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*People Needing Housing:*  
A Collaborative Housing Strategy for  
the Niagara Community

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SUMMARY DOCUMENT

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12981 Keele Street, Suite #3  
King City, ON L7B 1G2  
[www.shs-inc.ca](http://www.shs-inc.ca)

# INTRODUCTION

## Background

It has been said that the Niagara region is a community of communities. It is made up of towns, cities and rural areas, all linked together by social and economic ties. In addition to the Regional Municipality of Niagara, there are 12 municipalities in the region: Fort Erie, Grimsby, Lincoln, Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham, Port Colborne, St. Catharines, Thorold, Wainfleet, Welland and West Lincoln.

Niagara currently has a broad range of housing, including homelessness shelters, transitional, supportive housing and permanent housing. As part of this continuum of housing, Niagara Regional Housing and 68 non-profit and co-operative housing corporations provide affordable housing in over 7,000 units across the region. However, some of the housing infrastructure is over 30 years old and there is not enough of it to keep pace with the demand for affordable housing. Currently, the central waiting list for rent-geared-to-income housing is approximately **4,000 households, or over 8,400 people**.

Through the use of its planning framework, Region of Niagara has set a number of policies and procedures in place that contribute to the supply of affordable housing, such as smaller lots and a range of housing types. However, a formal plan connecting these components has not yet been developed. Although networks of individuals and service organizations dedicated to housing have emerged over the past few years, there is no formal network or service system in place and agencies are doing the best they can within current circumstances.

For these reasons, Niagara Regional Housing undertook the preparation of “**People Needing Housing – A Collaborative Housing Strategy for the Niagara Community**”.

## Purpose and Scope of the Strategy

The overall purpose of this strategy is to identify and/or assemble the current housing issues facing Niagara region and make and/or consolidate existing recommendations for change. There are three key components to the strategy:

**Housing Needs Analysis** – Detailed housing demand and supply analysis to identify the key housing gaps in the communities of Niagara region.

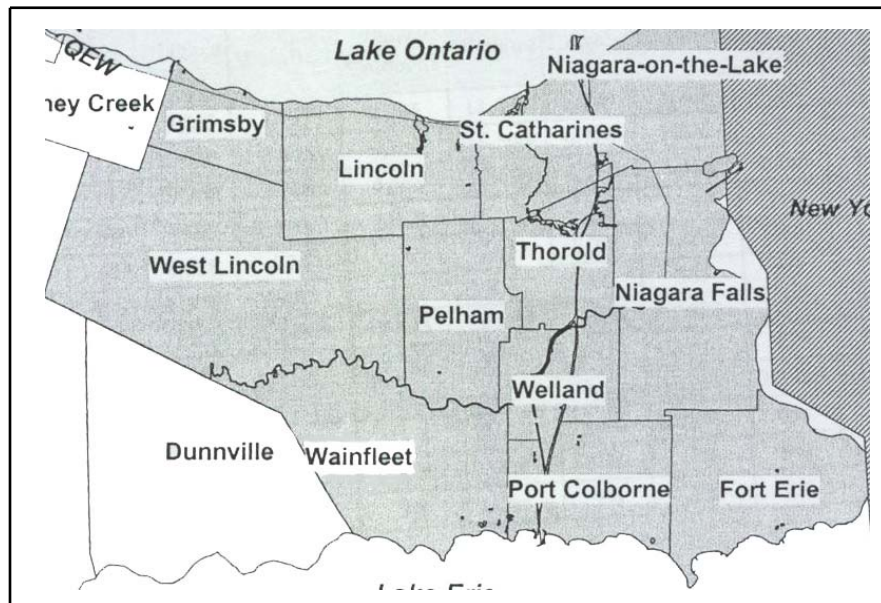
**Action Plan** – Based on recommendations arising from the study, the strategy will map out a 5 year action plan for resolution of identified issues. Timing, costs and implications (risks) are identified.

