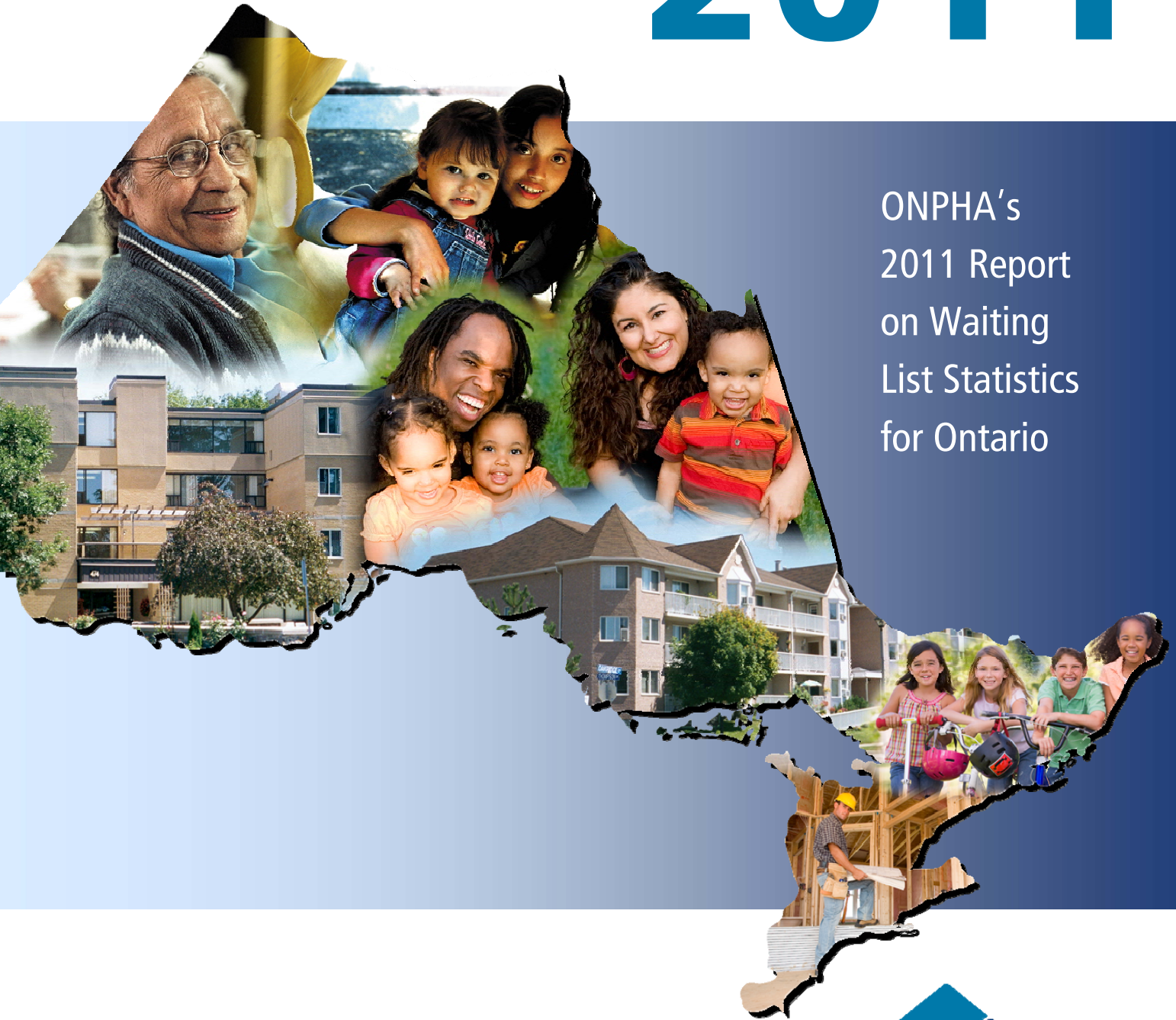


waiting lists survey **2011**



ONPHA's
2011 Report
on Waiting
List Statistics
for Ontario

May 2011



ONPHA

Ontario
Non-Profit Housing
Association

Executive Summary

In early 2011, a survey was conducted on behalf of the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association by Tim Welch Consulting Inc. to collect waiting list statistics from the 47 Municipal Service Manager areas in Ontario¹. Since 2004, ONPHA has released its annual *Waiting Lists Statistics Report* to provide an up-to-date picture of the number of households on waiting lists for affordable housing in Ontario and the length of time they must wait to be housed.

