

Housing Services Notice **No: 23-09**

APPLICABLE TO:

DATE: October 1, 2023

<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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rent Supplement
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Public Housing

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

SUBJECT: Changes to Niagara Region Housing Services Local Priority Groups

PURPOSE

To inform Housing Providers of the mandatory requirements under the Housing Services Act (HSA) and the changes to the local rule related to Priority Groups for the Centralized Wait List.

BACKGROUND

The Housing Services Act gives Service Managers the option to develop a local rule related to priority groups.

Currently, the Local Priority Group Policy has three local priority groups for households applying to community housing in Niagara Region, Overhoused, Urgent (includes Mobility Barrier and Hardship Barrier), and Homeless.

Provincially, there is one mandated priority group, which is known as the “Special Priority Policy” (SPP), which must precede all local priority groups.

Households on the Niagara Region Housing Services Centralized Wait List for Community Housing are currently offered housing units in the follow order:

1. Special Priority Policy (SPP) – Provincially Mandated
2. Overhoused (OVH) – *Local Priority*
3. Urgent (URG) mobility and hardship barrier – *Local Priority*
4. Homeless (HML) rotational 1 in 10 vacancies – *Local Priority*
5. Chronological (CHR) based on date of application

Analysis

In the last several years, the Niagara Region Centralized Wait List for Community Housing has grown considerably, far surpassing the amount of housing available. To respond to the increased need for housing, multiple communities across Ontario are changing local priorities for community housing to better align with current community needs and reprioritize urgent populations facing barriers to housing.

To address these challenges, Staff completed a comprehensive review of the current local priority groups and waitlist processes, to understand whether it was meeting community needs. It was determined that existing priority groups presented assessment and approval challenges to Housing Services Staff and the current structure did not align with community needs. Change was required, in order to address these concerns.

Changes to Local Priority Groups

To better align policy and in an effort to increase access for those on the Centralized Wait List as well as reduce homelessness in the Region, the following changes to local priority groups for households applying for community housing in Niagara Region are as follows:

1. Special Priority Policy (SPP) – Provincially Mandated
2. Overhoused (OVH) – *Local Priority*
3. **Urgent (URG)** – *Local Priority*
 - **Mobility Barrier only**
4. **Homeless (HML)** rotational **1 in every 5 vacancies** – *Local Priority*

Special Priority Policy (SPP) – this priority group continues to be mandated by the Province and remains the top priority on the centralized waiting list for all Service Managers across the province.

Overhoused (OVH) – there are no changes to this category and it continues to remain as the second priority group after SPP.

Urgent category (URG) – the Hardship Barrier sub-category has been removed from this priority group. All existing Urgent priority applicants on the Centralized Wait List have been grandfathered. Mobility Barriers will continue to remain as the only category under Urgent status.

Homeless category (HML) – Housing Services has aligned the definition of homelessness with that of Niagara's By-Name List (BNL) of Homelessness, which is a real-time list of all known persons experiencing homelessness locally who are accessing homelessness services in the Region. Existing applicants with Homeless priority status will **not** be grandfathered.

The new criteria for households requesting Homeless priority status will be: (1) the applicant(s) is on Niagara's By-Name List (BNL) of Homelessness or (2) transitional housing, or (3) they are Indigenous households experiencing homelessness at the time of a housing offer. To better support movement in this priority group into community housing, the 1 in 10 rotation placement is changed to a 1 in 5 rotation placement.

PROCESS

Effective December 1, 2023

Housing Providers will continue to offer units according to the established order. The change in the Urgent priority category will have no impact on Housing Providers when accessing their waitlist.

As of the effective date, Housing Providers are required to offer one (1) in every five (5) vacancies to a household identified on the waiting list with Homeless (HML) priority status. Housing Providers will be required to contact Housing Access prior to making an offer of housing to a household with HML status, to confirm this household is still eligible to receive the offer of housing.

Housing Provider's Role

Housing Provider staff are required to forward this notice to the Board of Directors for their information.

Housing Providers are required to follow the procedures outlined in this notice to ensure compliance with the local rule.

Service Manager's Role

The Housing Services and Homelessness divisions are committed to working with Housing Providers to provide additional supports for Special Priority Policy households and Homeless priority households.

NRHS will monitor compliance with this notice through the operational review process.

If you have any questions regarding this notice, please contact your Housing Administrator at 905-980-6000.

Cameron Banach, Director Housing Services