

Moving Forward on Affordable Housing and Homelessness in Northern Ontario

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Prepared for the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association in
cooperation with Housing Services Corporation

August 2012



**Housing
Services
Corporation**

About NOSDA

The Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) is an incorporated body that brings together Service Managers in Northern Ontario who are responsible for the local planning, coordination and delivery of a range of community health and social services. These services represent a significant portion of the social and community service infrastructure in all Northern Ontario communities, and account for a large share of the property taxes that municipalities dedicate to these services.

NOSDA is composed of ten District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs), a form of governmental board unique to Northern Ontario, and one municipal Service Manager:

Thunder Bay DSSAB	Algoma DSSAB
Nipissing DSSAB	Cochrane DSSAB
Kenora DSSAB	Parry Sound DSSAB
Timiskaming DSSAB	Manitoulin-Sudbury DSSAB
Rainy River DSSAB	Sault Ste. Marie DSSAB
City of Greater Sudbury	

NOSDA members plan and coordinate the delivery of public services and infrastructure programs across the North that result in measurable gains to the quality of life of Northerners through:

- Financial and other supports to persons in financial crisis and/or having difficulty entering or re-entering the labour force;
- Creation, maintenance and provision of affordable, social housing;
- Providing quality early learning and child care services to promote child development while enabling parents' educational/skills upgrading and employment;
- Emergency medical services in times of medical crisis;
- Addressing homelessness through funding and delivering diverse emergency and preventive services.

www.nosda.net

About HSC

The Housing Services Corporation (HSC) is a non-profit organization that delivers province-wide programs that benefit Ontario's affordable housing sector. It assists Service Managers, including DSSABs, by:

- Helping protect the building asset through programs and services that support better capital asset and energy management
- Delivering business value through economies of scale with competitively procured province-wide programs in bulk purchasing, insurance and investments
- Building and spreading knowledge that supports effective decision-making with relevant research, training and by facilitating collaborative best practice sharing
- Enabling greater resident engagement and self-sufficiency by developing partnerships for social innovation with other organizations and networks.

HSC was created in January 2012 under the *Housing Services Act*. HSC, as successor to the Social Housing Services Corporation (SHSC), builds on that organization's 9 years of experience in delivering programs to social housing and working with different levels of government, the public and the private sector.

www.hscorp.ca

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Executive Summary

This report was prepared for the Northern Ontario Services Deliverers Association (NOSDA) as a statement of Northern Ontario issues in affordable housing and homelessness. It is written mainly from the point of view of District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs) and municipal Service Managers (SMs). It provides an overview of the context, articulates the issues and needs, and sets out suggested next steps and recommendations. Housing and homelessness includes people at risk of losing their home or who need support services to maintain stable lives.

This report is intended for DSSAB/SM officials, provincial and federal governments, Aboriginal organizations, funding/allocation and delivery organizations in the health sector, municipalities, community service bodies, and all whose concerns touch on affordable housing or homelessness.

Changing demographic, market, and policy environment

Social and demographic change is continuing to affect housing and homelessness in the region:

- Stable or declining populations mean rapid aging of the population in most communities;
- A rising share of population is Aboriginal, with a young age profile, many housing and homelessness needs, and many people migrating to urban centres.

The economy and labour market has shifted in recent years:

- The mining boom has created jobs and economic growth in many communities, augmented by health and educational expansion in the largest centres. Other communities with economic bases in forestry or pulp and paper continue declining, due to issues in forestry regulation and competition from lower-cost jurisdictions.
- The labour market is increasingly polarized, with plentiful jobs for people with skills or professions but relatively few jobs for low-skilled workers.

Provincial policy on housing and homelessness is changing, and creating a new need for local and regional planning and related capacity:

- The Ontario government has adopted a new policy framework for affordable housing and homelessness in 2011-2012, with two large short-term implications for DSSABs/SMs:
- Each Service Manager, including DSSABs, is required to prepare a 10-year plan for housing and homelessness by January 2014.
- “Phase 1” consolidation of homelessness programs will take effect in January 2013, providing new flexibility to adapt responses to local needs, but also posing risks.
- This is occurring in a context of reduced federal-provincial funding for housing programs.

This creates significantly larger local/regional responsibility to set priorities and determine funding in affordable housing and homelessness. This requires increased DSSABs/SM capacity to undertake strategic planning and to collaborate with other sectors in this.

Widespread needs in affordable housing and homelessness

Many housing needs and issues are identified in DSSAB/SM interviews and documents, notably:

- The stronger economy has led to tighter housing markets in larger centres and mining towns, with rising rents and fewer low-rent units available for lower-income renters;
- A relatively large percentage of the housing stock is in poor repair;
- Federal and provincial funding for new affordable housing, assisted repair and energy retrofit is at much reduced levels since 2011;
- Social housing faces rising repair needs in aging buildings, declining federal-provincial subsidy, mismatch of unit mix to waiting list, and more higher-needs tenants.

Many homelessness and housing stability needs and issues are identified in DSSAB/SM interviews and documents, notably:

- Many communities have few support services or assisted living options available for the rising population of older seniors;
- People have to travel to larger centres to access specialized health care or social services;
- Lack of public transport is a barrier for low-income people to get to jobs and services;
- The range of homeless preventive and emergency services is incomplete in many DSSABs;
- There are extremely high demands for emergency assistance with energy costs;
- Tighter rental markets and rising rents mean fewer options for people migrating to urban centres, more risk of arrears and eviction, and more risk of homelessness;
- A significant part of the chronic homeless population in larger centres has serious mental illness or addictions, while illicit drug use is a problem in many other communities too;
- Migration to larger centres for jobs and opportunities includes many people who find themselves on the margins, relying on income assistance, shelters or “couch-surfing”.
- There are large unmet needs for housing with mental health/addictions-related supports.

Challenges in strategic planning and priority-setting

Existing roles in affordable housing and homelessness are largely program-based. Strategic planning at the DSSAB/SM level is limited and is not very integrated with other sectors:

- All DSSABs fund and operate social housing under the *Housing Services Act*;
- DSSABs/SMs use a varying mix of the six provincial homelessness funding programs, significant local funding, and also federal funding in the four largest centres (Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, and North Bay);

- Services for people with housing problems and homelessness are provided by diverse DSSAB/SM departments/units, community service agencies, the Violence against Women sector, Aboriginal organizations, and others;
- The health sector provides vital support services and housing for high-needs and at-risk populations, under the North East and North West Local Health Integration Networks;
- Steps toward coordinated intake/referral need to be more fully and widely implemented;
- Strategic planning linkages need to be enhanced between DSSABs/SMs and Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs), and between DSSABs/SMs and Aboriginal organizations.