**Framework for Action** – The strategy describes a framework within which government, housing providers, agencies and the private sector can work together towards common goals. Roles and responsibilities are defined within this framework.

## Approach and Format

This study was a collaborative effort involving Niagara Regional Housing, the Region of Niagara, stakeholders from across the area and the consulting team of SHS Inc. In addition, a Reference Group was established to guide the development of the Strategy.

The study area covered the twelve municipalities comprising Niagara Region as shown below.



## GAPS IN THE NIAGARA REGION HOUSING MARKET

In developing a set of recommendations aimed at filling identified gaps, it is important that there be a clear understanding of these gaps. At the same time, it is also important to prioritize those gaps that need the most urgent and immediate attention.

Below we organize these into eight fundamental gaps in order of priority in terms of the urgency of the problem. These gaps become the focus of the recommended housing strategy.

### Lack of Affordable Rental Housing

The demand and supply analysis showed that rental housing meets a number of important needs in the Niagara housing market and provides accommodation for about 42,000 households - 26% of all households living in the region. It is especially important as a source of accommodation for those many households of low and modest income facing few other options in the housing market. Indeed, 56.8% of all renter households had incomes below \$30,000 in 2001.

The current vacancy rate of 2.7%, while somewhat healthier than in previous years, is still below the 3.0% level which CMHC generally identifies as a market in balance.

**Rental Housing Vacancy Rates, St. Catharines-Niagara CMA, 1996 to 2003**

Number of Bedrooms	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Bachelor	7.3	7.1	4.7	3.8	4.0	1.8	4.2	3.6
1 Bedroom	5.8	6.2	3.8	3.6	3.0	2.5	2.6	3.7
2 Bedroom	5.4	4.8	5.1	3.0	2.2	1.5	2.1	2.0
3 Bedroom	5.8	5.3	4.4	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.3
Total	5.6	5.4	4.6	3.2	2.6	1.9	2.4	2.7

NOTE: The St. Catharines-Niagara CMA contains: St. Catharines-Niagara CMA: Fort Erie, Town of Lincoln, Niagara falls, Niagara on the lake, Pelham, port Colborne, St. Catharines, Thorold, Wainfleet and Welland.

Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Rental Market Report (1996-2003)

Perhaps more critically, the analysis shows that, as of 2001, some 45.2% of all tenants (approximately 19,000 households) were paying more than 30% of their income on housing, with 21.2% (approximately 9,000 households) paying more than 50%.

**Gross Rent as a Percentage of 2000 Household Income for Tenant Households**

Type of Household	Niagara Regional Municipality			
	Less than 15%	15% - 30%	30%-50%	50% and over
<i>One family household</i>	22.3	41.3	20.6	15.8
All couples	27.8	45.3	17.1	9.9
Couples with children	27.4	46.5	15.1	11.0
<i>One-family households: Lone parents</i>	11.5	33.6	27.5	27.5
<i>Multiple-family households</i>	47.5	45.9	6.6	0.0
<i>Non family households</i>	13.2	32.7	27.4	26.6
<b>Total Renter Households</b>	17.9	37.0	24.0	21.2

