

IDEA FOR ACTION

on the Housing Crisis that Confronts Ontario Adults with Developmental Disabilities

Ontario Developmental Services
Housing Task Force

FINAL REPORT 2018

**Executive Excerpts:
Plain Language Summary**



This is a plain language version of the Executive Excerpts from the document: *Generating Ideas and Enabling Action: Addressing the housing crisis confronting Ontario adults with developmental disabilities*. You can read the full document [here](#) and [here](#).

'Crisis' is the right word for what we are facing

When people with developmental disabilities become adults, they face a housing crisis. Not having a safe and supportive place to live causes pain and limits the joys of living that we should all have in a province as blessed as ours.

This crisis has been getting worse for at least 20 years. For instance, in 2013, 12,000 people with developmental disabilities were on the wait list for residential services. That number had climbed to 15,700 by 2017. More and more people are waiting, and they are waiting longer than ever.

To understand the real impact of these numbers, you have to multiply them many times. The need for housing affects whole families and networks of support, haunted by worry about a safe and secure future for someone they love who needs a place they can call "my home."

Add to these numbers the many people who need housing but are not on wait lists, because their families care for them quietly for decades without enough support, until they too are in crisis.

All of the political parties in Ontario's legislature agree there is a crisis. In 2014, an all-party committee urged an end to the wait lists within a year. That did not happen. In 2016, the Ontario Ombudsman released a report called *Nowhere to Turn*. It described many troubling times when Ontario families were in prolonged crisis because of the lack of the right kind of housing.

The Housing Task Force

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services formed a task force in 2014 to explore new ideas for taking on this steadily worsening problem. Many members of the Housing Task Force know about developmental disability first-hand in their own families and lives. The Task Force studied the research on housing and disabilities and consulted widely for four years.

The Task Force also learned from 18 demonstration projects that the Ministry funded during that time. The projects explored new ideas such as:

- A community hub to build partnerships between developmental services and the health care sector
- Using well-established and new networks, with the help of independent facilitation, to build support so that a person with complex developmental and medical needs can live in a self-contained area in the family home
- A housing co-ordinator to help families learn how to use resources such as banks and realtors to help them secure the kind of housing that would best suit their loved one
- Helping aging parents learn how they can create housing trusts for home ownership and property management for their son or daughter after they are gone.
- Matching seniors and supportive neighbours with people who have a developmental disability
- Repurposing group homes to support people in their own apartments in buildings with enhanced 24-hour support
- Teaching young adults with developmental disabilities the skills needed for independent living, such as cooking and banking
- Forming new worker co-operatives to offer flexible, community-based, person-directed supports to adults with developmental disabilities, no matter where they live
- Planning and putting in place solutions, led by people with developmental disabilities and their families, with the support of independent facilitators
- Existing community housing organizations working together with families to find housing solutions
- Housing solutions that work for people who are homeless and have a developmental disability and often other complex needs

All of the demonstration projects taught the Task Force valuable lessons and had real success in getting people the housing and support they needed. Our final report explains what we have learned and what should be done.

What the Housing Task Force stands for

First and foremost, we stand for new ideas and the need for action. That is why we did more than research new ideas for this report – we launched demonstration projects to begin building quickly on what we know.

The 13 recommendations in our report are in two parts: Ideas and Action. Within that framework, the recommendations reflect three crucial aspects of our approach:

Whole of government: This housing crisis cannot rest solely on the shoulders of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. We need the resources, energy, and creativity of other Ontario ministries, such as housing and health care, working together. We also need other levels of government to be involved, such as regional and municipal governments.

Whole of society: We believe in the promise of partnerships. Possibilities emerge from strong relationships and commitment to a shared purpose. Our demonstration projects have taught us that we can succeed when agencies and government departments that serve at the community level partner creatively with one another and with the private sector.

Person-centred and directed: Ontarians with developmental disabilities must have their rights as citizens fully respected. As we move forward, we must keep listening to them and to the networks of people who support them in their daily lives. When we look for solutions, we must respect that we are a large and diverse province. We must take into account the special challenges of each region, especially the North. We must think about the varying demands of rural, town, and urban living. We must respect and value the diversity of our social, ethnic, racial, and faith communities.

Here is a summary of the Housing Task Force's 13 recommendations:

Recommendations Part 1: Ideas

"Whole of government" approach to research

1. The Housing Task Force recommends that the government form its own task force in which all ministries take part. This is called an inter-ministerial task force. It should look for ways to combine the energies of

different ministries to help solve the crisis. And it should look beyond the crisis to lasting solutions.