Best practices

This report suggests the following as some of the best practices that are needed to address affordable housing and homelessness in a more strategic way in Northern Ontario:

- Systems of coordinated intake and referral to local community and health services, to be adopted in every DSSAB.
- Promoting and adopting at the DSSAB/SM level best practices in the following areas, including a role by NOSDA in information-sharing:
 - Systems to use administrative (program/client) data to analyse homelessness needs;
 - Service inventory and gaps analysis in smaller DSSABs;
 - Using shelters as a base for preventive programs and rehousing;
 - System change to promote Housing First approaches in larger DSSABs/SMs;
 - Mental health and addiction services for homeless people and shelter users;
 - Planning groups on assisted living in local communities.
- Information-sharing by DSSABs through ongoing electronic means, peer-to-peer learning, and planned quarterly learning meetings on the following issues during 2012 and 2013:

- Approaches to community consultations, community liaison groups, and related processes in preparing 10-year housing and homelessness plans;
- Needs assessments for preparing 10-year housing and homelessness plans;
- Service planning under the new consolidated homelessness funding;
- Monitoring and metrics in the context of 10-year housing and homelessness plans;
- Other related matters.
- Special efforts to foster collaborative planning with Aboriginal and Health organizations:
 - Including representatives of Aboriginal organizations, and Health-sector organizations, at DSSAB/SM steering/coordinating groups for developing 10-year plans;
 - Potential DSSAB/SM-Aboriginal liaison bodies to meet regularly in each DSSAB/SM;
 - Potential DSSAB/SM-LHIN liaison bodies to meet regularly in each DSSAB/SM.

Recommendations to the provincial and federal governments

Joint Federal and Provincial

- The federal and Ontario governments renew capital funding for assisted new supply, home repair, social housing regeneration, and housing allowances / rent supplements, in 2014 at the end of current Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) funding.
- The federal and Ontario governments establish a collaborative liaison group on Aboriginal housing and social services in Northern Ontario, jointly with First Nations, urban Aboriginal organizations, DSSABs/SMs and other sectors.
- The federal government fund a general needs assessment, to be defined in collaboration with NOSDA and Aboriginal organizations, on housing and homelessness needs associated with migration from First Nations to urban centres in Northern Ontario.

Federal

- The federal government re-examine the steps recommended in 2012 by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to preserve and create moderate-cost rental housing, including financing and tax changes to promote non-profit acquisition and private rental production.
- The federal government replace expiring housing transfers to the provinces with funding of at least similar magnitude, to address good repair of social housing, housing allowances and rent supplements, new affordable housing, and related needs.

Ontario

- The Ontario government raise the shelter component of social assistance to a level equal to at least 60 percent of average market rents by local housing market.
- The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care establish a policy framework to foster collaboration between LHINs and DSSABs/SMs on mental health and addictions as they relate to homelessness and housing stability, and assisted living for seniors.
- The Ontario government establish a framework of multi-year provincial funding to support the priorities established in DSSAB/SM 10-year housing and homelessness plans.
- NOSDA work with potential granting bodies including foundations and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, to identify options for grants of \$50,000 per DSSAB for preparing 10-year plans and associated needs assessments and consultations.
- The Ontario government provide funding for housing allowances and rent supplement sufficient to extend benefits in place under ROOF and STRSP (Rental Opportunity for Ontario Families and Short-term Rent Support Program) for a further five-year period, above and beyond the existing IAH envelope.
- The Housing Services Corporation work with Northern Ontario DSSABs/SMs on long-term asset strategies for the social housing stock, and financial strategies in the context of expiring mortgages and expiring federal subsidy.

- The Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Northern Development and Mines fund a needs analysis, to be defined in collaboration with NOSDA, on housing market impacts and requirements associated with mining booms in Northern Ontario; and fund a companion study to explore Community Benefits Agreements as a potential tool.

Introduction

Purpose of this report

The report was prepared for the Northern Ontario Services Deliverers Association (NOSDA) as a statement of Northern Ontario issues in affordable housing and homelessness. It builds on the 2009 report *Improving the Housing System in Northern Ontario*, but with a coverage and emphasis that is adapted to today's changed context.

This report is intended to serve several related purposes. It offers:

- An overview of the shared Northern Ontario context, issues and needs
- A framework of thinking for boards and staff of DSSABs/SMs in Northern Ontario.
- A basis for collaboration, priority-setting, and advocacy among DSSABs/SMs.
- An articulation of Northern Ontario housing and homelessness issues and needs to the provincial and federal governments.
- A DSSAB/SM perspective to foster dialogue with other major sectors that shape affordable housing and homelessness in Northern Ontario, including the private sector, Local Health Integration Networks, local municipalities, and Aboriginal organizations.

This report includes the following sections:

- Section 1 of this report describes the changed policy context.
- Section 2 on the Northern Ontario context emphasizes elements of the economy and housing market that set the stage for affordable housing and homelessness.
- Section 3 deals with affordable housing, first with a discussion of needs and then with a discussion of program issues.
- Section 4 deals with homeless prevention and response, first with a discussion of needs and then with a discussion of program issues.

- Section 5 addresses housing with supports, which cannot be adequately dealt with under the headings of affordable housing or homelessness.
- Section 6 identifies key areas for moving forward with emphasis on capacity, collaboration, and federal and provincial policy frameworks.
- A chart attached as an appendix summarizes specific responses from each SM/DSSAB in information interviews conducted for this report.

How this report was prepared

This report was made possible through the support of the Housing Services Corporation. It pulls together information from existing sources and the existing knowledge base of DSSABs/SMs and others. Available reports on affordable housing, homelessness, and related issues in Northern Ontario were reviewed (see appendix). Telephone interviews were conducted with one or two key staff in housing and homelessness at each DSSAB/SM, and input was obtained from selected other key informants. Information from the Pan-Northern Ontario Homelessness Summit organized by NOSDA (June 12-13, 2012) has been incorporated into the document. After review by NOSDA Executive Coordinator Chris Stewart, a draft of this report was circulated for comment to the NOSDA CAOs and Executive, the Housing Services Corporation, DSSAB/SM housing and homeless contacts, and selected others (see appendix).

1. Changing context for affordable housing and homelessness

Much has changed since the report *Improving the Housing System in Northern Ontario* which was commissioned by NOSDA in 2009.

Despite unstable economic conditions in much of the world, the global resource boom has intensified and its effects are seen strongly in Northern Ontario.

Provincial housing and homelessness policies and programs have evolved significantly. When NOSDA's 2009 report was written, most of these changes were unknown or in their early stages.

- Canada and Ontario, after their large stimulus programs in 2009-2011 as part of a globally coordinated strategy, have now moved into a period of fiscal retrenchment.
- The Ontario government has adopted a new policy framework for affordable housing in 2011-2012. It issued its *Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy* and has set out a revised policy framework in the *Housing Services Act* and the *Housing Policy Statement*. These confirm and adjust the provincial and DSSAB/SM roles and clarify the scope of provincial commitment.
- Ontario has confirmed that long-term sustainability of social and affordable housing is a shared provincial and Service Manager responsibility. This is reflected in the new policy framework and the broadened mandate of Housing Services Corporation.
- Ontario's *Housing Services Act* now requires each service manager, including DSSABs, to prepare a 10-year plan for housing and homelessness by January 2014. Funding is not addressed in the provincial policy framework for these plans.
- Major housing funding programs are being scaled down and consolidated. This applies in the accelerating phase-out of federal funding for social housing over the next decade. It applies in the smaller scale of federal-provincial funding for new initiatives and repair under the Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) program.
- Initiatives in human services integration and coordinated access to social services have been moving forward in various Service Manager areas across Ontario.
- Ontario is also moving forward with the Phase 1 consolidation of homelessness programs. While the details of this initiative are still pending as this report is written, it will consolidate funding and enable local flexibility in six major programs relating to homelessness and prevention for persons at risk.
- The system of Local Health Integration Networks (LHIN) has matured, with strategic priorities set out in Integrated Health Service Plans by both the North East and North West LHINs in 2009-2010. Relationships have started to develop between LHINs – with their funding/planning mandate in aging-in-place, mental health and addictions – and DSSABs with their related mandate in housing and homelessness.