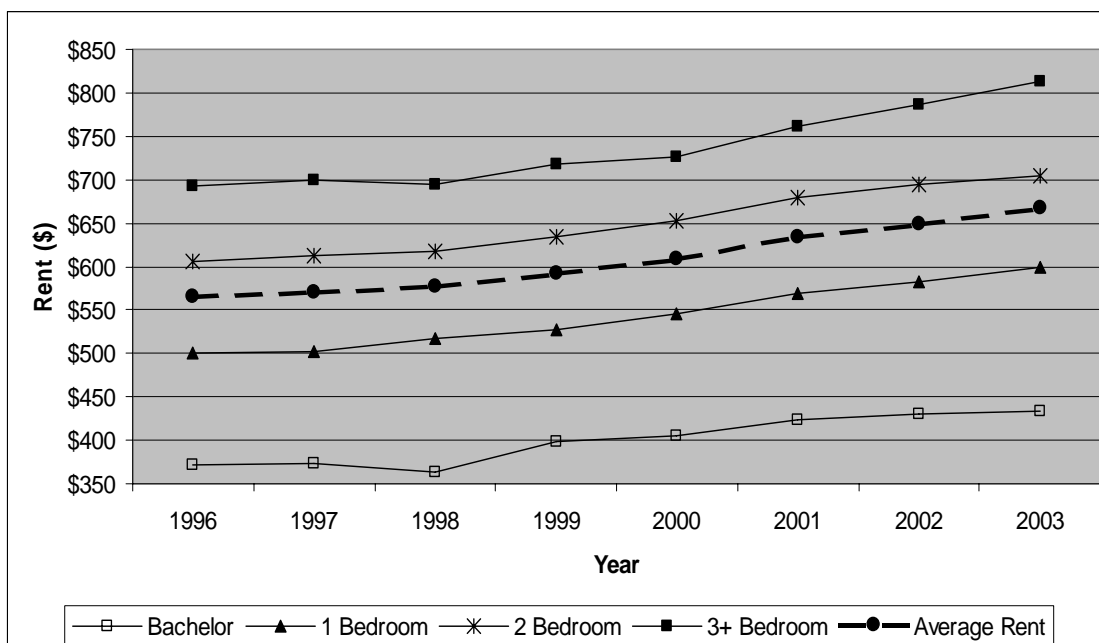
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2001 – Special Tabulation

Data from Community Services, Niagara Region found that 62.5% of Ontario Works recipients living in market rent accommodation are paying beyond their shelter allowance for rent. Among families with two children, the rate is 69.6%.

Further, while vacancy rates have increased slightly in recent years, the social housing waiting list has remained virtually unchanged at about 4,000 households for the past three years. This demonstrates the inability of the market to serve these needs.

At the same time, while rent levels have been steadily growing in recent years (rents for bachelor, one bedroom, two bedroom and three bedroom apartments increased by 17.0%, 20.0%, 16.2% and 17.3% respectively from 1996 to 2003), the incomes of households on social assistance and persons earning minimum wage remained unchanged for an eight year period until recent modest adjustments were announced by the new Ontario government.

Average Rents, St. Catharines-Niagara CMA, 1996 – 2003



NOTE: St. Catharines-Niagara CMA contains: St. Catharines-Niagara CMA: Fort Erie, Town of Lincoln, Niagara falls, Niagara on the Lake, Pelham, Port Colborne, St. Catharines, Thorold, Wainfleet and Welland.

Source: CMHC Rental Market Report (1996-2003)

Clearly, the depth and extent of this problem leaves the lack of permanent affordable rental housing as the most widespread housing gap facing Niagara today. The almost total lack of new affordable rental production over the past decade, the lack of income subsidies such as rent supplement funding to help households meet rental costs and the cancellation of social housing supply programs in the 1990's has left many renter households facing affordability difficulties. It is likely that the situation will become worse without initiatives aimed at filling this gap.

## Lack of Temporary and Transitional Housing

Consultations during the study found that transitional housing plays a key role in the housing market, especially in providing an important option for homeless individuals. Transitional housing provides an opportunity for individuals living in emergency shelters or other homeless and at-risk situations to move to a supported environment where they can achieve stability in their lives and eventually move on to permanent housing that meets their needs.

Yet, because of a lack of such accommodation in Niagara, persons being released from shelters often have nowhere to go and continually find themselves right back in the shelter or on the streets or in inappropriate situations (such as couch-surfing or overcrowded premises). This is especially the case for youth, who typically have few resources or alternatives.

At the same time, emergency and temporary shelter facilities often keep residents longer than necessary because there is a lack of transitional housing to which they can move. This places greater strain on these facilities and their staffs. Accordingly, emergency shelters often lack sufficient space and/or resources to meet the growing need.

