

## Frequently Asked Questions about Community Housing

**Please remember that we cannot provide you with any personal information without a signed “Consent to Disclose Personal Information” form (attached).**

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**NOTE:** Effective May 30, 2021, Niagara Regional Housing (NRH), formerly acting as Service Manager on behalf of Niagara Region, moved to a ‘fully integrated model’ whereby NRH Staff joined Niagara Region and became part of the Community Services department. The NRH Board continues to provide governance for Public Housing (i.e. “Owned Units”), however the operation of Community<sup>1</sup> Housing services in Niagara will remain the same. This transition will have no effect on Community Housing clients, other than an expected enhancement in services over time.

<sup>1</sup> See next pages for definitions

## 1. What is Community Housing?

Community Housing includes:

- **Public Housing (formerly called “Owned Units”)** – units owned and managed by a municipal housing corporation, which, for Niagara is NRH. Tenant rent is 30% of household income (called “Rent-Geared-to-Income” or “RGI”) for low income residents who meet provincially determine income tested eligibility criteria.

NRH also has three communities with a mix of RGI, Market and Affordable (80% of Market – as determined by ‘average market rent’) rents – Broadoak (Niagara Falls), Birchwood “Fitch East” (Welland) and 527 Carlton Street (St. Catharines).

\*Reminder: Public Housing remains under the governance of the NRH Board, and the operation of Public Housing under the NRH Board remains guided by Board policy and directives.

**For questions related to Public Housing, contact the Manager of Housing Operations at 905-682-9201 ext. 3906.**

- **Housing Providers (Non-Profits/Co-operatives)** – Housing Services provides provincially mandated legislative oversight to Non-profit and Co-operative organizations across Niagara (largely through funding agreements). Non-Profit and Co-operative Housing Providers provide a mix of approximately 75% Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) and 25% Market rental units to tenants.

It is important to note that Housing Services does not directly manage Housing Providers. Non-Profits are independent corporations that are owned and managed by an elected Board of Directors from the community at large. Cooperatives are owned and managed by the members who live in the units. They are governed by their own Board of Directors who are elected from the membership.

**For questions or complaints related to Non-Profits/Co-operatives, contact the Non-Profit or Co-operative Property Manager or Board Chair. Contact information can be found at <https://www.nrh.ca/providers/pdf/ContactList-Providers-Sept2018.pdf>. For questions related to the legislative oversight of Housing Providers, contact the Housing Programs Manager at 905-682-9201 ext. 3926.**

- **Rent Supplement Program** – Consistent with municipalities across the Province, Housing Services has agreements with private landlords to subsidize rents for tenants in private buildings. Tenants in Rent Supplement units sign a standard lease with the landlord of the building and maintain a landlord-tenant relationship like any other private tenant. Subsidies for designated units are paid directly to the landlord but the tenant is still responsible to pay their own portion to the landlord in accordance with their rental agreement.

**For questions related to the Rent Supplement Program, contact the Housing Programs Supervisor at 905-682-9201 ext. 3945.**

- **Housing Allowance Program** – In this program, (to the extent that funds are available) Housing Services provides a rental benefit payment directly to applicant/tenant or directly to private and non-profit landlords. The program is intended to provide temporary assistance while the tenant remains on the waiting list for a rent-geared-to-income unit.

**For questions related to the Housing Allowance Program, contact the Housing Programs Supervisor at 905-682-9201 ext. 3945.**

- **Niagara Renovates Program** – Housing Services administers this program to assist low to moderate income households in Niagara with repairs and/or accessibility modifications to their homes. Based on funds available and the number of applications received. Approximately 30 residents are supported through this program annually.

**For questions related to the Niagara Renovates Program, contact the Manager of Housing Programs at 905-682-9201 ext. 3926.**

- **Welcome Home Niagara Homeownership Program** – Housing Services offers down payment assistance for eligible applicants to help low to mid-income tenants purchase their own homes. Based on funds available and the number of applications received, 20-25 residents are supported through this program each year.

**For questions related to the Welcome Home Niagara Homeownership Program, contact the Manager of Housing Programs at 905-682-9201 ext. 3926.**

## **2. How does the Centralized Waiting List (for those applying for Community Housing) work?**

People in need of suitable, affordable housing apply to be on the Centralized Waiting List for Community housing in:

- Public Housing
- Housing Providers (Non-Profits/Co-operatives)
- Rent Supplement Units (i.e. subsidized units in private buildings)

In accordance with provincial policy, applicants must be Canadian citizens, permanent residents of Canada or refugee claimants and able to live independently (with or without support services) and meet specified income eligibility criteria. Other criteria can be found at <http://nrh.ca/applicants/default.shtml>.

