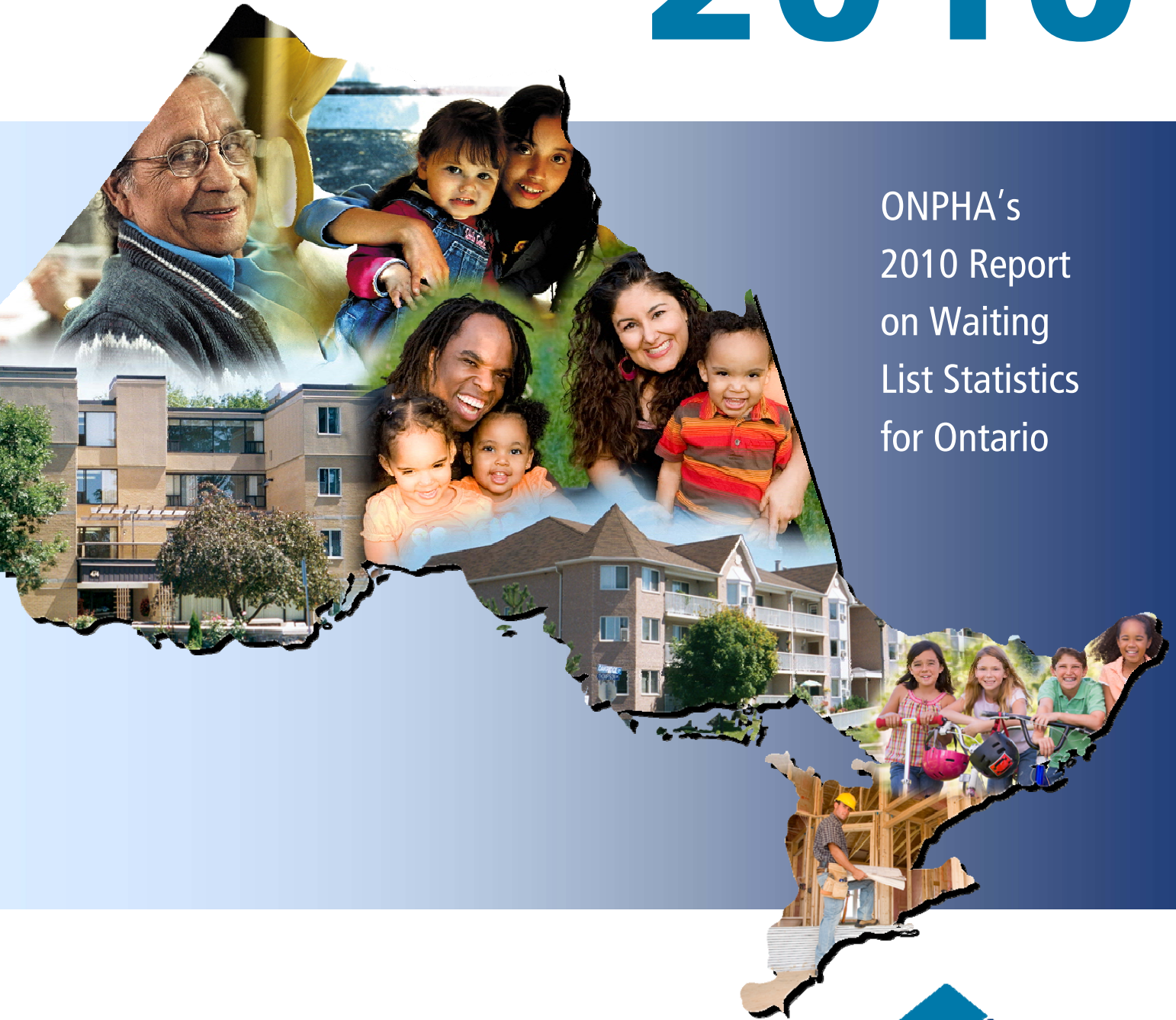


waiting lists survey **2010**



ONPHA's
2010 Report
on Waiting
List Statistics
for Ontario

May 2010



ONPHA

Ontario
Non-Profit Housing
Association

Executive Summary

In early 2010, a survey was conducted on behalf of the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association by Tim Welch Consulting Inc. to collect waiting list statistics from all of the 47 Municipal Service Manager Areas in Ontario.¹ Since 2004, ONPHA has annually prepared its *Waiting Lists Statistics for Ontario* report; designed to provide an ongoing view of the number of households in Ontario waiting for assisted housing.

This annual report offers an up to date picture of the number of households on waiting lists for affordable housing throughout Ontario, including the length of time they must wait to be housed.