Data on shelter usage show that it has increased substantially since 2001. The total number of clients has increased by some 144.4% since 2001 (from 1,278 to 3,123 in 2003). The largest increase is noted for females, increasing from 178 in 2001 to 572 in 2003, a 221.3% increase. A major contributor to this increase has been a large upswing in the number of refugees arriving in Niagara region with very limited financial resources.

**Total Shelter Usage, 2001-2003 (Niagara Region)**

	<b># of Clients</b>	<b># of Males</b>	<b># of Females</b>	<b># of Youth</b>	<b># of Refugees</b>	<b>Ave. Stay</b>	<b>Range of Ave. Stay</b>
2001	1,278	319	178	91	660	7.52	6.15 – 9.33
2002	2,504	479	438	64	960	6.06	4.45 – 8.20
2003	3,123	504	572	164	770	6.09	2.59 – 10.03
<b>% increase (2001-2003)</b>	<b>144.4</b>	<b>58.0</b>	<b>221.3</b>	<b>80.2</b>	<b>16.7</b>		

Source: Community Services Department (Housing, Hostels and Homelessness), May 2004

A particular need is for temporary housing during the busy summer tourism season, when many seasonal workers come to the area to take on a variety of low-wage seasonal employment in sectors such as tourism (including horse racing at facilities such as Fort Erie) and agriculture.

While these findings reveal that more efforts are required to increase the supply of emergency and transitional housing in Niagara region, focus group participants stressed that the ultimate solution to this problem was to expand the supply of permanent affordable rental housing in order to create more viable opportunities for individuals to find safe, secure and stable living environments within their financial means.

## **Lack of Supportive Housing**

Similar to transitional housing, supportive housing plays an important role in the Niagara housing market. A variety of facilities and services provide much-needed accommodation to persons with special needs.

Persons requiring supportive housing often live on Ontario Works and ODSP benefits and often cannot afford market rent units. Consultation during the study found that the growing range of these needs is outpacing the availability of spaces and services to

meet these needs. Agencies also pointed out that, not only is accommodation needed, but support service funding needs to keep pace with the growth in demand in order to ensure needs are met in the future.

Key informants indicated that in addition to the creation and provision of affordable and adequate housing for persons with special needs, there is a major need to improve the transportation system in Niagara region. It was suggested that there are gaps in transportation networks that link rural communities with larger urban centres. This is mainly because larger urban centres contain most of the support services and special needs persons living in rural areas often have difficulty accessing these services due to the lack of well designed and functional transportation system in the region.

The *Demand and Supply Analysis* has shown that there are numerous gaps in housing for various client groups requiring specialized housing and supports. Key informants indicated that there is a need to increase the supply of supportive housing for persons with development delays. In addition, housing for persons with acquired brain injury and mental illness appears to be of concern in Niagara Region. Findings indicated that service providers were constantly at capacity with long waiting lists. Considerable efforts will be required to ensure that there are adequate housing and support services to enable individuals with mental illness to maintain a reasonable quality of life within the community.

In terms of persons with physical disabilities, it is clear that greater efforts are required to ensure new housing being provided across Niagara is accessible to all persons and adheres to the principles of universal design. This is a priority area with a current wait list of 123 households needing units adapted to the needs of persons with physical disabilities, an increase of 35% since April 2003. As noted earlier, many persons with physical disabilities obtain either ODSP or Ontario Works. As a result, for many of them the only housing option available is rent-geared-to-income housing, which is in short supply throughout the Region.

While some housing organizations exist in Niagara to serve these special needs, there is still a need for an increased number of support services and units throughout the region. As a result, support and funding is required from the province to ensure that there is an adequate supply of affordable housing and supports for these groups within Niagara Region. It should be noted that extensive local planning has been undertaken with recommendations made to MOH-LTC and provincial supportive housing policy and best practices already exist. Local strategies in this area build on the work already carried out by the local agencies and the province.