- The report of the Social Assistance Review is expected to be released in fall 2012. Meanwhile, the Ontario government has not moved ahead with a Housing Benefit as proposed by a coalition of advocates in 2008.

These provincial policy changes amount to significantly larger local/regional responsibility for setting priorities and determining funding in affordable housing and homelessness. They point to a need for increased capacity of DSSABs/SMs to undertake strategic planning and decide on priorities and program choices that meet local needs.

This new DSSAB/SM responsibility is arriving in a context of uncertain federal-provincial priority for elements of the broader social safety net. This will strongly affect the scale of affordable housing and homeless challenges, and also the resources available for local responses. The concept of a provincial strategy as a framework for block-funded local strategies (reflected in the 2009 NOSDA report) has not come to be. The context of expanded planning responsibility but scarce provincial resources poses a risk for DSSABs/SMs in meeting community expectations and in potential local fiscal pressures.

This new context points to a need for new forms of engagement between the provincial and DSSAB/SM levels.

2. The Northern Ontario Context

Population

Northern Ontario's population level is essentially holding steady, standing at 775,000 in 2011¹ – contrasting to Ontario-wide increases of over 10 percent each decade. Lack of growth does not mean stability. The composition of the population is changing significantly, and growth and decline are very unevenly distributed between different districts and local communities. This changing composition has profound impacts on housing and homelessness.

¹ After decline in the 1990s, population was flat in 2001-2006 and declined 1.4% in 2006-2011. Official provincial population projections are for 1 percent growth 2011-2021. This can be characterized as essentially holding steady. Ontario's rate of growth over 2006-2011 was 5.7 percent.

Population trends vary sharply between communities; five main patterns stand out.

- The largest two cities, Thunder Bay and Sudbury, are holding steady in population.
- Many smaller communities with older economic bases in transportation, forestry, or pulp and paper are experiencing population decline as jobs dwindle.
- Several communities are affected by mining booms, raising or maintaining their population.
- Areas with dominant vacation and tourist economies are growing.
- The Aboriginal population is rising much faster than the overall population, affecting First Nation territories, nearby rural or remote communities, and most larger centres.

Communities with flat or declining populations are seeing a rapid aging of the population. It is mostly youth and young adults who migrate out for education and jobs, leaving a local population tilted toward working people in their middle years, and retired people. In 2006 15.8 percent of Northern Ontario population was age 65 or more (versus 13.6 percent Ontario-wide); this is projected to rise to 23 percent by 2021 (versus 18 percent Ontario-wide) according to official Ministry of Finance projections. This will be an increase of some 47,000 seniors by 2021, as other age groups decline. The same effect applies to a greater or lesser extent to any Northern Ontario community or district where growth is slow relative to the Ontario average.

The Aboriginal population is becoming a larger part of most communities. The 98,000 self-identified Aboriginals in Northern Ontario (2006 census, probably undercounted) are about 1 in every 10 Aboriginals in Canada and 1 in 8 Northern Ontario residents. About one-third live in the four largest cities, one-third in Kenora DSSAB, and one-third in other parts of Northern Ontario. Growth rates are very high (20 percent every five years across Canada and in centres such as Thunder Bay) and half of Ontario Aboriginals are under age 28. While First Nation territories are not within provincial or DSSAB jurisdiction, migration creates a strong relationship between trends and needs on and off reserve. Aboriginal people are a rapidly rising share of the young population and of the low-income population.

Economy and labour markets

Northern Ontario is strongly affected by forces that are national and global but have particular impacts in this region. Three patterns are most prominent, described briefly here. These contextual factors shape income trends and in turn housing and homelessness needs. They affect local tax bases, and resources available to support municipal and DSSAB services.

- In the two largest centres (Sudbury and Thunder Bay city, together home to 35 percent of Northern Ontario population), economic change is dominated by an expanding service sector, both in the public sphere and in service and wholesale functions connected to the resource boom. Expansion in health care and education (parallel to trends in mid-sized centres across Ontario) has been offsetting job losses in the transportation and resource sectors. These patterns apply to some degree in the cities of North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, and Timmins, which comprise another 22 percent of Northern Ontario population.
- Many smaller Northern Ontario communities have had an economic base dependent on forestry and pulp and paper, which are declining industries due to issues in forestry regulation and competition from lower-cost jurisdictions. The loss of jobs in this sector has propelled population decline and rapid shift toward a relatively older population; and in many areas a larger percentage of Aboriginal people. Kenora is affected by this in the most significant way, but many areas of the region are affected.
- The global resource boom is leading to increased mining activity including the opening of new mines. This is having dramatic effects in Timmins (in Cochrane DSSAB), Red Lake (in Kenora DSSAB), Kirkland Lake (in Timiskaming DSSAB) and Greater Sudbury, but there are many other examples sprinkled across the region. The unemployment rate in Northern Ontario has been one to two points lower than the Ontario level in 2011 through early 2012.

The resulting overall pattern is consistent with the history of economic boom and bust that Northern Ontario has long experienced. The extent of population loss in some communities, and the sharp turnaround experienced in the resource boom, are sharper than in most of the south.

Most DSSABs include some mixes of these local contexts. For example, while Cochrane includes Timmins, dominated today by the gold mining boom, and Thunder Bay DSSAB includes Northern Ontario's second largest city, each of these DSSABs includes many small declining communities and a rising Aboriginal population. These mixed economic contexts present DSSABs with a complex picture of shifting economic realities and socio-demographic needs. Sudbury is distinct in having economic and social issues that are largely urban.

Incomes in Northern Ontario are generally lower than province-wide. In 2006 full-time and part-time workers alike had average incomes 11 percent lower than the provincial average; relatively fewer people work full-time. Reflecting its economic base and remote communities, Northern Ontario has fewer workers with university degrees than the province average, and more with high school education or less. The percent of households with low income is also higher. This pattern appears to be rooted in five main factors: a polarizing labour market; large numbers of retired persons; lack of jobs in some local communities; higher than average numbers of people who are either low-skilled or unemployed; and relatively more workers in seasonal jobs than in most of Ontario. These patterns relate to the resource-based economy, declining elements of the economic base, and challenges facing the Aboriginal population. Despite steady advances, disproportionate numbers of Aboriginal people have lower-than-average education and income.

Signs of widening disparities in the labour market, and contrasts between thriving or declining communities, echo province-wide trends. Such widening disparities are also seen in housing.

Housing markets

Housing markets in Northern Ontario vary widely from one local community to another, yet shared characteristics are found.

Flat population does not mean that housing production is not needed. Instead, as household size declines, more homes are needed for the same population – consistent with province-wide trends. Any housing market faces a need to

replace older and obsolete homes. As well, excess housing in declining local communities does not meet demand in growing local communities.

Slow growth creates housing prices lower than in many other parts of Ontario, with only slight price increases or decline. This makes homeownership relatively affordable for most households. Ownership rates are about the same as provincial levels, at 71 percent (2006). The flipside of accessible homeownership is that rental housing is a relatively low-income sector.

