



Wellness Supportive Living Program,
Niagara Region

INNOVATIONS IN HOUSING *stability*

Housing stability: Everyone can find, and keep,
a home that meets their needs.

Innovation: A novel solution that achieves
benefits not possible through current practices
in the current context.

ONP*h***A**

ONTARIO NON-PROFIT
HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Summary:

- **The innovation:** Wellness centres in four seniors' buildings provide affordable supports to tenants and the surrounding community, and reduce hospital stays, emergency-room visits, turnover and vacancy loss
- **Lead and partners:**
 - Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) – building owner and property manager
 - March of Dimes Canada – project lead and attendant care provider
 - Community Support Services of Niagara (CSNN) – social and recreational programming
 - Niagara Region Seniors Community Programs (the Region) – wellness programming
- **People served:** Seniors 55+ with a wide range of support needs
- **Funding:** Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) – capital and operating

THE CATALYST



Many of Niagara Regional Housing's (NRH) seniors were no longer able to live independently, but could neither find nor afford the right mix of supports. Some were at an increased safety risk in their homes. Others were unable to return home from hospital or were moving into long-term care facilities.

When the Ontario government announced new Aging at Home funding, it was an ideal opportunity to develop a coordinated place-based approach that would improve care and reduce costs.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

ACCESSIBILITY: A neighbourhood hub model offers services to seniors where they live.

EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF RISK: Staff are equipped to identify tenants in difficulty and link them promptly to support services.

A TEAM APPROACH: Working collaboratively makes it easier for tenants to accept supports and stay in their home longer.

FLEXIBLE SERVICES: Supports are designed to provide the “right care at the right time” to help tenants stay safely in their homes.

PRO-ACTIVE SERVICE PLANNING: When tenants return from hospital or are facing decline, programs are tailored to respond to changing needs.

BREAKING ISOLATION: Promoting a sense of belonging, offering purpose and building on the strengths of each individual helps tenants stay involved and engaged.



DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

NRH and March of Dimes Canada had previously partnered to support people with physical disabilities. When the LHIN issued an RFP in 2009 for its Aging at Home initiative, the two organizations were ready to submit a proposal.

The team identified four properties with a high number of 911 calls and hospitalizations, and – consistent with the LHIN’s focus on collaboration – brought together the Region’s own seniors programming with the non-profit Community Support Services of Niagara.

As a LHIN transfer agency, March of Dimes applied on the team’s behalf and received \$168,000 in capital funding to convert a unit in each of four buildings to an office and bathing station, along with \$1.5 million in operating funding. After two years, the LHIN recognized the program in its base budget.

The NRH board approved the conversion of four units, choosing vacant units on accessible floors. After tendering, NRH hired a contractor with Accessibility Design Standards expertise.

NRH also involved tenants from the beginning, working with the March of Dimes to create a Tenant Advisory Group and facilitate focus groups. Most tenants welcomed services they would not otherwise be able to afford. However, some were concerned that the buildings would turn into nursing homes. NRH emphasized that the building would continue to focus on independent living, and has maintained that message throughout.

After two years, the program expanded, using the LHIN’s hub-and-spoke model to serve residents within 15 minutes of three of the four buildings.



PROGRAM:

- Services delivered in four buildings, providing attendant care to over 200 tenants and wellness programs to 700 tenants
- Each hub targets a minimum of 30 high-risk seniors living within a 15-minute response time
- Over 100 high-risk clients are supported by mobile Personal Support Workers available 24/7

ACCESS:

- Tenants continue to apply through Niagara Region's coordinated access system, with no screening or streaming of applicants based on support needs
- Upon move-in, tenants are told about the opportunities available in the program

SERVICES:

- Attendant care, including bathing, dressing, transfers, medication prompt, meal preparation, housekeeping and laundry
- Someone to call in the middle of the night
- Exercise program to improve strength, coordination and balance
- Health and wellness clinics tailored to each building, including foot care, falls prevention, etc.
- Security checks drawing on tenant volunteers
- Congregate dining, volunteer visiting and social programs offered six days per week
- Unit modifications on an as-needed basis