## **Housing for New Immigrants and Refugees**

Given its location adjacent to the U.S. border, Niagara encounters high levels of immigrants and refugees seeking both temporary and permanent shelter in the region. Many of these individuals have few resources and need a variety of supports, including access to temporary, transitional and permanent affordable housing. The impediments

and barriers facing the provision of such housing are essentially those discussed in the above sections. Other barriers are linked to such issues as income support, skills development, language training and senior government immigration policy.

## Lack of Diversity in Housing Supply

In recent years, the development industry has responded almost exclusively to the demand for single detached ownership housing in Niagara, with virtually no new multiple construction. Indeed, only 16% of new starts in 2003 were multi-residential units (townhouses or apartments). Further, only 2% of new starts since 1995 have been rental units. In order to ensure that an appropriate mix of housing types is provided to meet current needs and projected population growth, additional medium and high density development needs to be part of the equation.

**Housing Starts in the St. Catharines-Niagara CMA, 1990-2003**

Year	Ownership Dwellings					Rental Dwellings				Grand Total
	Freehold			Condo		Private		Assisted		
	single	semi	row	row	apt	row	apt	row	apt	
1990	1,109	184	112	168	384	0	477	54	18	2,506
1991	558	117	86	4	0	11	198	124	259	1,357
1992	646	110	52	64	26	14	18	433	306	1,669
1993	575	112	30	81	0	0	7	107	103	1,015
1994	935	192	82	99	0	32	114	54	195	1,703
1995	565	156	47	36	50	0	18	26	0	898
1996	668	134	59	119	0	8	7	0	0	995
1997	1,007	98	94	106	106	8	43	0	0	1,462
1998	996	104	87	132	0	0	0	0	0	1,319
1999	1,026	100	89	105	90	0	75	0	0	1,485
2000	962	102	65	71	30	0	0	0	0	1,230
2001	916	80	80	32	0	26	0	0	0	1,134
2002	1,032	88	126	63	0	0	8	0	0	1,317
2003	1,154	56	146	70	11	0	7	0	0	1,444

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Source: CMHC Rental Market Report (1990 -2003)

This narrowing of housing types is occurring despite a growing diversity of household types and sizes. Indeed, largely due to the aging of the population and declining birth rates, Niagara is witnessing a rapid decline in household size, giving rise to a growing demand for smaller units. The housing market, however, is not responding appropriately.

Given these trends, additional apartment and townhouse development, including a mix of both rental and ownership tenure, is critical. Such housing provides a lower cost alternative to single detached, while its size and maintenance requirements are more appropriate to smaller and senior households. Additionally, housing consumers will benefit with a wider range of options. Adequate supply ensures that costs do not become inflated and that there is sufficient access to suitable accommodation for various household types and sizes.

At the same time, focus group participants emphasized the diversity in the geographic, demographic and economic characteristics of the various communities across Niagara. This diversity is borne out by many of the statistics contained in the *Demand and Supply Analysis*. The housing strategy sets in place a framework for ensuring this diversity is strongly recognized in housing policies and programs.

## **Lack of Housing Options for Seniors**

Niagara region has a greater percentage of seniors population than the Province as a whole and this segment of the population is expected to increase significantly over time. The area, in fact, is a major attractor of retiring singles and couples from elsewhere in Ontario (especially the GTA) and beyond. Key informants point to a number of concerns among seniors: the need for affordable housing for those on low and fixed incomes; the need for accessible units; the need for a range of accommodation and support service options for seniors with differing needs; and a lack of alternative accommodation to allow rural seniors to stay in their community.

Seniors housing comes in a variety of types along a continuum, including private, subsidized seniors housing, supportive housing, and so on. A strong emphasis should be placed on providing a wide variety of housing and supports for seniors of all income levels across the Region.

