



AMO Principles and Strategic Considerations for Social Housing in Ontario

March 2007

Association of
Municipalities
of Ontario

393 University Avenue, Suite 1701
Toronto, ON M5G 1E6 Canada
tel: 416-971-9856 fax: 416-971-6191
email: amo@amo.on.ca
website: www.amo.on.ca

1. Introduction:

Housing stability and affordability is a primary factor in determining the economic, social and physical health and well-being of Ontario's families and Ontario's communities. Housing is more than just shelter, it is the interrelated system of services, supports, funding and policies that enable Ontario's citizens to live in their community.¹

Through the intervention of the private, non-profit and government sectors the people of Ontario enjoy the benefit of a large stock of residential ownership and rental housing – many would claim that the province and country has some of the best housing conditions in the world. Despite the excellent track record of housing the people of Ontario roughly 15% of housing needs of the residents are not being adequately met. While action by all housing stakeholders is essential there is a key role to be played by all orders of government to address the needs of vulnerable families and individuals who cannot successfully compete in Ontario's housing market place.

2. Principles:

Housing in Ontario must be based on the following principles:

1. Funding an income redistribution program like housing through property tax is unsustainable and at odds with basic principles of good public policy and good fiscal policy.
2. So long as municipalities are the principle funders of housing services in Ontario, they should be the principle policy makers.
3. Focused on long-term, sustainable solutions that provide the most cost-effective solutions to problems across the full spectrum of housing and social policy, not just specific programs.
4. That the Federal, Provincial and Municipal governments in Ontario must have a clear plan for collaboration and action on housing issues under a comprehensive National Housing Strategy.
5. Active participation of all orders of government, focused on the quality of life that housing needs to provide, and that active participation is based on defined roles, responsibilities and accountability, and a sustainable funding framework which does not include the property tax base.

¹ On December 16th, 2006, the Federal Finance Committee put forth a recommendation that, in part, read: "The Committee believes that appropriate housing is also an important contributor to the productivity of a nation's residents and to the competitiveness of a country, since residents and employees must be well-rested if they are to be productive in society, and children and students must be appropriately housed if they are to concentrate in school as well as to grow and thrive....Moreover, we feel that housing must be affordable."

6. Comprehensive and coordinated policies and programs that include improved income supports, improved housing choice and improved access to social and health services to enable people to live independently in their communities.

3. Strategic Considerations:

These principles support a comprehensive long-term housing strategy that includes policies and programs across the spectrum of public policy:

- A comprehensive housing framework promoting policy integration must incorporate all three orders of government. This framework must facilitate engagement with private sector stakeholders. Given the taxation, legislative and jurisdictional roles of federal and provincial governments, many housing issues that communities face must be addressed by these orders of government. Municipal governments and the communities they represent must be at the table because of the key role we also play in policy development and implementation, and to ensure that locally-specific housing issues are addressed in the most effective manner.
- Adequate income supports are part of the solution to making housing affordable for the working poor and those needing social assistance, including improved minimum wage legislation, addressing the under funding of Ontario Works and Ontarians with Disabilities Support Programs, and other income supplement programs.
- Sustainable and sustained funding from the provincial and federal orders of government, with less prescriptive provincial legislation that, while ensuring accountability, allows municipal governments, communities and agencies to make decisions locally, in order to provide the best services for their needs.
- The Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, and the Ministry of Community and Social Services must work together to ensure that policies and programs are mutually supportive and do not prevent local innovation and flexibility to provide both affordable housing and the supports that are often necessary for the people being housed.
- The whole housing spectrum must be considered in all policy and program design:
 - What are the costs of not funding affordable housing? The role and costs of using housing alternatives such as jail, long-term care, hospitals, emergency shelters as substitutes for affordable, supported housing must be taken into account in any policy or program decisions, to ensure the most cost-effective solutions are being developed and sustained.

- Policies that ensure new communities are affordable to all, and that existing communities can remain affordable in the long-run [e.g. planning policies like inclusionary zoning, and other recent improvements to Municipal Act to enable better local control over housing stock].
- The need for both short term and long-term tools to address housing need. For example, relatively short term housing allowance subsidies to tenants to help them remain in their homes while they deal with temporary (6 to 24 month) financial difficulties, versus permanent non-profit affordable housing that ensures that significant public investments in housing are retained and kept available for future populations.
- The need for service supports to enable people to remain in the communities they call home, including dedicated supportive housing as well as better health and social service supports to assist people to stay in their homes.

4. Actions:

With these principles, the right actions will happen:

- Constitutionally, social housing is the responsibility of the provincial and federal governments. Inroads to solving the current problem can begin with the uploading of the cost of funding social housing from municipalities, because it is not appropriate to fund income redistribution programs from the property tax base. The province must provide solutions while municipalities continue to play an important facilitative and regulatory role.
- Uploading is only half of the solution. Housing is an important capital investment; the province must act to address the current and future needs of the existing social housing stock by providing sufficient funding to do so. This will also revitalize and protect existing communities.
- Administration of social housing should remain with municipal governments because local governments are closer to the people being served, have constructive working relationships with other sectors locally and have proven to be innovative and effective in the delivery of human services.
- Legislation will be revised to give local government the necessary authority to deliver programs while remaining accountable for outcomes.
- Public resources will be focused on the best, and most cost-effective solutions, such as supportive housing in the community to help address the demand for long-term care beds.

- Better income support policies and programs will be enacted because the downstream costs to our corrections, police, health care and social services systems of not being able to afford to live in our communities will be recognized.
- Commitment from all orders of government to develop and implement a comprehensive national housing strategy. This will create and sustain healthy communities, social integration, economic competitiveness and provide the opportunity for all Ontarians to fulfill their dreams, expectations and live a full life.

5. Conclusion:

As partners in social housing in Ontario, municipal governments must have a stronger and more influential voice in the development and guidance of social housing policy. The people who rely on these services and the people who pay for them demand quality services delivered efficiently, effectively and innovatively, and they should settle for nothing less.

AMO's principles and strategic considerations for social housing in Ontario are intended to help us meet those demands.