Applicants choose the communities they would like to live in and will be housed more quickly the more options they select.

Once on the list, applicants are housed chronologically, unless they qualify for priority status. Priority is given to:

- Victims of violence (**Special Priority**)
- **Overhoused** (current tenant/members who are living in a unit that has too many bedrooms for the number of people living there)
- Individuals experiencing **Homelessness**
- Those whose situation is considered **Urgent**, including:
  - Mobility barriers that compromise the applicant’s health (e.g. physical limitations, cannot walk up stairs and is living in a building that has no elevator)
  - Extreme hardship where the individual’s situation puts them at extreme risk and/or causes severe hardship and relocation would reduce the risks and/or alleviate the hardship

Urgent Priority DOES NOT include:

- Police issues – related to activities in the building and safety concerns
- Financial reasons – including low income and high rent
- Medical condition not affected by current accommodation
- Pregnancy
- Landlord issues such as AODA issues (landlord is responsible to provide accessibility modifications), maintenance of unit/building, verbal abuse by landlord, neighbours, loud noise, bed bugs, roaches, ants, and other insects

Further information on priority status can be found at <http://nrh.ca/applicants/forms.shtml>.

It is normal for anyone who is in need of subsidized housing to consider their own circumstances to be urgent. As a result, priority status must be closely monitored to ensure the waiting list is administered fairly.

**For questions related to the Centralized Waiting List, contact the Supervisor of Housing Access at 905-682-9201 ext. 3928.**

### **3. Are applicants for accessible units given priority?**

Applicants for units with accessible features complete a “Request for Accessible Unit” form which can be found at <http://nrh.ca/pdf/accessible-unit-request-form.pdf>.

While not formally considered a “priority”, requests for accessible units become a priority because only qualified applicants are eligible for those units (i.e. chronological applicants are not eligible for accessible units). Housing applications for accessible units are

complicated because the applicant's needs must match the accessible features of the units (e.g. a tenant may not be able to stand for long periods of time so they need lowered counters but they do not need a fully accessible unit with roll-in showers). Some Housing Providers may have accessible units that they are not able to fill. When this occurs, they contact Housing Services and other agencies for assistance.

To be classified as an accessible unit, units only need one accessible feature so there is a wide range of configurations. There are 181 affordable housing units that have varying degrees of modifications and are classified as accessible.

**For questions related to the Centralized Waiting List, contact the Supervisor of Housing Access at 905-682-9201 ext. 3928.**

#### **4. What happens if applicants do not accept the unit that is offered to them?**

Further to provincial policy, all applicants will now receive only one offer of housing. If they decline that offer, the application is cancelled. It is important to note that since applicants are only offered a unit from the list that they have chosen, (in the case of a decision by the applicant to decline an offer) they have rejected their own choice.

**For questions related to the Centralized Waiting List, contact the Supervisor of Housing Access at 905-682-9201 ext. 3928.**

#### **5. How soon will an applicant be housed?**

With supply unable to meet the level of demand, the wait for a unit can range from 2-18 years and is understandably very discouraging for applicants. Average wait times for each city are available at <http://nrh.ca/applicants/Wait-Times-Chart.shtml>.

Applicants are encouraged to choose as many locations as possible as increased options can reduce wait time.

Staff cannot respond to any personal questions without a signed "Consent to Disclose Personal Information" form (attached). Even with a consent form, Staff cannot predict when appropriate units will become vacant.

**For questions related to the Centralized Waiting List, contact the Supervisor of Housing Access at 905-682-9201 ext. 3928.**

#### **6. Does the Centralized Waiting List include emergency shelters or temporary housing?**

The Centralized Waiting List provides options for permanent housing only. This does not include shelter for emergencies, temporary housing or shelters. Dial 211 or visit INCommunities website at <https://niagara.cioc.ca/> for information on emergency, temporary housing or shelters.

Community Housing does not house households who are not able to live independently. Community Housing tenants must be able to live independently – with or without support services. This means that we do not house people who need 24 hour care (“Supportive Housing”). Visit Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) at <http://healthcareathome.ca/> for information on Supportive Housing.