## **Aboriginal Homelessness**

The Niagara Regional Native Centre Homelessness project of 2002 identified more than 1,000 Aboriginal families and individuals requiring housing assistance. These included affordable permanent housing, transitional housing and emergency services. More specifically the report identified the need for: rent assistance; transitional housing for women and children; emergency shelter for families and women; a seniors residence; and safe, affordable housing for aboriginal families and single male parents.

The report indicated that one time assistance was available for households facing homelessness, eviction, poverty, overcrowding and inadequate accommodations and conditions. Additionally, at the time of the report there were two native housing providers in the Region: Oounuhseh – Niagara Native Homes with 32 units in St. Catharines and Ganawageh Urban Homes which operated 101 units in Fort Erie. These projects reported waiting lists of 32 and 260 units respectively.

The report identified a total of 528 households seeking accommodation. The Aboriginal client group was characterized by a large number of persons under 14. This was consistent with native population as a whole in Canada where 50% are under the age of 25. Indeed there was evidence of a shift to larger families of three or more children in need as well as more single men with children. Nonetheless, the majority of these households were comprised of single women with children.

The overall need among native households was bolstered by in-migration of individuals and families from outside the region. These included those who had come from the Six Nations -- either for an education or to remove themselves from a poor housing situation. There were also a notable number of households who had come from the Niagara Falls and Buffalo areas in search of employment. Clearly, strong steps are needed to address the needs of this growing segment of the Niagara population.

### Lack of Affordable Home Ownership Units

The housing assessment showed the importance of home ownership in the Niagara housing market. Home ownership has been increasing in recent years, primarily due to declines in mortgage rates. However, the assessment also demonstrated that the cost of ownership housing is out of reach of many households in Niagara. There are also concerns that, should mortgage rates increase to previous levels, many homeowners of modest income may experience financial difficulty and have trouble hanging on to their homes.

**Homes Listed for Sale by Municipality, Niagara Region (As of February 17, 2004)**

	<b>Under \$80,000</b>	<b>\$80,001 to \$100,000</b>	<b>\$100,001 to 120,000</b>	<b>\$120,001 to \$140,000</b>	<b>\$140,001 to \$180,000</b>	<b>\$180,001 and over</b>	<b>Total Listings</b>
Fonthill/Pelham	1	0	3	0	6	67	77
Fort Erie	22	25	28	0	66	95	236
Lincoln/West Lincoln	4	0	3	6	12	42	67
City of Niagara Falls	23	13	29	47	76	233	421
Niagara on the Lake	6	0	0	0	1	147	154
Port Colborne/Wainfleet	22	23	12	8	21	66	152
City of St. Catharines	19	52	47	41	74	124	357
Thorold	1	4	1	7	9	27	49
Welland	28	26	17	25	45	66	207
Grimsby****	1	2	2	0	13	79	97
<b>Total</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>946</b>	<b>1,817</b>
<b>% of Listings</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>17.8</b>	<b>52.1</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: [www.mls-niagara.com](http://www.mls-niagara.com)

\*\*\*\* Grimsby listing obtained through, [www.mls.ca](http://www.mls.ca)

Given the many advantages of home ownership for individual households and the community as a whole, the lack of production of new modestly-priced ownership units is a major gap in the housing market. Initiatives are needed to address this important need.

## **Need for a More Integrated Planning Process among Community Groups**

While not specifically a housing issue, other key issues which have considerable impact on meeting housing needs include the lack of public transportation, income support and the provision of support services and an integrated, coordinated approach.

It was identified during our consultation that the lack of transportation is of particular concern in more rural communities, as this limits the housing options for lower income households living in such areas. Thus, recommended actions which strengthen linkages between transportation planning and the provision of affordable housing are needed to help fill these gaps.