In January 2011, 152,077 households were on waiting lists for assisted housing - up 7.4% in one year.

As of January 2011, there were 152,077 households on municipal waiting lists for assisted housing. The number of households looking for assisted housing across Ontario grew by 10,442 households from January 2010 - an increase of 7.4% in one year.

This is the second consecutive year of significant increases in the number of waiting households, following a 9.6% increase from 2009 to 2010. In the two year period from January 2009 to January 2011, there was an increase of 22,824 households on waiting lists for financially assisted housing in Ontario, representing a 17.7% increase from the 129,253 households on waiting lists in 2009.

Seniors, families and singles all showed increasing waiting list figures.

¹ Under the *Social Housing Reform Act 2000*, municipal service managers have the legislated responsibility to maintain centralized social housing waiting lists in Ontario.

This increase in the number of households on active waiting lists reflects the effects of the recession over the past two years. The wait list report survey asked Service Managers whether there were any noticeable trends that have occurred over the last year in their waiting list statistics. A number of them commented on the impact of the recession increasing the waiting list figures. While the unemployment rate in Ontario may have eased from its recessionary peak, the reality is that many Ontarians are living through a period of uncertain economic recovery with reduced work hours, lost jobs or new jobs at lower wages. This reality has meant that many more people have had to seek financially assisted housing and have applied to local housing waiting lists.

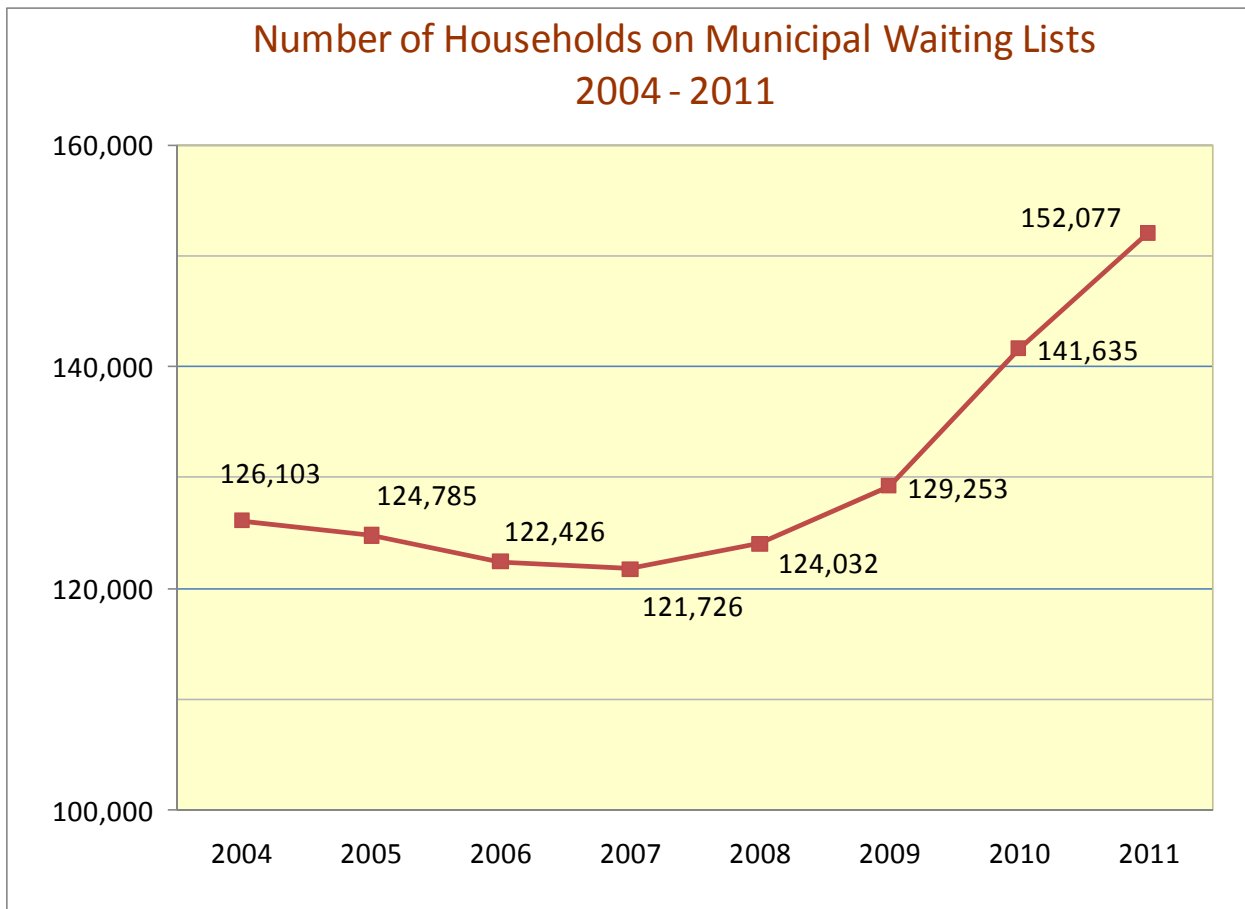
The current provincial vacancy rate decreased from 3.5% in October 2009 to 2.9% as of October 2010 and average rents continued to increase as a typical two bedroom apartment rent increased by 1.9%. Higher rents and tighter rental markets put a squeeze on moderate and low-income renters, thus pushing more of them to apply for assisted housing.