STAFFING:

- 75 to 90 Support Service Attendants employed by March of Dimes Canada, plus a Program Manager, two Community Support Supervisors, two Service Delivery Workers and four Community Support leaders community support worker, administrator and two team leaders
- Three Community Programs Co-ordinators employed by NRH for individuals with complex needs
- Two recreation coordinators employed by CSNN
- One Community Resources Co-ordinator for all four buildings employed by the Region to bring in clinics and education sessions offered by other organizations
- Staff identify themselves to tenants as the Wellness Supportive Living Program team (rather than as the employees of individual organizations). The team shares an office and meets monthly to review program initiatives, identify tenants with high service needs and plan next steps.

VOLUNTEERS:

- Over 90 volunteers, mostly tenants, support the program. Twenty-five per cent of tenants in the four buildings volunteer in the program.
- Volunteers support and, in some cases, run programs and complete security checks
- Tenants state volunteering helps them feel more connected to their neighbours and community



- **TO SUCCEED, YOU NEED TWO THINGS: SUPPORTS AND MONEY.** You need to ensure your program aligns with the LHIN's priorities.
- **PARTNER, PARTNER, PARTNER.** Nobody can be an expert in all things. Bring to the table what you're good at, and leave room for your partners to do what they're good at.
- **LOOK FOR AN AGENCY THAT CAN NAVIGATE THE SYSTEM.** Pull services together and both lead and work with others.
- **SELECT CONTRACTORS WITH ACCESSIBILITY DESIGN STANDARDS EXPERTISE.** Redesign common areas, if necessary. Assign caregiver parking.
- **PLAN THE TRANSITION CAREFULLY.** For example, when funding was approved, March of Dimes needed to quickly hire 50 to 70 Support Service Attendants. Job shadowing helped tenants to transition smoothly from their accustomed worker to the new staff.
- **RECOGNIZE AGE DOESN'T DETERMINE NEEDS.** The age range in the program is 55 to 100 years old. But a 55-year-old with substance use issues will need much more support than a healthy 100-year-old.
- **PILOT.** If you don't try new things, you're never going to know. Over time, lessons learned can be integrated into the next initiative.





“Every day tenants tell us, ‘I no longer sit at home waiting until I go to bed. I have a purpose. I am loved. It’s a wonderful feeling.’”

- Carolyn Askeland,
Executive Director,
Community Support Services
of Niagara

“The program operates in four buildings with 700 people. That’s huge reach. But it also extends to people living outside the building – people who might be on our waiting list. That multiplies the benefits.” - Dan Troche,

CEO, Niagara Regional
Housing



- A one-stop shop, offering a wide array of services provided free of charge to tenants.
- Lower costs for care: The program’s attendant care services cost \$20/ person/per day. The average cost of home care (as reported by the Ontario Association of Community Care Access Centres, 2014) is \$42/ day. Some tenants have removed themselves from long-term care waiting lists because they no longer foresee needing that level of care.
- Lower costs for emergency services: Ambulance calls have been reduced by 44 per cent and tenants are discharged from hospital sooner.
- Greater tenant satisfaction: Among tenants surveyed after the program was introduced, over 80 per cent said their quality of life has improved and they have a more positive outlook on life since the Wellness Program began; 100 per cent said they knew more about how to stay healthier, safer and stronger.
- Greater peer support: Participants in programs encourage other tenants to join. Tenants will also call program staff if they see a neighbour needs support.



- **Niagara Regional Housing (NRH)**
www.nrh.ca
- **March of Dimes Canada**
www.marchofdimes.ca/EN/Pages/default.aspx
- **Community Support Services of Niagara**
www.cssn.ca
- **Niagara Region Seniors Community Programs**
www.niagararegion.ca/living/seniors/programs
- **Wellness Supportive Living Program: A holistic approach to growing older at home and living independently**