In addition, it was found that median incomes are noticeably lower than Ontario as a whole. In 2001, Niagara region median household incomes were \$47,224 – well below the Ontario figure of \$53,626. Niagara region incomes lost ground to Ontario as a whole from 1996 to 2001, as they grew by only 15.0% compared to overall Ontario income growth of 18.8%. Further, a total of 30.3% of all households had incomes below \$30,000 in 2001. As shown by data on percentage of income being paid on rent and data on the social housing waiting list, many of these households are facing severe affordability problems. Clearly, it is of critical importance that initiatives aimed at addressing housing needs must be linked to efforts to increase household incomes and improve the financial capabilities of residents in need.

Similarly, a variety of agencies provide a range of support services to individuals and families with a variety of special needs. These supports are often crucial to enable these residents to live independently and to meet the requirements of day-to-day living. Given funding cutbacks for many of these services over the past decade, the ability of agencies to continue to provide the needed levels of service is under severe pressure. It is crucial, therefore, that initiatives aimed at filling gaps in the Niagara housing market include efforts to strengthen the capacity for delivery of key support services across the area.

Given its integral role in the lives of all individuals, housing should be viewed as an integral part of building healthy and sustainable communities in partnership with community agencies and the private market. Thus, action plans which strengthen linkages between transportation planning, income support initiatives, expansion of support services and the provision of various forms of affordable housing are needed to help fill these gaps as well.

In particular, stakeholders have identified that there is a need to utilize this opportunity to develop an overall integrated housing strategy for Niagara that incorporates newly identified issues with previously existing strategies across the entire housing continuum to create a consolidated common housing framework. In particular:

- Community Plan for Homelessness in Niagara
- Addressing the Aboriginal Homelessness Needs in Niagara Region
- Mental Health Housing Strategy (Niagara District Health Council, 1999, 2002 and 2004 )
- Community-Based LTC Multi-Year Plan (NDHC 2004) A Long-Term Care Census of Central South/West Ontario: September 24, 2003. (Central West Health Planning Information Network, 2004)
- “Climbing Up” A Living Wage, Sustainable Income for Niagara
- Niagara Building an Economically Healthy, Sustainable and Responsible Community
- Confronting the Jobs Challenge: A Niagara Human Resources Strategy
- Niagara Funder’s Alliance
- Smarter Niagara Incentive Programs: Local and Regional Partnerships
- Public Transportation Strategies

Wherever possible, these initiatives have been integrated into the action plan identified in the next section. In addition, the framework for implementation outlined below further describes how community organizations could be involved in the implementation of the housing strategy.

## ACTION PLANS AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

### Action Plans

The overall purpose of the Collaborative Housing Strategy for the Niagara Community is to develop a comprehensive community strategy for dealing effectively with the continuum of affordable housing needed across the region. A range of housing issues faced by residents and their communities across the region was identified in *Demand and Supply Analysis*. The strategy builds upon the findings of this analysis to recommend a series of targets, programs and action plans to help address these issues and meet current and future housing needs across the area. The detailed action plans are included as an appendix to this summary document.

### Strategic Framework

As noted above, Niagara is characterized by a host of diverse housing needs facing residents and their communities across the region. Successfully implementing this

housing strategy requires an effective framework within which government, housing providers, local agencies and the private market can work towards common goals.

Further, housing needs cannot be resolved in isolation of other closely linked issues such as transportation, delivery of support services and smart growth. Given its integral role in the lives of all individuals, housing should be viewed as an integral part of building healthy and sustainable communities in partnership with community agencies and the private market. In particular, stakeholders have identified that there is a need to utilize this opportunity to develop an overall integrated housing strategy for Niagara that incorporates newly identified issues with previously existing strategies across the entire housing continuum to create a consolidated common housing framework.

The recommended framework for ensuring that an ongoing process is set in place through which linkages and partnerships are established and maintained to address such issues in a highly integrated, coordinated and effective manner is outlined below. A proposed housing vision, mission statement, objectives, organizing principles, key partners and steering committee are suggested below.

## **Housing Vision for Niagara**

A “Housing Vision” is an expression of the broad goal toward which all policies and actions related to housing are directed within a community. It answers the fundamental question of “why do we care about housing?”