The 2011 survey asked waiting list staff for their opinion as to whether the length of the wait list discourages a significant portion of eligible applicants from applying. More than two-thirds of responses indicated that many households, discouraged by long wait times, simply do not bother to apply as their need for housing is often immediate.

The active waiting list number provides one measure for the growing need of affordable housing. It is also important to note that the number would increase significantly if all households eligible for assisted housing applied through the Co-ordinated Access Centres. 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, as many of those people in need of affordable housing have simply given up hope.

A separate table and map accompanying this report outlines the complete results of the survey for each Service Manager Area for 2011. The chart below summarizes trends in overall wait list numbers between 2004 and 2011.



Results of Survey

THE NUMBER OF "ACTIVE" HOUSEHOLDS ON WAITING LISTS²

As of January 2011, 152,077 households were actively looking for assisted housing in Ontario. This figure includes 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.

The number of households on waiting lists province-wide has increased by 10,442 households (7.4%) from the 2010 figure of 141,635. This increase is a reflection of local increases occurring in a number of municipalities - 30 of the 47 Service Managers, or 64%, reported an increase in their waiting lists.

In the past two years, there has been an increase of 22,824 households on the waiting lists for financially assisted housing in Ontario. This represents a 17.7% increase from the 129,253 households on waiting lists in 2009.

In two years, there has been an increase of 22,824 households on waiting lists for financially assisted housing in Ontario.

There are a number of Service Managers that have seen a significant increase in wait list numbers in the past year. The greatest impact on a percentage basis has been in Prince Edward - Lennox and Addington, with an 82% increase in the wait list (representing an increase of 138 households), followed by the Timiskaming District Social Services Administration Board with an increase of 80% (representing an increase of 251 households), the City of Greater Sudbury with a 39% increase (representing an increase of 545 households), and the County of Dufferin with a 32% increase (representing an increase of 124 households).

Service Manager areas experiencing the largest increases in the number of waiting households were Toronto with 6,262 households added to that city's waiting list, the Region of York with 941 households added, the Region of Niagara with 932 households added, and the Region of Peel with 905 additional households.

In 2010 and 2011, 17 Service Managers reported decreases totaling 2,044 households. The largest decrease occurred in Simcoe County, where the waiting list dropped by 580 households as the result of an aggressive purging of out of date and no contact files.

² 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.

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 2011 survey, we asked whether Service Manager/housing registry staff believed long wait times were discouraging potential applicants from submitting applications. The majority (32 of 47, or 68.1%) believed this was true. The "discouragement" occurs in both large and small communities across Ontario as many potential applicants are in immediate need of affordable housing. The comments provided noted that many of the applicants were "desperate" or in crisis when they applied. When told the length of time they will likely wait, many potential applicants simply do not bother to apply.

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, 66,197 households were on the active waiting list in the City of Toronto - representing 43.5% of all of the active households in the province even though Toronto represents only 20.6% of the provincial population. Wait list statistics in the Region of Peel also remain high with 15,341 households, or 10.1% of the total active households, on waiting lists in Ontario.

SENIORS, SINGLES & FAMILIES

Of 47 Service Manager areas, 41 were able to track how the need for assisted housing varies across three main groups - seniors, non-single seniors (persons under 65), and family households; six Service Managers did not provide this breakdown.