Rental markets are tighter than they were 5 or more years ago, as a function of an improving economy in the resource sector. In Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and Timmins, vacancy rates for one- and two-bedroom apartments in fall 2011 were lower than average Ontario levels; Sudbury was similar to provincial levels. Rental housing in many communities in Northern Ontario consists of either social housing or privately rented houses, and private rental apartment buildings are rare outside the five larger centres. DSSABs report that landlords are less interested in renting to low-income tenants or in being party to rent supplement agreements than they were a few years ago. There is virtually no market production intended for rental, and in the larger centres there is some loss of rental via conversion to condominium.

Rents are 20 to 30 percent lower than province-wide averages – typically under \$600 for a one-bedroom and under \$800 for a two-bedroom except in Sudbury and Parry Sound. But these rents are still high compared to incomes at the low end of the scale: elderly without private pensions, low-wage earners, and people on social assistance. Issues of affordability that face low-income people anywhere are found in Northern Ontario, and availability is tight in many communities.

Communities most affected by the mining boom face special issues. Influx of higher-paid workers creates demand pressures across the housing market, leading to higher purchase prices, rent increases, and fewer options for lower-income residents. In communities such as Timmins or Red Lake there has been minimal market new-supply response to elevated demand, even in higher-priced market segments and with serviced lots available. Market forces draw contractors and skilled labour into the mining sector, and fail to draw investment into housing production.

Relatively large segments of the housing stock need major repair. Such needs are only slightly higher in the Northern Ontario rental stock than province-wide (11 and 10 percent respectively) but notably higher in the homeowner sector (7½ versus 5 percent) and therefore overall. This is associated with the relatively older housing stock, the number of elderly lower-income owners, the low-income profile of most of the rental sector, and the lax building standards of earlier times. Because Northern Ontario had strong economic expansion in the early and mid-twentieth century, much of the housing stock is older, with less newer housing.

High costs to build and to operate housing are a salient feature of Northern Ontario markets. Housing is expensive to operate and maintain, because of the costs of energy for heating as well as faster weathering in the northern climate. Construction costs are high – attributed to the short construction season, resource-industry competition for skilled trades, and the small number of contractors and trades in some local communities.

Geography

The large distances and dispersed populations of northern Ontario pose challenges in meeting housing and homelessness needs and in operating programs.

- Small population in a local community makes it difficult to provide all services or specialized services. For example, home care services for seniors may be limited, and addiction services unavailable. People must travel to larger centres to access services, and must sometimes move to larger centres – creating barriers and delays in accessing services.
- Travel to services is an issue for many low-income or elderly residents. Public transportation – local or intercity, public or private – is minimal outside the larger centres. This limits people's ability to get work without a car, if job openings are outside one's home community. DSSAB/SM contacts and participants at the Pan-Northern Ontario Homelessness Summit identified lack of public transport as a significant barrier in accessing services.
- Distances create diseconomies of scale in operating programs. For example, property management staff of DSSABs have to spend time

travelling to remote sites; Cochrane has satellite DSSAB offices across its wide territory; consultations about policy/program changes require meetings in dispersed local communities or travel to meetings in Southern Ontario.

Migration

Migration is a significant force affecting affordable housing and homelessness needs in Northern Ontario. Several elements of migration are noteworthy.

- There is ongoing migration from smaller to larger centres. People migrate to larger centres for opportunities: job openings, post-secondary education, better schools for children, more housing options, and sometimes better quality of life. They also move to access services: health care not available in smaller places, social services, income and housing assistance.
- Aboriginal migration is a distinctive part of this. Aboriginal people migrate for most of the same reasons, and because job, educational and housing options on many First Nations are very limited. Aboriginal migration is distinctive for several reasons – the rising number of people, the large share with lower education and urban life skills, the need for culturally appropriate services, the need to coordinate between Aboriginal and general-purpose services, and in some cases the tensions between Aboriginal residents and others in the community.
- “Transient” populations are significant in the larger urban centres such as Thunder Bay, Sudbury or North Bay. These DSSABs report that many clients arrive from elsewhere hoping for a job but not finding one, or who are passing through on the highway and need emergency assistance.
- Youth (typically age 16-24) who migrate to urban centres often face challenges. Many enter educational programs or soon find jobs, but others find themselves living on the margins. DSSABs report large numbers of people who “couch-surf”, staying with friends or relatives in arrangements that usually end after a few days or weeks, leading to the next unstable arrangement or to a need for emergency assistance.
- There is some reported migration of seniors too: from smaller to mid-sized or larger centres. If an elderly person can no longer care for themselves in their own home, home care and assisted living options are

more available in larger centres. Specialized health care may also require moving to a larger centre or staying there for prolonged periods.

DSSAB government structure

Northern Ontario's local/district social services are delivered by District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs), except in the City of Greater Sudbury. DSSABs are unique to northern Ontario, different from the system of counties, regional municipalities, and single-tier municipalities in Southern Ontario. While their boards consist of selected local municipal council members, DSSABs have sometimes been perceived as less integrated into local government, or remote from local issues. DSSABs do not have the full taxation and borrowing powers as municipalities or counties. Limited or declining tax bases in many areas can make it challenging to give priority to social and community services at the DSSAB level.

Existing affordable housing and homelessness programs and services

Similar to the rest of Ontario, DSSABs and other northern SMs fund and manage a range of housing and homelessness programs, and in many cases directly operate these. While they are the largest player in these policy/program areas, their role intersects with a wide range of community organizations and with other funding and planning bodies.

Social housing in Northern Ontario totals approximately 23,000 units or about 7 percent of all housing in the region, and 26 percent of rental homes; it is home to roughly 1 in 4 low-income households. DSSABs/SMs administer some 15,000 rent-geared-to-income units – about 18 percent of all rental housing – as well as some market-rent units. Compared to Ontario overall, relatively more Northern Ontario social housing is owned or operated directly by the DSSAB/SM rather than by a community-based non-profit/co-op organization. DSSABs have participated in the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program (AHP) and Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) programs, with priorities for new supply, repair, and housing allowances varying widely from one district to another. The federal Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) was also important until terminated in Ontario in 2011.

The range of homelessness programs varies greatly. Most DSSABs/SMs in Northern Ontario use most of the provincial homelessness programs that will be consolidated (see box), except domiciliary hostels which are not significant in this region. The array of homeless services extends well beyond these programs, and varies between smaller and larger DSSABs/SMs.

The larger DSSABs/SMs have more complete systems including prevention, shelters, and other emergency response. They have diverse services for supporting people at risk, rehousing those who are homeless, and specialized services for people with mental health or addictions issues. CHPP (Consolidated Homeless Prevention Program) supports a diverse range of services, including housing/outreach workers in Sudbury. Smaller DSSABs place more emphasis on emergency support through the Emergency Energy Fund, Rent Bank, CSUB (Community Start-up Benefit) or related programs (see box on page 12). In almost all communities, there is huge need for and take-up of emergency energy funding. Several larger DSSABs have a shelter system with identified gaps in populations served. Some smaller DSSABs have no shelters except the separate VAW system, or have one or two shelters for certain client groups.

Delivery of these services is mixed: there is some direct delivery by the DSSAB and some funding of community agencies. Homeless-related services are often closely tied to administration of Ontario Works, directly by the DSSAB.

