

Housing and justice report **SUMMARY**

Improving supportive housing for justice-involved individuals with mental health and addiction issues

THE PROVINCIAL HUMAN SERVICES AND JUSTICE COORDINATING COMMITTEE 2020 HOUSING AND JUSTICE FORUM

On Feb. 26, 2020, the [P-HSJCC](#) hosted a one-day provincial housing and justice forum in Toronto to share and discuss promising practices and ways to improve housing support for individuals with mental health, addictions and other complex needs who are involved with the criminal justice system. The forum convened stakeholders from across the human services, housing and justice sectors including representation from mental health and addictions community organizations, special population agencies, housing service providers, policing and partner ministry representatives. Several persons with lived experience were invited as presenters and guests.

KEY THEMES

In addition to the panel discussions, attendees participated in breakout sessions where they were asked to discuss options to improve supportive housing for justice-involved individuals. Some key themes emerged through these discussions including the following:

AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE CORE SERVICES

The lack of a consistent and co-ordinated set of defined mental health and addictions services combined with the inadequacy of a consistent and seamless service experience leaves a patchwork of services across Ontario. Ontarians need a consistent set of core services regardless of where they live. Elements of core services could address gaps and improve access to supportive housing for justice-involved individuals.

INCREASED COMMUNICATION, CO-OPERATION AND COLLABORATION

Improving the connectivity between the criminal justice system, the supportive housing system and the broader health care and social services delivery system can be accomplished through increased communication, co-operation and collaboration across sectors. When sectors operate in silos, clients are at increased risk of “falling through the cracks.”

CONTINUITY OF CARE/ CONSISTENT DISCHARGE PLANNING

Close linkages to community-based services and supports has been noted as an effective tool for discharge planning. Unfortunately, there is no consistent approach to discharge planning across correctional facilities in Ontario.

INCREASED EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Stigma and discrimination associated with criminal justice involvement is a key barrier to accessing supportive housing. Increased education and training for service providers as well as the broader public was noted as an important piece in breaking down barriers and improving access to supportive housing for justice-involved individuals.

INCREASED ACCESS TO LEGAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Increased access to community-based legal support services can assist with eradicating discrimination, protecting an individual's human rights and ultimately improving access to supportive housing for justice-involved individuals.

LACK OF HOUSING SUPPLY

Across the province, there's a shortage of both public and private housing. Housing prices and rental rates in many large and mid-sized cities have risen faster than incomes, to the point where the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing called the situation in Ontario in 2019 a “housing crisis.” Securing appropriate housing is challenging for everyone. Due to stigma and discrimination, the problem is compounded even further for people with complex needs involved in the justice system.

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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The key themes clearly present immediate opportunities for action to improve access to supportive housing for justice-involved individuals.

At the service delivery level, the following recommendations are proposed:

1.

Develop mandatory anti-oppression and equity-focused training, specifically designed to eradicate stigma and break down barriers for justice-involved individuals, to educate landlords and supportive housing service providers across Ontario.

2.

Increased access to and availability of community legal services to assist justice-involved individuals to attain income security, apply for a record suspension, assert the right to equal treatment in housing and employment, challenge discrimination or harassment, and ultimately improve access to employment and supportive housing opportunities in Ontario.

3.

Increased collaboration and co-operation between community service providers to assist justice-involved individuals in connecting with appropriate supports and services and improve their access to supportive housing.

The average cost of providing social housing to one household

\$613
PER MONTH

IN COMPARISON:

one shelter bed costs an average of **\$2,100 PER MONTH** (more than three times as expensive)

one long-term care bed costs an average of **\$3,960 PER MONTH** (more than six times as expensive)

one correctional facility bed costs an average of **\$4,300 PER MONTH** (more than seven times as expensive)

one hospital bed costs an average of **\$13,500 PER MONTH** (more than 22 times as expensive)

At the system level, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

4.

The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Ministry of the Solicitor General and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, make dedicated, long-term investments in supportive housing and case management supports for individuals with mental health and addictions issues involved in the criminal justice system.

5.

The Ministry of the Solicitor General, in collaboration with community-based organizations, develop and implement a provincial strategy to ensure consistent and standardized discharge planning for individuals leaving provincial correctional institutions across Ontario, with a focus on remand populations.

6.

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services revise the Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works policies to continue benefits for an extended period of time when a recipient is incarcerated, thereby preventing the potential loss of housing and entry into homelessness upon discharge.