While the need is great for all household types, the largest number of households on waiting lists are families at 37.5% (56,997) of the total wait list, followed closely by non-senior singles (56,859) representing 37.4% of the households on the waiting list. Seniors households (37,824) represent 24.9% of the households on the waiting list. These percentages are relatively consistent with the ratios from previous years.

The number of waiting list households across the province increased in all three categories of seniors, non-senior singles and family households. The number of senior households increased by 3,566 (or 10.3%) from 34,258 to 37,824. The number of non-senior single households increased by 2,645 (or 4.9%) from 54,214 to 56,859. The number of family households increased by 2,110 (or 3.8%) from 54,887 to 56,997.

The longest wait times in most Service Manager Areas continue to be experienced by single persons. Single persons in the following 17 Service Manager areas wait four years or more for assisted housing: Cochrane, Cornwall, Durham, Halton, Hastings, Kawartha Lakes, Kenora, Kingston, Muskoka, Niagara, Ottawa, Parry Sound, Peel, Peterborough, Prescott and Russell, Toronto and Waterloo.

FACTORS AFFECTING WAITING LISTS

Service Managers were asked about trends affecting their waiting list numbers. A number of Service Managers commented on the impact of the recession. The Region of York noted they have experienced a 40% increase in applicants since the recession began, while Brantford noted that more employed people are applying as earnings appear lower due to factory closures. The City of Windsor, while experiencing a very high rental vacancy rate, is faced with an increased number of homeless applicants due to the economic downturn which has resulted in an increased number of foreclosures, bankruptcies and evictions.

Some Service Managers noted the increased wait times involved for chronological applicants because a significant number of the units are offered to Special

Priority Policy applicants or other priority households. Under the Province's Special Priority Policy, all Service Managers are required to give priority to applicants that have experienced domestic violence or abuse. The Special Priority Policy is maintained in the new *Housing Services Act*, and Service Managers must address the needs of Special Priority households in their local housing and homelessness plans. Service Managers, at their discretion, may also prioritize additional categories such as homeless youth, youth in general or those with chronic illness. Priorities are set to recognize urgent housing needs among identified groups, but depending on the availability of housing units, may have the effect of limiting access for non-priority households. The Service Manager area of Peel indicated that singles and families on the chronological waiting list are not gaining access to subsidized housing and are waiting longer and longer.

Conclusions

The significant increase in the number of households waiting for financially assisted housing over the past two years indicates an increasing need for additional affordable housing in Ontario. Stagnant incomes among lower and moderate income households coupled with rising costs means more and more Ontarians need financially assisted housing to get by.

Waiting lists statistics provide a key indicator of the gap between the need for affordable housing and the available supply. It is important to note that this indicator under-represents the need for assisted housing across the province. Many households do not apply for assisted housing, either unaware they are eligible or discouraged by long wait times. Other households drop off the list because they have not updated their contact information over the long wait period. According to Statistics Canada's 2006 Census, 20% of tenant households across Ontario (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.

The Province of Ontario released its Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy in 2010, including new legislation for social housing. The recently passed *Housing Services Act* removes some requirements for wait lists and provides Service Managers with more flexibility in managing their "systems for waiting households." This new flexibility may allow Service Managers to better manage their wait lists to meet local need; however, it also raises the concern that wait lists will not be maintained consistently across Service Manager Areas, creating challenges to reporting on provincial levels of need. In its Long

Term Affordable Housing Strategy, the Province stated that "Best Practices will be encouraged among Service Managers and new annual waiting list reporting requirements will be developed in 2011 and used to develop better information across the Province." In order to have clear comparable data, the Service Managers should agree on a "best practice" methodology to collect waiting list data. ONPHA looks forward to working with the Province and Service Managers in 2011 in order to have an improved, and ideally consistent, data collection methodology.

While ONPHA is pleased that the new *Housing Services Act* appears to give Service Managers direction in terms of preserving existing stock and more flexibility in redeveloping some of the existing housing, we are concerned that the strategy did not include any targets or funding for affordable housing development. The lack of any announced new capital or operating funds to support new affordable housing and the absence of a national housing strategy at the federal level means that housing needs, as clearly illustrated in the large and growing waiting lists for financially assisted housing, are simply not being met.

Both the federal and provincial governments must show an ongoing commitment to increased affordable housing investment in order to meet expanding community need and help the hundreds of thousands of people throughout the province waiting for help.