Funding of homeless-related programs varies, beyond the six provincial programs just noted. Larger DSSABs/SMs, especially Sudbury, contribute large amounts of their own funding in addition to these provincial funds. The federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) is delivered in the four largest centres – Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and North Bay. Each centre varies in HPS delivery (DSSAB, City, or community coalition), planning approach (how integrated it is with DSSAB planning) and priorities (capital, preventive services, etc.).

LHINs play large roles in housing and homelessness. They fund mental health and addictions services, and seniors support services. As in other parts of Ontario, some social housing is supportive housing funded directly by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) and the LHIN or by the

Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS). Virtually every DSSAB/SM has arrangements with the local Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) to provide services to seniors in DSSAB/SM-operated social housing. There are, increasingly, arrangements with Health-funded agencies to support social housing tenants with mental health issues or addictions, or others with special needs. Clients with mental illness or addictions who refuse medical treatment, or whose numbers exceed the capacity of medical services, are a large part of the population served by DSSAB/SM-funded shelters and emergency services in the major centres.

Aboriginal organizations, including First Nations and urban/off-reserve Aboriginal organizations, have a far more prominent role than in southern parts of the province. Aboriginal organizations operate some housing projects funded through the DSSAB, and some under separate Aboriginal funding. Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS) has been delivering the \$60 million First Nation, Inuit, Métis Urban and Rural (FIMUR) Housing Program. About half of these funds have supported projects in Northern Ontario, including over 400 rental and about 300 home-owner homes. FIMUR is being extended with some \$20 million to OAHS under IAH. Various DSSABs have provided rent supplement to such projects or facilitated them in other ways.

Aboriginal organizations are also active in homeless-related services and supports to people on the economic margins. Ontario Works is administered by First Nations in their own territory and by DSSABs/SMs in the rest of the region. In most larger centres, the Native Friendship Centres play an important role in support to Aboriginal migrants and people in need, and several receive some DSSAB/SM funding.

The Violence against Women (VAW) sector is present in various communities in all DSSABs, not only with shelters but with related supports, alternatives, and rehousing supports.

Planning capacity and collaboration

Relationships to other main players vary from one community to another. In some cases there is a close DSSAB collaboration with one dominant municipality; in others the needs of diverse local communities must be carefully

balanced. In some there is a close collaborative relationship with a social planning council or community coalition while in others this is more arms-length. Planning processes, such as for the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy in Sault Ste. Marie or Nipissing, or the Thunder Bay Housing Strategy, have helped foster collaborative relations.

A few larger DSSABs/SMs have made progress in building relationships with the LHIN in their region, beyond the program or project-related partnerships with the CCAC. Even in the larger centres, most steps to date are early steps, such as presence at each others' planning tables or some early discussions about shared needs and priorities.

DSSABs/SMs vary in the strength of collaborative relationships with Aboriginal organizations. Relations with urban-based organizations such as Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services or Native Friendship Centres are strongest.

Initiatives in human services integration and coordinated access to social services have been seen in Northern Ontario. Nipissing piloted a "No Wrong Door" system of intake and referral in 2009, and its 2011-2014 HPS priorities include entrenching this in the service system. Sudbury and Thunder Bay have identified this as a desired direction in service system management.

The status of existing needs assessments varies widely. A couple of larger DSSABs/SMs have developed strategic plans for affordable housing, or housing needs studies – an important foundation for 10-year housing and homelessness plans. The largest DSSABs/SMs usually have a fuller base of information about needs in homeless services, but none has a full client database. The largest DSSABs/SMs also lead or actively collaborate with existing community planning processes for federal HPS funding in regard to homelessness. Some DSSABs/SMs have program-related plans, for example on capital needs within the social housing portfolio.

While some DSSABs/SMs have relatively well-developed capacity for planning and priority-setting, many smaller ones do not. A few DSSABs have housing plans dating from recent years, but most have no overall homelessness strategy as of mid-year 2012. All Northern Ontario DSSABs/SMs are at quite early stages in developing 10-year plans for housing and homelessness.

The Six Provincial Homelessness Programs to be Consolidated

- *Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Program (CHPP)* – Funds diverse services that help people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to find and maintain stable housing.
- *Emergency Energy Fund (EEF)* – Provides emergency funds to households to help prevent losing a home due to utilities/heating cut-off or arrears.
- *Emergency shelters* – Provide short-term accommodation for people who are homeless, along with a temporary personal needs allowance (cost-shared by DSSAB/SM on same basis as OW).
- *Domiciliary hostels* – Provide support funding to private-sector or non-profit rooming/boarded homes with supports, for adults who require some supervision and support with daily activities.
- *Rent Bank* – Provides one-time (not ongoing/recurring) grants to cover outstanding rent arrears due to financial crisis and thereby prevent eviction and homelessness.
- *Community Start-up Benefit (CSUB)* – This provides special Ontario Works funds to help with setting up a home (e.g. if moving from a shelter) or to prevent eviction or utilities cut-off.

3. Affordable Housing

3.1 Needs in Affordable Housing

Shifting conditions

Population change creates challenges in affordable housing and homelessness, even when population is not growing. These arise from migration of less-skilled young people into urban centres where most job growth is higher-skilled; from rapid population aging; from tightening of labour markets and housing markets in the resource boom; from the rapidly rising Aboriginal population; and from the older age profile of the housing stock.

Low-income renters

Among the most severe and ongoing issues are those of low-income renters. As elsewhere in Ontario, the majority of low-income renters are in the market, not in social housing. Even though rents in Northern Ontario are among the lowest in the province, they are still high vis-à-vis what a low-income renter can afford. For example, at the benchmark 30 percent of income, a single or couple with an income of \$15,000 to \$20,000 can “afford” a rent of \$400 to \$500 – not the \$600 to \$800 which prevails in the market. People in these income brackets – seniors on GAINS, single parents or others in minimum-wage jobs – usually stretch the budget to afford market rents. People on social assistance for whatever reason – disability, pre-school children, low-skilled joblessness, mental health issues or addictions, temporary misfortune – have more severe problems. Virtually every DSSAB housing/homelessness contact person, and participants at the Pan-Northern Ontario Homelessness Summit, identified a major challenge in the scarcity of low-rent options for low-income people and the gap between social assistance incomes and market rents. Scarcity of affordable housing funding was a main issue for Summit participants.

Higher rents pose obvious challenges for lower-income renters. Tighter markets worsen this. DSSABs from Thunder Bay to Nipissing report that landlords have become less interested in renting to lower-income tenants, and less interested in maintaining rent supplement agreements. This poses challenges for low-income tenants in keeping their homes when their income drops or arrears mount or energy costs spike. For homeless people and the community agencies and DSSABs/SMs that serve them, this poses challenges to simply having enough housing available.

The polarization of the workforce and in-migration of lower-skilled people to urban centres have created large numbers of working-age singles and couples struggling in the rental market on low incomes. This has led to increases in the numbers of these population groups who apply for social housing and are on the waiting lists.

Good repair of older housing

The older age profile of Northern Ontario housing poses a challenge to ensure that it is in adequate repair and meets standards. Issues of social housing are discussed below, but the larger overall issues are in market housing. DSSABs report widespread issues of disrepair in market rental and in parts of the homeowner sector occupied by lower-income or elderly people.