At the beginning of 2010, there were 141,635 households on the municipal waiting lists for assisted housing. The number of households looking for assisted housing across Ontario has grown significantly by 12,382 households from January 2009 - an increase of 9.6% in one year.

The survey, conducted in early 2010, reflects the impact of a significant recession that hit Ontario in the fall of 2008. With communities dealing with significantly increased unemployment for more than a year, the waiting list statistics show the first substantial increase (almost 10%) in the six years since this survey began being undertaken by ONPHA.

As the unemployment rate remains high in the spring of 2010, the size of the waiting list is not likely to decrease any time soon. ONPHA and CHF Canada Ontario Region's upcoming report, *"Where's Home? 2010,"* reviews the state of rental housing in Ontario and across 22 rental markets in the province. This research projects a further decline in tenant incomes that, when combined with average rent increases that are generally greater than inflation, will likely continue to add to the number of households on waiting lists.

Service Managers were asked whether there were any noticeable trends that have occurred over the last year in their waiting list statistics. The number of households on the active waiting list continues to climb and particularly this year, has increased at an alarming rate over the 2009 numbers. More seniors, families and singles all continue to wait for housing in growing numbers.

¹ Under the *Social Housing Reform Act*, municipal service managers have the legislated responsibility to maintain centralized social housing waiting lists in Ontario.

While the survey asked similar questions to the year before, the Waiting List Survey added an additional question for the Service Managers, requesting input or suggestions regarding future surveys and data collection. A number of suggestions were made; including the need to probe further to help ensure the data being provided across Municipal Service Manager Areas is truly comparable.

The current provincial vacancy rate increased from 2.7% in October 2008 to 3.5% as of October 2009. One factor affecting the vacancy rate could be that Ontarians are suffering from layoffs as a result of the recession and moving from their rental units due to unaffordability and/or moving in with family and friends. This will continue to put pressure on waiting lists numbers.

The 2010 survey asked waiting list staff for their opinion as to whether the length on the wait list discourages a significant portion of eligible applicants from applying for affordable housing. **The majority of responses indicated that many households, discouraged by long wait times, simply do not bother to fill out an application.** These comments concur with the responses received to the same question in 2009. **The number of active households on municipal waiting lists at the beginning of 2010 was 141,635, a significant increase from the 129,253 active households in early 2009.**

The waiting list figures represent an incomplete picture of the absolute affordable housing needs in Ontario. This figure does not account for households who do not maintain their wait list status through the annual confirmations required in most jurisdictions. ONPHA and CHF Canada Ontario Region's *"Where's Home? 2010"* report highlights the broader scope of housing need by noting that 261,000 Ontario tenant households (1 out of every 5 tenant households) are paying 50% or more of their income on rent.

The wait list for seniors, non-seniors and families has increased significantly across the three categories since the 2009 data. The wait times for seniors, which have been manageable in previous years, has seen a notable increase. Previously, wait times for seniors were an average of one to two years or less, with the exception of Peterborough and Peel where the average wait time was seven years. In the 2010 statistics obtained, Peterborough and Peel are still reporting an average wait time of seven years, but Wellington has now reported up to eight years for seniors and Kawartha Lakes and Parry Sound have an average of five years for seniors on the wait list. In some cases, it was reported that many of the market rent households on the waiting list have now moved to the rent-geared-to-income list because of job loss and economic hardship.

The active waiting list number provides one measure for the need of affordable housing - a number that remains high and is climbing. It is also important to note that the number would increase significantly if all eligible households applied through the Co-ordinated Access Centres.

Not only are we not meeting the obvious need for affordable housing, but there are a growing number of inadequately housed households who have simply given up hope.

A separate table and map that accompanies this report outlines the complete results of the survey for each Service Manager Area.

Results of Survey

The survey results provided a number of key statistics.

THE NUMBER OF "ACTIVE" HOUSEHOLDS ON THE WAITING LIST

This figure - 141,635 households - states the number of households which are actively looking for assisted housing in Ontario. In general, this would include the number of households that have either applied or maintained their existing application by keeping in contact with the local co-ordinated access system within the last 12 months.

Province-wide, the number of households on the waiting list has increased by 12,382 households, or 9.6%, from the 2009 figure of 129,253. This overall increase is a reflection of the increases occurring locally in a number of municipalities. Thirty-one (31) of the 47 Service Managers, or 66%, reported an increase in their waiting lists.

A large number of Service Managers have had a significant increase in the wait list numbers. The greatest impact has been in Thunder Bay with an 84.1% increase in the wait list, followed by Oxford County with an increase of 51% (517 and 81 respectively). In the City of Hamilton and the County of Renfrew, the waiting list increased by 21% (879 and 120 respectively) over the previous year. The greatest impact province-wide has been the 15.5% overall increase in senior applications and a 17% overall increase in single non-senior applicants.