**For questions related to the Centralized Waiting List, contact the Supervisor of Housing Access at 905-682-9201 ext. 3928.**

## **7. How does Housing Services deal with social issues in Community Housing (e.g. conflict between neighbours)?**

Please note that Staff cannot respond to any enquires about individuals without a signed consent form. We can tell you that we do everything possible to maintain healthy communities free of conflict, including the provision of:

- Community programs and events that encourage neighbourhood pride and cohesion
- Community meetings to discuss and resolve issues
- Informal or formal mediation
- Eviction prevention supports for individual tenants and households

Our very last option is a Notice to Evict. As it is recognized that an eviction can create lasting impacts for tenants already facing barriers and lower incomes, a Notice to Evict can be a “wake up call” to stop the offending behaviour or risk eviction. Eviction, as legislatively permitted, will only proceed if the behaviour does not stop.

**For questions related to social issues in Community Housing contact: Community Resource Programs Manager, 905-682-9201 ext. 3937**

## **8. What is the eviction process?**

Again, Community Housing is dedicated to maintaining housing stability for tenants. We recognize that our tenants are vulnerable. They live in poverty – sometimes with physical/mental issues, circumstances like family breakdown, or a myriad of social conditions that affects their ability to maintain a successful tenancy. As a result, we give tenants every reasonable opportunity to avoid eviction.

However, eviction may be pursued for:

- Non-payment of rent
- Social issues that negatively affect other tenants and are not being resolved
- Damages to Community Housing property
- Safety issues
- Illegal activities or misrepresentation of income (fraud)

If all informal efforts to prevent eviction have failed (discussion, letter, meeting, etc.), the formal eviction steps are as follows:

- N5 - Notice of Termination
  - 1st N5 – a warning notice giving the tenant 7 days to stop the behaviour. If the specific behaviour stops, the eviction process stops.
  - 2nd N5 – If the 1st N5 is voided but another incident occurs within 6 months, the 2nd N5 restarts the process
- L2 – Application to the Landlord Tenant Board (LTB) to evict

It is important to note that, throughout this process, eviction can be avoided through:

- Settlement before the hearing
- A mediated agreement
- Demonstration of significant progress

**For questions related to the eviction process in Public Housing (“owned units”), contact the Senior Property Administrator at 905-682-9201 ext. 3905.**

**For questions related to the eviction process in Non-Profit or Co-operative communities, contact the Non-Profit or Co-operative Board. Contact information can be found at <https://www.nrh.ca/providers/pdf/ContactList-Providers-Sept2018.pdf>.**

**Staff are not able to assist with enquires related to eviction in private rental units and tenants are encouraged to contact Legal Clinic services for assistance if required**

## **9. Why is Niagara Regional Housing evicting a tenant?**

Staff cannot respond to any personal questions without a signed “Consent to Disclose Personal Information” form (attached), but can offer the following in general:

- Eviction is a last resort that (with the exception of illegal acts) is only used if every effort to prevent it has failed
- We know that our tenants can have high-needs and, as a result, may require more supports and patient intervention
- We also know that tenants, whose issues we could not resolve, will likely face challenges in the private market in the future and it is recognized that private landlords often do not have the resources/expertise to cope with the high-need of these tenants

Please let us know if you would like a copy of our Eviction Prevention Policies

**For questions related to eviction prevention, contact the Community Resource Programs Manager at 905-682-9201 ext. 3937.**

## **10. What if an applicant/tenant doesn't agree with a housing decision?**

The Appeal Committee rules on appeals from applicants and tenants on:

- Applicant eligibility
- Priority status
- Overhoused status (i.e. more bedrooms than needed)
- Transfer requests
- Rent calculation issues
- Withdrawal of Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI)
- Provider refused to offer unit

**For questions related to a Housing Services decision (i.e. applications), contact the Manager of Housing Programs at 905-682-9201 ext. 3926. For questions related to an NRH decision (i.e. tenants of Public Housing), contact the Manager of Housing Operations at 905-682-9201 ext. 3906 for assistance.**

## **11. How is a complaint submitted?**

There is a detailed Complaint Process available at <https://www.nrh.ca/contact.shtml> that explains each step and includes a complaint form.

We hope this helps to explain some of the inquiries your offices receive regarding Housing Services/NRH.

**If you have further questions (or would like to suggest additional questions for this sheet), contact Wendy Thompson, Community Resource Programs Manager, at 905-682-9201 ext. 3937.**