The following recommended Housing Vision for Niagara supports the overall vision of the Region and reflects the views and concerns of the community as expressed in the many focus group and feedback sessions which took place during the development of the housing study.

*Our vision is that Niagara’s community of communities provides affordable, accessible and quality accommodation that meets the full range of shelter and support needs of all current and future residents.*

## **Housing Mission Statement**

In pursuing their vision, it is important that communities identify the fundamental “mission” which will guide their actions. An effective Housing Strategy for Niagara should set out a Mission Statement that complements existing Mission Statements and reflects an effective and comprehensive overall approach to meeting housing needs.

The following recommended Housing Mission for Niagara supports the two relevant mission statements of the Community Services Department and Niagara Regional

Housing and reflects the views of the community as expressed in the focus group and feedback sessions.

*Our mission is that Niagara's community of communities works at effectively and efficiently using existing infrastructure and community resources in an integrated way and recognizes housing as an integral part of building healthy and sustainable communities.*

## Housing Objectives

The Vision identifies the broad goals of the community. Mission Statements articulate the fundamental approach through which these goals will be pursued. Strategic goals or objectives provide more detailed direction for policies, programs and actions to be adopted in support of the vision and mission.

The recommended set of Housing Objectives, which underlay the suggested Housing Vision and Mission Statement set out below are consistent with existing strategies and the findings of the housing study.

- 1. To ensure there is an accessible, adequate supply of affordable rental and ownership housing in all communities which comprise Niagara region.*
- 2. To ensure the availability of a mix of housing for all household types, income levels and persons with special needs;*
- 3. To place priority on compact urban form, residential intensification and utilization of existing infrastructure in support of "smart growth" policies.*
- 4. To eliminate physical, social and economic barriers to all forms of housing.*
- 5. To encourage an integrated approach to addressing housing issues through multi-sectoral partnerships which include all levels of government and the private and non-profit sectors thereby maximizing available resources and facilitating innovative solutions to meeting housing needs.*
- 6. To monitor the effectiveness of housing policies, programs and action plans on an ongoing basis and communicating this information regularly to all stakeholders thereby enabling effective and relevant decisions making on meeting housing needs.*
- 7. To facilitate ongoing coordination of housing policies, programs and action plans throughout Niagara to enable effective solutions to area-wide housing needs and providing a roadmap for future direction.*

## Organizing Principles for Implementing the Strategy

The establishment of a Housing Vision, Mission Statement and Objectives help to establish the framework from which the strategy is implemented. There is also a need for the establishment of a coordinating body with representatives from all relevant sectors to move the action plan forward and monitor progress on a regular basis.

Before evaluating the various organizational models for implementing the strategy, the Reference Committee developed a number of organizing principles to guide the selection of the most appropriate model. These principles are described below.

The organizational model recommended must ensure that the coordinating body responsible for overseeing the implementation of the strategy:

1. is recognized as the vehicle for a common voice on housing issues across all of Niagara;
2. is representative of key partners in the housing sector, including the private sector;
3. is accountable to Niagara Regional Council;
4. is acknowledged by regional and local councils as the body responsible for overseeing the implementation of the housing strategy, including identifying how the proposed housing strategy and framework will be resourced;
5. creates and works within a framework which is flexible and dynamic to continually identify and address housing needs in the most effective way possible;
6. informs/educates local municipalities about the housing situation in their community and involves local municipalities in addressing the identified needs;
7. coordinates work being carried out by various local agencies and government departments, links existing networks (i.e. NDHC's Integrated Planning Framework) and avoids duplication where possible;
8. involves key partners in providing services, funding, research and policy development in all areas of housing along the housing continuum (i.e. from shelters to market housing);
9. leverages funding and resources already available in the community and advocates for funding, as appropriate;
10. creates a community-wide knowledge base of experience and expertise in all aspects of housing.