



ONTARIO NON-PROFIT
HOUSING ASSOCIATION

The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
Office of the Premier
Legislative Bldg Rm 281
Queen's Park, 111 Wellesley St. West
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

March 20, 2020

Subject: Inclusion of the community housing sector in COVID-19 response and relief plans

Dear Premier Ford:

The Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA) represents over 700 non-profit housing providers across 220 communities in Ontario who house over 400,000 people in 170,000 homes.

We support the significant steps your government has taken to “flatten the curve” and contain the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus), and support people and communities, including the passage of emergency legislation to protect workers, municipalities and retailers, the court order sought to indefinitely halt/postpone all new and scheduled eviction orders, declaring a state of emergency to further limit the spread of the virus and encourage the practice of social distancing and considerable investments in the healthcare system.

As we all strive to keep people and communities safe through the pandemic, we recognize the critical role that community housing providers play in supporting those who will be most impacted by the virus, including low/limited-income people, seniors, Indigenous peoples, newcomers and tenants requiring support services. Now more than ever, the need for adequate, affordable housing that meets the needs of our communities is paramount. Current events have highlighted the inextricable link between health and housing.

As such, echoing many of the calls released by our sector partners, we ask the Government of Ontario to consider the following recommendations:



1. Engage ONPHA in ongoing government consultations to represent the needs of the community housing sector and assist the government in communicating crucial information in a timely manner to the sector.
2. Establish an emergency stabilization fund for the community housing sector to provide direct and immediate financial assistance to the community housing system to offset losses incurred as a result of tenants' inability to pay rent and/or utility fees.
3. Provide necessary equipment, materials, supplies and personnel for personal hygiene, disinfection, cleaning and other containment measures (i.e., masks, hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies, immediate access to healthcare providers) to community housing providers in a timely manner, especially those serving populations more likely to be at high risk, including seniors, Indigenous peoples, newcomers and tenants requiring support services.
4. Immediately implement and communicate flexibility measures around current funding agreements and reporting requirements for community housing providers to minimize additional work (i.e., extending existing agreements with pending expiration dates, suspending reporting requirements to shift focus to front line services).
5. Direct the Landlord and Tenant Board to deny future eviction applications for nonpayment or persistent late payment of rent during the period of the COVID-19 outbreak, where tenants' ability to pay has been affected by illness, caring for others who are ill, caring for children during school and daycare closures, self-isolation requirements, and/or loss of income due to the outbreak.
6. Enact a temporary rent freeze period for tenants and implement a temporary rent-free period for any tenant who has been affected by COVID-19, caring for others who are ill, caring for children during school and daycare closures, self-isolation requirements and/or loss of income due to the outbreak in conjunction with the emergency stabilization fund to mitigate disproportionate impacts felt by landlord and community housing providers in particular.
7. Reinstate and expand paid sick leave to include workers who are ill and/or caring for ill relatives.
8. Require employers to allow remote work and/or provide paid leave to employees affected by daycare and school closures, or self-isolation requirements.
9. Prevent discharge of anyone from the health system or from detention into homelessness or into the homeless shelter system.
10. Immediately expand the capacity of the shelter system and access to personal protective equipment (PPE), testing services and healthcare provision so that anyone requiring safe shelter can be safely accommodated and isolation measures can be implemented where necessary.



As public health officials continue to recommend self-isolation, we are acutely aware of the impact this has on community housing providers and their tenants, many of whom may not have the option to self-isolate and are likely to face mounting financial burdens. As ONPHA is able to work remotely and continue to serve our members effectively while keeping our team safe, we recognize the vast number of people in our communities who are unable to self-isolate due to employment requirements (including the inability to afford to take time off work), the need to care for themselves and/or ill relatives, the need to care for children in light of school and daycare closure and overcrowded housing conditions (which impacts nearly 1 in 10 Canadian households, as reported by [Statistics Canada](#)).

Low/limited-income individuals/families who face work shortages due to containment measures (i.e., closure of businesses, cancellation of events) are likely to see dramatic losses to their incomes. This in turn affects their ability to pay rent and utility fees, which directly impacts the financial viability of non-profit housing providers, who operate on limited budgets with little room for fluctuation. A community housing stabilization fund, in addition to flexibility around funding agreements and reporting requirements, could help to stabilize the narrow operating budgets and capacity of community housing providers and allow them to continue to provide safe, affordable housing options for low/limited-income individuals and families.

Our members serve populations that are more likely to be at high risk to the virus, including seniors, Indigenous peoples, newcomers and tenants requiring support services. In light of recent supply shortages, we recognize the critical importance of equipping these providers with the tools, training and supports they need to provide safe, continued support and services for those most vulnerable to the effects of the virus, while also ensuring the protection of their employees. In addition, many of the tenants in community housing rely heavily on community-based supports such as food banks and in-home services for daily living so we are compelling the government to ensure the sustainability of these critical support services.

We are also concerned about the impact of the virus on people experiencing homelessness due to crowding in shelters and drop-ins and heightened incidences of pre-existing health conditions among people experiencing homelessness. Partnership with municipalities must include direct investments in shelter systems and homelessness initiatives to maximize practices of social distancing and/or self-isolation, while providing health support to high risk populations.

We take comfort in the fact that people and communities are coming together to support each other during this time and are working with our members to promote community-based responses and the sharing of best practices. We look forward to forthcoming government measures to continue supporting our communities. We recognize the crucial work of community housing providers in providing safe and



affordable housing and the strong role that the community housing sector and ONPHA can play in supporting government initiatives.

We look forward to engaging with you or your representatives at your earliest opportunity to discuss these recommendations and how ONPHA and the community housing sector can be a part of the government's response and relief plans to address COVID-19.

Sincerely,

Marlene Coffey
CEO, ONPHA

Cc:

The Honourable Christine Elliott, Minister of Health

The Honourable Todd Smith, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services

The Honourable Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

The Honourable Rod Phillips, Minister of Finance

The Honourable Sylvia Jones, Minister of the Solicitor General

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy, President of the Treasury Board

The Honourable Merrilee Fullerton, Minister of Long-term Care

The Honourable Raymond Cho, Minister for Seniors and Accessibility