Seniors and aging in place

Housing options to enable seniors to age in place is a front-and-centre issue – for all DSSABs/SMs, for many local municipalities, for the health sector, and for community agencies. This issue looms large across Northern Ontario because of the rapid shift toward a relatively older population. It is especially acute in smaller communities with declining economic bases. These situations often mean out-migration of the young, fewer young family members to offer direct support, a population too small to warrant an assisted living facility, and limited community-based capacity.

The most acute need is for assisted living. This refers to a range of options that fall between living in one's home independently, and the high level of personal care provided in Long-Term Care (nursing home or Home for the Aged). More concretely this typically refers to retirement homes (i.e. with congregate dining, housekeeping, and supervised medications) at affordable prices, or seniors social housing with similar support services available. A 2009 study for the North East LHIN on these issues identified a need for 3,500 to 6,600 more seniors supportive housing units and 2,700 to 5,700 additional Long Term Care beds by 2021.

Assisted living relates to “Alternate Levels of Care” (ALC) for patients with ongoing health or psycho-social support needs at the point they are ready for hospital discharge because they no longer warrant acute care. While the provincial ALC definition envisages a range of options, the only real options in many communities are the person's home (often without supports), a long-term care home (in larger communities), an emergency shelter (in the case of younger people) – or seniors social housing. For such reasons, Sudbury has allocated all its 2011-14 IAH funds to a senior's assisted living project despite the many competing affordable housing needs.

DSSABs/SMs report that many hospitals, physicians, and community agencies now look to senior's social housing to play this role of assisted living. Retirement homes are few or absent or higher-priced, a long-term care home is costly and unsuitable when the support needs are moderate, yet the person's needs are too high to live independently. While seniors' social housing must and does provide higher levels of support as its tenants age in place, its fundamental mandate is affordable rental housing, with appropriate supports when needed – not assisted living *per se*.

Housing supply and prices in mining boom towns

The special issues in mining boom towns affect housing affordability and availability across various segments of the market. DSSAB/SM contact persons interviewed for this report identified this as a large issue in some communities – catalyzing strong municipal and business attention in Timmins, for example. Comments on drafts of this report pointed to analyses in the parallel contexts of Australian mining towns and the Alberta Oil Sands, and to policy options.

Rising prices for ownership housing limit the housing options and squeeze the budgets of a wide range of residents. In the ownership sector this affects younger people who do not already own a home, including younger families. In the rental sector, the influx of new higher-paid workers leads to higher demand – because many of these workers do not expect to live in the community for the long term, and because mining or contracting companies lease accommodation for rent to their employees. Demand for rental accommodation squeezes lower-income residents, who now face higher rents and who find the sort of units they once rented taken by middle-income tenants.

More broadly, lack of housing options can create instability in boom towns and reduce the long-term local benefits from the resource boom. Housing demand in these communities requires a co-ordinated and managed supply response. For First Nations, Impact and Benefit Agreements have become one tool to respond to such issues. In other contexts – large-scale urban property development, Olympics/mega-events, and mining in Western Australia – community benefit agreements have been used in a similar way (see references Haslam McKenzie; Gross; Torjman).

Other issues

DSSABs/SMs and other contact persons for this report have identified a range of other points relevant to affordable housing needs.

- Homeownership affordability is not a large issue in most communities, because prices are moderate.
- There is virtually no production in mid-priced segments of the housing market, where it has been feasible to build housing on a profitable market basis in other times and places. These segments include lower-priced new homes, and new market rental.
- It has been suggested that manufactured housing can meet housing needs at moderate cost and high quality, and be an efficient way to meet elevated demand in mining boom towns.
- There is little prospect of rental production except by non-profit groups and/or with government incentives or support.
- There is a strong need for housing with supports, beyond the seniors needs discussed (see section 5 below).
- For lower-income households, energy costs are an enormous financial challenge which often creates a risk of losing one's home. This affects both homeowners and renters (see section 4).

3.2 Issues in housing programs

Social housing

Social housing remains the largest program operated by most service managers, in Northern Ontario and province-wide – in terms of people served, expenditures, and impact on overall housing and homelessness needs. Funding, non-profit housing governance, and sustainability issues are similar to those found across Ontario, but with distinct issues of stock mismatch.

Many communities face a mismatch between the types and size of homes needed by people on the waiting list and what exists in the social housing stock. In Sault Ste. Marie, Thunder Bay and other DSSABs, the stock has more units for seniors and families with children, and fewer units for working-age singles and

couples, compared to the waiting list. Where family units are needed, the greatest need is for smaller family units. In many cases there is also a mismatch of locations: rent-geared-to-income apartment buildings or scattered homes in declining towns or in rural locations. The latter do not help people who cannot afford a car and need to be in a larger centre to find a job, upgrade skills, and stay connected with their community.

Aging social housing – built primarily in the 1960s to 1980s – faces rising needs for ongoing maintenance and major capital repairs. Energy retrofit is also much needed, and is a major way to reduce operating cost pressures. While the 2009-2011 Social Housing Renovation and Retrofit Program (SHRRP) was a major boost, ongoing resources are needed. DSSABs/SMs need the ability to do strategic asset management: retrofit for energy or accessibility or support service facilities; major renovation or replacement of antiquated buildings; selling or closing of social housing that is too costly to operate; and redeploying associated subsidy flows to meet today's needs. This requires enhanced capacity, and it requires provincial regulatory flexibility.

DSSABs/SMs face long-term reductions in the federal housing transfer that the Ontario government passes through to them. Annual federal funding to Ontario will decline by half over the coming decade, although the recent gazetting of amounts for 2013-2017 shows only moderate declines in Northern Ontario (4.3 percent overall) and increases for some smaller DSSABs. Studies of the ramifications of the simultaneous expiry of project mortgages and associated federal subsidy have shown that those projects with high percentages of RGI tenants or high unmet repair needs will face financial shortfalls. This creates inexorable pressure on the local tax base to backfill this declining funding; or else pressure to operate social housing on a shoestring, without adequate maintenance or social supports. This is occurring at the same time as repair needs are rising, and larger numbers of tenants and applicants have support needs.

In sum, DSSABs/SMs face large challenges over the next few years in social housing, especially in the area of strategic management of real estate assets, and financial strategies as debt service declines but so do federal subsidies. The mandate of the Housing Services Corporation includes acting as a resource to DSSABs/SMs in these long-term issues.

The Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) program and related changes

Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) is the main federal-provincial funding program for new affordable housing, repair assistance, and additional housing allowances or rent supplements. It replaced both the former Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program (AHP) and the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) in 2011. IAH offers a new local flexibility to set priorities between new affordable housing, rent supplement or housing allowances, and/or repair programs. But IAH has arrived in tandem with three large challenges: less overall funding in 2011-14, less funding for repair, and unknown funding beyond 2014.

Funding is at a much lower average level than that of recent years, which has included AHP, RRAP, and Aboriginal funding programs (as well as some Health sector housing funding). AHP since 2005 has included funding for new affordable housing, rent supplements and housing allowances, and repairs. Provincial data show 2,900 new affordable housing units created from 2005 through 2011 (including stimulus projects) and another 2,900 homes rehabilitated under the Northern Repair. Total RRAP funds allocated to Northern Ontario averaged \$3.9 million annually over fiscal 2008/09 through 2010/11.