DISCOURAGED APPLICANTS

In previous ONPHA waiting list surveys, Service Managers commented on "discouraged households" that do not bother to apply for assisted housing due to the long wait time. In the 2010 survey, we asked whether Service Manager/housing registry staff believed long wait times were discouraging potential applicants from submitting applications. The majority (34 of 47, or 72.3%) believed this to be true. The "discouragement" occurs in both large and small communities across Ontario as many potential applicants are often in immediate need of affordable housing. Many of the comments referred to applicants needing housing immediately, feeling hopeless and discouraged about the length of the wait list. Also, comments were made that due to the urgent need of the applicants, many of the applicants apply but do not maintain their change of address as they may be transient in their housing status.

In the Region of Peel, the long wait for subsidized housing - up to 21 years for singles and families, and up to seven years for seniors - has discouraged potential applicants from applying.

GEOGRAPHIC CONCENTRATION OF WAITING LIST HOUSEHOLDS

The greatest concentration of households on waiting lists remains in the large urban areas of Ontario. At the time of this survey, 60,197 households in the City of Toronto were on the active waiting list - representing 43% of all of the active households in the province even though Toronto represents only 20.6% of the population of Ontario. The Region of Peel also remains high with 14,436 households, or 10%, of the total active households on the waiting lists for Ontario.

INACTIVE HOUSEHOLDS

There is no common methodology among the Municipal Service Managers to keep track of "inactive households" (those who earlier applied for financially assisted housing, but who have not kept in contact with the waiting list system). As a result, ONPHA no longer collects data on the number of inactive households.

In order to have clear comparable data, the Service Managers should agree on a "best practice" methodology to collect waiting list data. We will continue to work with Service Managers in 2010 in order to have a consistent data collection methodology.

Having reliable province-wide measures of housing need should be part of Ontario's public policy environment. Accurately and consistently reported waiting list data is one such measure. Many of the Services Managers did, however, acknowledge purging their waiting list at least once a year of households they are no longer able to contact. For example, due to a purge in the waiting list and inability to make contact with applicants, the County of Lambton and the Region of Durham, reported the

number of households on the waiting list decreased by approximately 50% and 41% respectively.

It should also be noted that the need for affordable housing is also measured by Statistics Canada. The 2006 census showed, for example, that across Ontario, 20% of tenant households (representing 261,225 tenant households) are paying 50% or more of their income on rent. Virtually all of these households could be eligible for financially assisted housing. Given the current economic climate, we would expect this measure to worsen over the next few years. The soon-to-be released "*Where's Home? 2010*" report notes that in the previous recession of the early 1990s, the proportion of tenants paying 50% or more of income on rent increased by 30% and projects that Ontario will also see some decline in 2010 tenant incomes once the next census figures are released. There is no doubt, however, that the gap between what is available and what is needed will remain enormous.

SENIORS, NON-SENIOR SINGLES AND FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS

Of the 47 Service Manager areas, all were able to track how the need for assisted housing varies across Ontario for three main groups - seniors, single non-seniors (persons under 65), and family households. While the need is great in all areas, the largest number of households on waiting lists are families at 38.8 % (54,887) of the total wait list, followed by non-senior singles (54,214) representing 38.3% of the households on the waiting list. Seniors (34,258) households represent 24.2%. These percentages are consistent with the figures for 2009.

The longest wait times in most Municipal Service Manager Areas continues to be experienced by single persons. Single persons in 20 Service Manager areas

wait five years or more for assisted housing. There were six Service Managers that did not provide data. Service Manager Areas where the average wait for a single person is five years or more are as follows: Peel, Brantford, Cochrane, Cornwall, Kawartha Lakes, Lennox, Hastings, Huron, Kenora, Kingston, Niagara, Dufferin, Norfolk, Northumberland, Parry Sound, Waterloo, Wellington, Peterborough, Wellington and Windsor. It should be noted that the number of Service Managers that reported a wait list time for singles of five years and over has grown from nine to 20 over the past few years.

Eleven Service Managers (Thunder Bay, Chatham, Cochrane, Kawartha Lakes, Kenora, Lambton, Lanark, Manatoulin, St. Thomas, Wellington and Windsor), as compared to three Service Managers in 2009, noted that their increase in wait lists statistics was directly related to job loss through plant closures or downsizing/layoffs due to the recession. The Municipality of Chatham-Kent noted that there is a change in the type of applicant households; higher income households who have lost jobs, homes, and depleted investments in order to find shelter. In the County of Wellington it was reported the number of new applicants has increased approximately 26% in 2009.

