

Niagara Poverty Reduction Network Housing Task Group Rent Supplement Position Paper



The Niagara Poverty Reduction Network sees Rent Supplement programs as a significant part of the region's continuum of housing and homelessness services. These programs offer individuals a stigma free, cost effective solution to the growing pressures for attaining quality affordable permanent housing. The Network strongly supports an examination and review of existing programs in comparison to best practices in order to identify opportunities to expand, strengthen, or realign local rent subsidies to maximize access and use by those who can benefit from them most.

Over the course of the year 2107 the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network Housing Task Group explored the following questions:

- What does the rent supplement picture look like across the region?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of rent supplements in the current system?
- What potential is there to increase the impact of rent supplements?
- What best practices could inform rent supplement programs moving forward?
- What recommendations could be made regarding rent supplements in the region?

A number of practices and components of rent supplement programs were highlighted by the task group as ways to create a vibrant model of service. Moving forward, rent supplement programs would be more effective if they were used more flexibly. Improved transparency and readily available information would improve the accessibility of subsidies for clients. The system in Niagara would benefit from:

- Clear and readily available information about individual subsidy programs accessible in one place. Providers and clients will then understand the scope and capacity of all rent supplement programs in the region.
- Offering shorter wait times by prioritizing immediate response for high-risk individuals or families experiencing homelessness or imminent risk of homelessness to prevent the loss of housing in the first place.
- The ability to support room rentals, such as secondary suites or rooming houses, which could increase the capacity of these programs and opportunities for individuals in a tight rental market where the current subsidies cannot keep pace with current apartment rental prices.
- Promote the capacity of current programs to permit pairing unrelated people on supplements as roommates, so that they would collectively have more rental purchasing power that would give them access to higher cost units, which are not available to an individual with only one subsidy.
- Programs that are flexible enough to offer short-term support to individual whose housing loss or imminent housing loss are interfering with their continued participation in workforce.
- Access to discretionary funds for seniors that have particular hardships on the very limited incomes, to assist them in securing and making the transition into more suitable or affordable housing.
- A rental supplement that is paid to the renter and not the landlord which would reduce stigma and also reduce the landlords administrative burden as they would no longer need to connect with the subsidy program directly.

Recommendations

The Niagara Region Poverty Network recommends the following:

That a review of existing rent supplement and supported living programs administered by NRH and LHIN funded agencies to examine capacity and scope of the programs. The review should:

1. Explore the development of protocols to offer rent supplements at the time when a client is ready to graduate out of an intensive program.
2. Collate information about all rent supplement programs in the region with a goal of offering clear outlines of what they offer and how to access them. This should include a plan to offer ongoing updates on program changes to front line staff in community.
3. Examine the collated information about existing program to form the basis for a needs study of this type of housing support for the entire Niagara Region.
4. Explore best practices, innovations, and high impact rent subsidy programs from other jurisdictions to inform suggestions for local programs.
5. Examine the current guidelines for local rent supplement, housing first and other housing programs to see if any of the practices or policies identified in the exploration or outlined in this report could be incorporated into existing programs.
6. Explore options for the continued expansion of rent subsidies in Niagara