

APPLICABLE TO:

DATE: May 26, 2006

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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Municipal & Private Non Profit |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Co-operatives |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Federal Non Profits |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | OCHAP/CSHP |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Rent Supplement |

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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Mandatory |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | For Information |

Subject: Transitional and Housing Support Program

Program

Housing Providers have a vital role in the Transitional and Housing Support Program. Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) and the five Transitional Housing Support Program Agencies have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that aims to connect abused women and their children with community supports and assists them in finding and maintaining safe and affordable housing.

Background

On November 1, 2004, the Ministry of Community and Social Services, announced a new program, the Transitional and Housing Support Program (THSP). It is part of the government's commitment to helping abused women escape domestic violence.

In Niagara, the following agencies have been identified as delivery agents for the THSP:

- Bethlehem Not for Profit Housing Projects of Niagara
- Centre De Sante Communautaire Hamilton Niagara
- West Niagara Second Stage Housing
- Women's Place (St. Catharines and District) Inc.
- Women's Place of South Niagara Inc.

In May of 2005, a cross sector working group comprised of representatives from Niagara Regional Housing, the Niagara Region Community Services Department, the five Transitional Housing and Support Program agencies, five Housing Providers and Family and Children's Services of Niagara began creating the Memorandum of Understanding in order to better support victims of domestic violence to find and maintain housing.

Housing providers have expressed their concern that the lack of support services for abused women living in affordable housing communities has resulted in significant turnover and related vacancy costs. Improving linkages to support agencies should help address these concerns and assist victims of domestic violence with maintaining their tenancy.

Implementation

This program is effective immediately.

Housing Provider's Role

The *Social Housing Reform Act* legislates first access to rent-geared-to-income units to persons who are victims of violence, recognizing the need for immediate re-location to ensure their safety.

Housing providers accommodate victims of violence as vacancies arise. The role of the Housing Provider continues through their efforts to welcome and integrate the new tenants/members into the housing community. The Housing Provider will actively work with the THSP agencies and other community agencies as requested by the tenant to enhance the tenant's ability to reside successfully in the housing community.

When housing persons under the *Niagara Regional Housing Special Priority Program*, the Housing Provider will meet with the potential tenant/member (and their THSP worker, as requested by the tenant/member) before a lease/occupancy agreement is signed. The Housing Provider will show the available unit and review the community's lease/occupancy agreement and main provisions with the tenant/member.

Providing for the physical safety of victims and their children is a paramount concern for all service providers. The Housing Provider should address safety issues by providing:

- dead bolts
- window locking devices
- peepholes
- lock changes on move out
- exterior lighting
- building directories that protect the privacy of tenant/members
- education for all tenant/members regarding controlled access to the building
- keeping all entrances and exits locked

Recipients of social assistance can apply for the Community Start-up Benefit through Social Assistance & Employment Opportunities. This funding is to be used for items related to safety and security subject to the following limitations:

- the person meets the eligibility criteria for the benefit
- she has not exceeded the dollar entitlement limit for the benefit

Adding the abuser to the Lease/Occupancy Agreement

As with all tenant/members, if the abused woman wishes to add someone to her household, she must inform the Housing Provider and Niagara Regional Housing. Basic eligibility will be assessed by Niagara Regional Housing. In Special Priority cases a check will also be done to determine if the person wanting to move into the unit is the abuser stated in the original documentation in which Special Priority was granted. If it is determined that it is the same person, Niagara Regional Housing will notify Family and Children's Services of the abuser's intent to join the family.

The Housing Provider should advise the tenant/member that if they do not inform the Housing Provider of an addition to the household they are putting themselves at risk of eviction.

If a Housing Provider believes that a tenant/member is at risk of domestic violence information about the THSP program will be offered following the protocols established by the Niagara THSP and Social Housing working group (attached Appendix A).

If a Housing Provider believes that children are at risk of abuse or neglect, Housing Providers must report their perceptions to the Niagara FACS office as part of the *Duty to Report* Sec. 72(2), Sec. 72(3)(4) and Sec 72(7) of the *Child and Family Services Act*.

Victims of Abuse as Tenants/Members Role

Responsibilities of the Special Priority Placement Program tenant/member are to:

- have knowledge about the occupancy agreement/lease and about the housing community she is entering.
- be aware of the advantages of the "pay direct to landlord" rent system, especially in the initial stages of occupancy, to avoid eviction for non-payment of rent.
- actively seek assistance when difficulties arise, by contacting either their THSP worker and/or the Housing Provider.
- endeavour to abide by the occupancy agreement/lease and rules specific to her chosen housing community once housed.

Transitional and Housing Support Program Agency's Role

THSP workers will help women to identify the supports they need and access those supports including:

- safety planning
- transitional plan and assistance to carry out transitional plans
- assist women to complete the Niagara Regional Housing Special Priority Program Application and appeal housing decisions as required
- support clients to find and maintain housing in affordable housing units
- make referrals to community agencies (e.g. child witness programs, social assistance, legal aid, rent banks, interpreter services, parenting support, education/training, health services)

- provide budget management, life skills training and information like Pay Direct Rent and Utilities (Ontario Works/Niagara Region Policy)
- advocate with third parties in specific cases (e.g., landlords, interactions with Family and Children’s Services of Niagara, court appearances, enrolling children in school)
- refer to Family and Children’s Services of Niagara when appropriate
- provide follow up with clients at 6 and 12 months
- liaise and coordinate with other community support agencies
- maintain appropriate communication with Niagara Regional Housing, Housing Providers and other support agencies according to the limits of confidentiality policies

Service Manager’s Role

- Receive applications for rent-geared-to-income assistance for all mandated Housing Providers in the Niagara region and make an eligibility decision within 7 days after the application is complete.
- Assess applications and supporting documentation for completeness.
- Assess basic eligibility for all household members for rent-geared-to-income assistance.
- Assess *Niagara Regional Housing Special Priority Program* eligibility and process the request within 14 days.
- Refer clients to appropriate community supports especially THSPs where appropriate and in a timely manner.
- Provide information to prospective applicants regarding affordable housing options in Niagara.
- Maintain centralized waiting list by adding eligible applicants, removing ineligible applicants (including housed applicants), changing contact information, reviewing income verification, family composition and housing selections.
- Contact Family & Children’s Services (FACS) Niagara as required under the Duty to Report.
- Provide the opportunity for an internal review within 10 business days (5 days for Special Priority Program) of a decision that adversely affects the applicant.
- Maintain all client information in a confidential manner.

If you have any questions regarding this Notice, please contact your Housing Administrator.

(Original signed by Lora Beckwith)

Lora Beckwith, General Manager

Enclosure – Appendix “A”