IMPACT OF PROVINCE'S SPECIAL PRIORITY STATUS

By virtue of the Province's Special Priority Policy, all Service Managers are required to give priority to applicants that have experienced domestic violence or abuse. Service Managers, at their discretion, may also prioritize additional categories such as homeless youth, youth in general, and those with chronic illness.

There were comments from 12 Service Managers (Durham, London, Ottawa, Peel, Simcoe, Thunder

Bay, Cochrane, Hastings, Kenora, Niagara, Toronto and York) indicating a significant increase in the number of Special Priority applicants and/or that a large portion of those being housed are Special Priority applicants. This is consistent with the 2009 survey that commented on this challenge. However, three Service Managers clearly expressed concerns that "special priority housing" is adding wait times for those in need of housing on the chronological wait list or those who do not fit in the "special priority" category.

Chronological households continue to wait longer to be placed in assisted housing. The Service Manager areas of Peel and London indicated that all, or almost all, of the people being housed are Special Priority applicants. Norfolk County indicated that the non-senior single wait list for Simcoe may never be offered housing as the special priority applicants "trump" applicants from the very lengthy chronological list. This essentially means that the list is needs-based and not chronological at all, even though the system is intended to be chronological. It should be noted that, in most cases, the waiting list for seniors was not being impacted by the Special Priority status; families and single non-senior waiting lists were consistently affected.

This increased pressure on the limited number of available assisted units is a problem that must be addressed. It has implications for the housing providers who now have an increasing number of households just out of crisis and potentially needing more support to ensure a successful tenancy. It also has implications for those whose mission is to help those being prioritized. Finally, it raises difficult questions about the nature of the chronological system and the needs of households that do not receive priority. ONPHA continues to work with housing providers, women's shelters, transitional housing providers and with provincial staff to deal with this challenge. ONPHA has long argued for a

provincial housing policy that provides for a series of program and funding tools that can be used by Service Managers to implement local housing plans. In 2007, ONPHA's membership passed a resolution requesting that the provincial government **"develop an emergency housing system that gives victims of violence a form of housing allowance adequate to obtain market rental housing in their community so that they can gain access to housing immediately when in need of a home"** and **"amend the *Social Housing Reform Act* to remove the provincial rule that special priority households be given priority access on centralized waiting lists."**

Our view is that there should be a two-track approach: one track being a steady expansion of the supply of social housing to meet the long-term housing needs of low-income households who are on waiting lists, and the other track being financial assistance for special priority households in urgent need. Such an approach would provide a more comprehensive and effective "safety net" for all households.

SELECTIONS MADE BY HOUSEHOLDS

One Service Manager commented on the selectivity by some households applying for assisted housing. In Windsor, the selections made by applicants were, in some instances, geographic in nature. However, it was noted that the *Social Housing Reform Act*, which allows three offers of housing to an applicant, will often give an applicant the option of refusal until a more appropriate unit becomes available.

The City of Chatham-Kent did not address selectivity but noted that there has been an increase in

applications for the community of Wallaceburg and the local Walpole Island Reserve. This is mainly due to plant closures in Wallaceburg and the deterioration of housing on the Reserve.

Given this situation, and particularly if it continues, governments at all levels should carefully consider the type and location of proposed housing. Governments should also consider some flexibility to renovate/redevelop units that are not desired or needed by a significant number of households, such as combining bachelor units into one bedroom apartments.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS REGARDING COLLECTION OF INFORMATION

There were 10 Service Manger areas giving responses to the Question # 7: *"Are there other questions or collections of information you would like to see on future ONPHA surveys?"*

The suggestions included:

- standardizing the measurement of average time waiting for housing and other statistical records,
- tracking, or separating out the number of RGI transfers,
- recording the number of new applications received in the year and comparing it to previous years,
- measuring the number of market rent unit applicants,
- number of applicants who are actually homeless, and
- separating the wait time by priority categories (homeless, SPP etc.).

Conclusions

On the face of it, the rise in the waiting list statistics is staggering if not shocking. Followers of ONPHA's annual report will note that, while waiting list numbers have been consistently high, they have been generally stable. However, from 2008 to the present, the large increase would seem attributable to the impact of the recent recession, particularly the lagging effect of unemployment on housing risk, which has only compounded the ongoing issues of lack of housing supply and affordability.

Year	Active Households	% Change over Previous Year
2004	126,103	
2005	124,785	-1.0%
2006	122,426	-1.9%
2007	121,726	-0.6%
2008	124,032	+1.9%
2009	129,253	+4.2%
2010	141,635	+9.6%

If these numbers are to be contained, if not sufficiently addressed, then the challenge for senior governments will be to maintain their investments in new affordable housing development and income assistance despite their need to address budget deficits. A failure to do so will only mean compounding an increasing intolerable situation in the years to come.