Total IAH funds allocated to Northern Ontario for the years 2012 through 2014 are \$23.8 million – an average of \$8 million annually. This is a significant reduction from the annual average sum of AHP, RRAP and Aboriginal funds in the region over the six fiscal years 2005/06–2010/11. Moreover, most of the rent supplement / housing allowance funding initiated under AHP and through ROOF and STRSP (Rental Opportunity for Ontario Families and Short-term Rent Support Program) in 2005-2009 is ending in 2012-13.

The long-term funding levels of IAH or its successor after March 2014 are entirely unknown. This appears very uncertain in the context of fiscal retrenchment at both the federal and provincial levels. Affordable housing has been almost absent from any election platform or any budget speech at either senior level of government over the past two years.

Within the new flexibility that IAH offers, the various DSSABs/SMs have made set divergent priorities among the program streams just noted reflecting different local needs. Several (e.g. Sault Ste Marie, Rainy River, and Manitoulin-Sudbury) have made repair the sole IAH priority. All, however, are making highly constrained choices in the context of reduced overall funding. Due to federal restrictions, IAH remains entirely separate from social housing funding and cannot be combined into joint or “stacked” projects or programs or repairs. This restricts the ability to do integrated planning between devolved social housing and other affordable housing.

Reduced funding for repairs has larger impacts in Northern Ontario than in most of the province. The large needs were noted above. This is the first time in years that there have not been three or more sources of repair and retrofit funding (e.g. EcoEnergy, Northern Repair, RRAP, Ontario Works). Northern Ontario received relatively high per-capita RRAP funding, and local delivery bodies that performed efficiently could seek and often get a share of unused funds from CMHC’s overall RRAP envelope. There is no such opportunity in IAH. DSSABs/SMs that have chosen housing allowances or new affordable projects have little or no money to allocate to repairs over the two remaining years of IAH. IAH must cover not only repair needs, but the demands for home retrofit for elderly residents (as they age or upon hospital discharge) and for energy retrofit.

4. Homelessness Services and Prevention

4.1 Needs among people who are homeless or at risk

Diverse community contexts

Homelessness varies considerably between communities: smaller or larger ones, growing or declining ones, service-sector cities versus resource towns. Some people face possible loss of their home and others are without a home. Needs vary between different populations too: migrant young people, Aboriginals moving into town, families facing eviction or utility cut-offs, people with mental

health issues or addictions, women and children in a VAW shelter. But there are also common issues and needs.

Larger cities in Northern Ontario have a diverse array of needs and services that is typical of larger urban areas across the province. The profile and needs that DSSABs identify are complex and varied. They include families facing loss of a home due to financial crisis or arrears; singles with few rental options they can afford; domestic violence; chronic homelessness, mental health and addictions; youth lacking skills, jobs, education or family support; people who are passing through or arrive looking for a job but meanwhile need emergency assistance.

The homelessness challenges and issues identified by DSSABs in larger Northern centres with their more developed array of services and more complex contexts are listed below:

- Enhancing an existing shelter system by adding a facility for an under-served population.
- Facing the challenge each year of funding demands placed on the local tax base to help support homeless prevention and emergency services.
- Moving from funding and overseeing an evolving set of programs, with some form of collaborative community-based planning, to a more truly strategic planning approach.
- Collaborating more effectively with other major funders and planners (usually based in the same urban centres) such as LHINs and large Aboriginal providers.
- System change away from preventive and emergency programs toward a model that is more effectively “housing first”, emphasizing prevention, rapid re-housing, and supports.

Towns with mining booms face other problems. Competition from higher-earning working people puts lower-income people at greater risk of inadequate housing, arrears and eviction. Economic booms also attract people who don't find a job and are unemployed for a spell, or end up living on the margins. In Timmins, there are people working in skilled jobs but living in their vehicle because of the scarcity of apartments, while homeless count results reported in news media in April 2012, including “hidden homeless”) was over 700 – extremely high per capita.

Declining or no-growth communities face challenges. Many people with low incomes facing economic, personal, family or health crises cannot find services in the community where they live; and without a car they cannot easily travel to get those services elsewhere. DSSABs that do not have any literal homelessness in streets, shelters or public spaces still report large problems of utility arrears. Communities everywhere have issues of domestic violence, family conflicts, and youth making difficult transitions into jobs and self-reliance. Aboriginal needs are evident in several smaller, no-growth communities. Addictions issues are very evident in several smaller communities. People in crisis in smaller towns often migrate out to get services in larger centres.

In some remote communities, there are acute issues of homelessness connected with lack of social stability, urban life skills, and family supports among people migrating from nearby First Nations. While jobs are booming for those with good experience, skilled trades, or professional credentials, there are few jobs for unskilled people. In some cases there are widespread and serious addictions problems, with associated issues of crime and security. These issues are acute in several communities in Kenora DSSAB and Cochrane DSSAB.

Preventing homelessness

Preventing homelessness is a need shared by all communities. Important elements of this in all communities are energy costs, arrears and evictions, mental health needs, and family crises. Affordable housing is an essential part of the solution, emphasized by DSSAB/SM contacts and participants at the Pan-Northern Ontario Homelessness Summit.

In Northern Ontario, energy costs for heating are far higher than in most of the province, sometimes over \$1,000 monthly. Virtually all DSSABs report very high demand for emergency energy assistance as well as Rent Banks, and some add significant local dollars to the provincial Emergency Energy Fund (EEF). These issues affect low-income homeowners as well as tenants.

Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters and associated prevention and intervention programs have close relationships to other issues people face. Domestic violence is a larger issue in situations of unemployment, addictions,

and other economic or social stresses. Family counselling and intervention services have a relationship to preventing homelessness. Homeless service planning needs to involve interagency collaboration and priority-setting in these areas.

Many DSSABs, as well as participants at the Pan-Northern Ontario Homelessness Summit, identified couch-surfing as an issue, especially among youth who have come to a community but have not found a job, have little education, and are away from the social supports of their place of origin. Couch-surfing is poorly measured and understood, but there are links between this situation and need for emergency DSSAB/SM assistance. Drug use and addictions are a significant issue among youth. Stable housing must go along with education, employment, and services help people set up stable adult lives.

Aboriginal needs

Young Aboriginals increasingly seek and create a future for themselves in urban areas. Aboriginal youth come to larger centres to attend high school but they often arrive with little or no social support system and without any adult or trustee supervision. Others come in later adolescence looking for work, and for more opportunity than can be had on their home First Nation. Housing stability is an essential component of ensuring social stability for the individuals, their children, the broader Aboriginal community, and the community at large.

In most of Northern Ontario, disproportionate numbers of Aboriginal people experience homelessness or imminent risk of it. Several factors are involved, part of a complex set of issues facing Aboriginal communities and the broader community. Migration from First Nations to urban centres, and from smaller to larger centres, was noted earlier. The Aboriginal population is young overall, and most migrants are young. Homelessness is related to low skills, unemployment, poor urban coping skills, lack of post-migration family supports, and addictions.

Many clients served by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social services, educational institutions, housing organizations, and homeless-related services are the same individuals. For example, 55 percent of Thunder Bay homeless outreach clients are reported as Aboriginal. Culturally appropriate service provision is needed to serve Aboriginal clients in the DSSAB/SM sphere.

Collaboration between the DSSAB/SM sphere and Aboriginal organizations is therefore essential.