2. The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services should take the lead in researching and reviewing government policy on housing for people with developmental disabilities. Other ministries with related concerns should support this research. Such ministries include Health and Long-Term Care, Municipal Affairs and Housing, Finance, Education, and Community Safety & Correctional Services. Policy at the municipal level should also be reviewed. The research should look for the most effective use of funding and supports. It should also watch for policy areas that are limiting or discouraging new ideas.

"Whole of society" approach to research

3. The Housing Task Force recommends that government invest in continual research and consultation around housing and housing supports. The goal would be to find out what is available and what is making good and creative use of funding and supports. We need to keep up to date on these initiatives, because they can help us to move beyond the current, crisis-based system toward choice and flexibility.
4. In its continuing research, the government should look beyond its own borders to other provinces and countries. This should include research into new housing ideas in related sectors, such as mental health and addictions. While the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services should lead this effort, they should work with and share data with ministries that have related concerns, such as Municipal Affairs & Housing, Health & Long-Term Care, Education, and Finance.
5. Adults who lack personal support networks and have complex needs should be an area of special concern and focus for the government's ongoing research. These adults are often at risk of losing their housing and facing homelessness. We must know more about the issues and the possible solutions for these, our most vulnerable adults with developmental disabilities.
6. Technology can and will play a role in finding new ways for people with developmental disabilities to live more independently. Government research must stay abreast of these advances.

"Person-centred and directed" approach to research

7. The best data and information we have is gathered from real people: those who have developmental disabilities and their networks – those who want them to live safe, healthy lives with as much independence as possible. To gather that data, the government must keep consulting in a regular and meaningful way with them, their advocacy groups, their families and networks, and their grassroots service providers.

What we all gain:

- Common-sense recommendations
- Opportunities for government action
- Information about inconsistencies and barriers to new ideas within current government programs.

Recommendations Part 2: Action

"Whole of government" approach to funding for action

8. Overall, the Housing Task Force recommends that government funding for housing supports place priority on new ideas. It should emphasize individualized housing supports and quality of life. We propose a two-track, 10-year budget plan. The first track should address the long-neglected needs of people who have been on the wait list for housing supports for more than 10 years. The second track should finance the policies and resources required to keep wait lists short in the future. This will prevent the crises in the lives of people with developmental disabilities and their families that plague the system now.
9. The provincial government should create a Housing Innovation Fund within the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. This fund would enable action on the ideas generated by the inter-ministerial task force that we call for in Recommendation 1. The Housing Innovation Fund should be ongoing and available to each region of Ontario. It should fund housing that is driven by new ideas.

10. In its research, the Housing Task Force found many opportunities for action to expand affordable housing for adults with developmental disabilities. All levels of government should work together to act on these ideas. That includes all related provincial ministries, local authorities such as municipal and regional councils, and service managers throughout the province.

"Whole of society" approach to funding for action

11. The Housing Task Force recommends increased flexibility in Developmental Services funding. This would include direct funding for residential options with a focus on individual needs. Also, people with developmental disabilities and their families need customized plans and proposals for their housing solutions. There should be resource people available, independent of government, who have the expertise to help them think their plan through and pull together the partners and funding needed to make it happen.

"Person-centred and directed" approach to communication

12. The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services should provide funding and resources to create and maintain a communications hub and information resource. This hub should be easy to access for anyone with an interest in Developmental Services. It should include the most current information about funding and housing options, links to forms and updates, and much more.

13. The Housing Task Force recommends that Developmental Services Ontario clarify its role across the province in connecting people who need access to housing options and solutions.

Conclusion: We can and should fix this

The 13 recommendations in the Housing Task Force's final report address the severe housing problems that confront adults with developmental disabilities in Ontario. Our research, consultation, and demonstration projects prove that many of the needed tools and resources are there. The government of Ontario must support new ideas and actions that will allow lasting housing options to emerge and flourish. Partnerships, consultation,

and expanded, individualized funding will give people with developmental disabilities and their families greater control over their lives.

For too long, the approach to housing within Ontario's developmental services system has been crisis-driven and crisis-generating. It has locked people into long-term, lifelong dependency at a great cost to families and to our society.

Government resources and leadership will always be needed for this vulnerable sector of our population. But responsibilities can and should be shared more effectively and productively. The innovations proposed in this report will allow citizens and communities to play the more expansive roles they are able and anxious to take up. This will in turn allow government to serve people with greater care and efficiency.