - As a result, developmental services housing experienced significantly fewer COVID-19 outbreaks than other comparable multi-resident environments, such as LTC and senior's residences.

The Developmental Services Housing Gap in Ontario

- For over a decade, Ontario's provincial investment in developmental services housing has been virtually frozen despite the large and growing need, driven by aging caregivers and changing complexity of existing cases.
- This has resulted in exceptional increases to housing waitlists. According to Ontario Ombudsman Paul Dubé's 2016 report, *Nowhere to Turn*:
 - In 2014, nearly as many people living with developmental disabilities were on the wait list for suitable supportive housing (13,000) as were currently living in appropriate housing in Ontario (15,246);
 - Between 2014 and 2016, only 800 adults received the needed housing support – a mere 6% of the 2014 wait list;
 - Each year, the housing wait list for people living with developmental disabilities increases by about 1,200 people.
- Wait times for housing are 10 times longer for those with a developmental disability compared to the average person waiting for affordable housing.
- Without enough appropriate housing options to support the growing population of adults living with a developmental disability, unsuitable and expensive alternatives are used.
 - Individuals with developmental disabilities spend more time than any other population in hospital emergency, acute and especially alternate level of care (ALC) beds.
 - Long-term care (LTC) facilities and nursing homes are increasingly being used as housing for adults with developmental disabilities under the age of 65. In 2017, research found that adults with developmental disabilities are admitted to long-term care approximately 25 years earlier than the rest of the population, and that annual rates of admission to long-term care are on average 4.5 times higher.
 - Many of the less fortunate also wind up in the shelter system, where 18-30% of chronic shelter users have a developmental disability.