

The Honourable Steve Clark
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
College Park 17th Floor, 777 Bay Street
Toronto, ON, M5G 2E5
minister.mah@ontario.ca

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Ontario's Plan for Economic Recovery: Housing Infrastructure Stimulus to Kick-Start the Economy

Dear Minister Clark,

More Ontarians than ever—seniors, single adults, new immigrants, young families—are feeling the squeeze in the housing market. Today there are nearly 750,000 households across the province that are in core housing need. This number is expected to grow as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a group of housing organizations, we know that access to suitable housing is a key determinant of people's health, well-being, employment and happiness. Investing in housing is an opportunity to make life better for people across the province. To improve everyone's access to housing that they can afford, action must be taken across the entire spectrum, from community housing to private rental housing.

It is imperative that we have strong housing mix that provides options for all Ontario families. Without sustainable action and investment in housing, the disparities in our communities will only serve to deepen, especially as eviction bans are lifted and emergency support funding ceases. Housing provides permanent frontline support to individuals and families, ensuring emergency systems (especially healthcare) are not overburdened.

Housing is critical to kick-starting economic recovery and renewal because of the widespread gains and savings it spurs across private, public and non-profit sectors, including construction and infrastructure, as well as health, social services and justice. By stimulating economic growth, creating jobs and increasing household incomes, investment in housing mix, supply and renewal will guard against the potentially devastating aftermath of this pandemic, while ensuring our communities are supported for the long-term.

As housing organizations from across the housing spectrum, we are calling on your government to prioritize investments in housing as part of your COVID-19 recovery plan. This can be done through the following recommended policies:

- 1. Direct immediate stabilization funding to community housing providers:** Community housing providers are facing significant revenue loss related to rental arrears, vacancy loss and increased costs for cleaning supplies, personal protective equipment (PPE), security services and staff overtime hours. The community housing sector needs immediate

stabilization funding to mitigate the financial impacts of COVID-19 on the sector in the short, medium and long-term, as many providers are beginning to redirect funding from capital reserves to support immediate operational challenges, severely threatening the sustainability of the sector for the long-term.

- 2. Implement the FRPO Ontario Rental Assistance Program proposal:** We are in extraordinary times and these times need extraordinary action. This is why FRPO, with the support of the signatories to this correspondence, is calling for the government to setup an [Ontario Rental Assistance Program \(ORAP\)](#). This program would be time-limited and intended to provide financial support to help residents pay their rent until we have passed the current crisis. This form of support provides the flexibility to support residents with a wide range of housing need—preserving tenancies for those who may not be able to pay rent arrears.
- 3. Protect the existing supply of community housing: Ontario needs to ensure that existing** community housing is maintained in a state of good repair and remains affordable for individuals and families with low-incomes. To accomplish this, we are calling for greater provincial funding for renewal and rehabilitation of existing housing stock. The Province must also work closely with the sector to protect the long-term viability of existing provincial housing providers as their mortgages come to an end.
- 4. Invest in the community housing sector (non-profits and co-op housing):** In order to increase the overall supply of community housing, we are calling on the Province to increase support for new community housing through an expanded toolkit of programs and policy options designed to increase access to capital, increase funding and ensure greater amounts of surplus land are available to the community housing sector. We urge the Province to use the [Affordable Housing Plan for Ontario](#) developed by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA) and the Cooperative Housing Federation of Canada (CHF) as a roadmap for recovery in the community housing sector. Research shows that with adequate, affordable housing, people have better health outcomes, higher propensities to spend and rely less on other costly public sectors such as healthcare, justice, shelter and social assistance.
- 5. Incentivize the development of purpose built rentals in Ontario:** Purpose-built rental apartments have made up just 9% of all units built in Ontario over the last 30 years. Research shows that a lack of rental housing can be a major detriment to financial stability of jurisdictions. Ontario needs a balanced mix and adequate supply of housing to meet its diverse and growing housing needs.
- 6. Expand eligibility for the Ontario-Canada Housing Benefit program:** As Ontarians face increasing job and income losses as a result of COVID-19, we are likely to see a widespread rise in homelessness when eviction bans are lifted. Expanding eligibility for the newly launched Ontario-Canada Housing Benefit can help meet the growing housing needs of Ontario communities and work to end chronic homelessness.

- 7. Increase investment in the Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative (COCHI) and the Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative (OPHI) programs:** Increasing investment in existing programs with high demand will help to quickly accelerate growth, repair and renewal along the housing continuum, while ensuring appropriate mix of affordable and adequate housing that meets the needs of communities across the province.

Considering the broad system impacts of the above recommendations, it is paramount to take an integrated approach to economic recovery planning in partnership with all levels of government, as well as sector organizations with community-based experience and expertise. The housing sector is well poised to work closely with public, private and non-profit partners to build the critical social infrastructure to meet the preexisting and growing needs in our communities. Amidst significant levels of public spending in response to COVID-19, investing in long-term solutions that support community wellbeing must be a top priority in economic recovery planning.

As we are actively preparing recovery plans for our organizations to meet the needs of our communities and strengthen our sector's capacity, we welcome the opportunity to work closely with your government on economic recovery solutions that benefit our communities by prioritizing investment in housing across the continuum. Thank you for taking the time to review this letter.

Sincerely,



Marlene Coffey
CEO
Ontario Non-Profit Housing
Association



Harvey Cooper
Deputy Executive Director
CHF Canada Ontario
Region



Tony Irwin
President and CEO
Federation of Rental-
Housing Providers of
Ontario

Cc:

Hon. Rod Phillips, Minister of Finance

Greg Orencsak, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Finance

Kate Manson-Smith, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Joshua Paul, Assistant Deputy Minister, Housing Division, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Jamie McGarvey, President, Association of Municipalities Ontario

Dan McCormick, President, Ontario Municipal Social Services Association

Howie Wong, CEO, Housing Services Corporation