Issues are most acute in the far-northern DSSABs of Thunder Bay and Kenora with their relatively large Aboriginal population and scattered remote towns. Homeless people on the street are common in some towns, many of them with addiction issues; shelter users include people who use it as de facto temporary accommodation. The tax base and the volunteer base to sustain emergency and preventive services is small relative to demand, and there are tensions between the large, economically marginal Aboriginal population and the rest of the community.

Addictions and mental health

Mental illness and addictions are a significant part of homelessness in Northern Ontario, in ways similar to other communities and also in distinctive ways. In larger urban communities with larger shelter systems, especially Sudbury and Thunder Bay, DSSABs/SMs report “complex mental and physical health issues” among users; addictions and serious mental illness affect a relatively large share of emergency shelter users who use the system on a long-term or repeat basis. Solutions for this population require intensive case management (ICM) and housing with supports – discussed below. There are few resources for intensive case management and scarce options for housing with supports, compared to the numbers of people in need. “There is insufficient and/or ineffective organization of existing outreach services ... to connect persons with untreated mental health illness to physicians (shortage) and mental health agencies for assessment and/or treatment.” (Thunder Bay input, Pan Northern Inventory).

Some smaller or remote communities are also experiencing significant issues of illicit drug use and addictions. In some cases chronic homeless people on the streets and public spaces, abusing alcohol or OxyContin have become a major concern in recent years. Addiction treatment, detox facilities, social supports, and counselling are needed elements in homelessness prevention.

Serving other population groups

Most mid-sized or larger communities in Northern Ontario, as elsewhere, have a Violence against Women (VAW) shelter funded through the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS). But most communities have few affordable options for the woman who needs to leave an abusive partner.

While few DSSABs described people with physical disabilities as being the most under-served population, some reported a lack of modified social housing units for people with disabilities.

Community safety

Issues of homelessness, domestic violence, addictions, and rapid population change can create issues of community safety. Tensions between different parts of the community, youth issues, addictions, and crime, can be challenging.

Municipal police services or local OPP detachments are important stakeholders in helping understand the issues facing communities, helping citizens and elected officials understand how the well-being of each affects the well-being of all. Police services or detachments are an important potential partner in addressing the issues. However, as many rural areas have service agreements with the OPP and are forced to pay for increased policing costs, these social issues have a direct impact on municipalities that are already struggling with limited taxation capacity.

4.2 Issues in homelessness programs/services

The challenges and issues in homelessness programs and services are complex and varied. This report highlights a few main points emerging from DSSAB/SM information reviewed.

While best practices in homeless services have evolved in recent years to emphasize prevention and housing solutions rather than emergency services, a

range of adequately funded program/service approaches will continue to be needed.

In preventing or averting homelessness, having enough affordable housing available is a necessary part of the solution. The loss of lower-rent housing to rising rents and to stronger demand from higher-skilled, higher-income people, along with the funding pressures on social and affordable housing, will make it challenging even to “tread water” in the next several years.

Prevention

The top of mind issue for many DSSABs is emergency energy assistance. This is the most widespread form of preventive assistance. As energy costs rise and as provincial funding is consolidated, the challenge will be to ensure adequate resources. As long as the resource boom progresses and leaves rising numbers of low-skilled people struggling in costlier and tighter rental markets, it is likely that demand for Rent Bank funding will also tend to rise.

Other forms of homelessness prevention mostly involve support services. The types of support are varied, depending on whether a particular tenant’s needs, disabilities, and risks. Homeless prevention frequently relates to issues of family counselling, debt management, mental health services, skills training and jobs, domestic violence, and so on.

In the context of homeless program consolidation, DSSABs/SMs may need to set clearer priorities between various types of prevention, and to make decisions on what types of ongoing supports and services cannot be funded from homelessness programs. DSSABs/SMs will need to coordinate homelessness prevention with a range of other social and community services.

Shelter systems

Three planning issues stand out in regard to emergency shelter systems in Northern Ontario.

Many DSSABs in Northern Ontario have an incomplete emergency shelter system. For example, needs for new shelters identified by DSSABs/SMs include a family shelter in Sudbury, and a youth shelter in Cochrane, while Rainy River has no such facilities apart from VAW shelters. Participants at the Pan-Northern Ontario Homelessness Summit identified scarcity or lack of shelter beds as a major gap in many communities.

DSSABs/SMs including Sudbury and Thunder Bay have identified inadequate funding per bed and/or lack of core funding as a challenge to sustainability of shelter providers and the shelter system. Many DSSABs/SMs fund shelters through a combination of per diems under the *Ontario Works Act* and funding from the Consolidated Homeless Prevention Program (CHPP); many shelters are supported by other net DSSAB/SM funding and extensive fundraising by providers. Shelters are large operations compared to other homeless services, and involve the capital and operating costs of the facility. Ontario-wide and in the larger northern SMs/DSSABs, shelters account for a large share of funding in the six programs to be consolidated.

Best practices in shelter systems involve change management to make them an anchor for a range of prevention and re-housing services. This shift is based on the knowledge that people are more stable if they can remain in their home, and that becoming homeless can intensify a range of other problems by leading to family conflicts, elevated stress, undermined confidence, disrupted family and social supports, changing schools, difficulty finding a job, and so on. To achieve such changes requires referral/diversion protocols at the point of intake, counselling and support in getting housing, and so on. It requires funding of mental health services and family/individual counselling beyond what can be covered within shelter budgets or by diverting funding from other services within the new consolidated homelessness program envelope.

Achieving a better-integrated system

Addressing homelessness requires planning for and evolving toward a more integrated system of services – including prevention, links with other support services, emergency response, and re-housing. It also requires affordable housing and housing with supports (sections 3 and 5).

In smaller DSSABs, the challenge is to ensure an adequate safety net, and to achieve a better ability to plan, fund and deliver a range of essential services. Identifying existing gaps in essential services can become a basis for efforts to adjust or expand priorities, secure funding, and link with other sectors and providers. But many smaller DSSABs, despite deep knowledge of the situation on the ground in their communities, have limited capacity to undertake a gaps analysis or service review. In many cases the local DSSAB has existing, informal linkages with CCACs or mental health agencies on specific programs, but this relationship does not extend into collaborative overall priority-setting or service planning.

In larger or more urban DSSABs, the challenge is to achieve a fully integrated service system. This would usually involve more housing-with-support for chronically homeless, better integration of service planning and provision, and putting in place a Housing First service model. Developing a systematic homeless prevention system on Housing First principles is a desired goal in Thunder Bay, but at this point there is not yet systematic data collection on clients and service usage to better inform comprehensive service planning.

In the context of responsibility for 10-year plans for housing and homelessness, priority-setting in homelessness prevention and response will require enhanced collaboration with other service sectors and providers. Some of these interrelations are within existing DSSAB responsibilities, notably income assistance. Others usually involve a lead role by the DSSAB, such as in coordinated access to services. Other spheres of collaboration are in the areas of individual and family counselling, life skills, crisis intervention, and domestic violence – matters funded in diverse ways through MCSS, United Way agencies, the VAW system, fundraising, and so on.

There are two essential but at times challenging areas where more formal collaboration is needed:

- Aboriginal organizations provide a range of services and housing to this fast-growing and relatively high-needs population. For the leading urban Aboriginal organizations, a collaborative relationship with DSSABs/SMs and local communities is a priority.

- Mental health and addictions funding priorities and allocations at the regional and local level are the responsibility of LHINs. A better-integrated system will necessarily involve enhanced collaboration with LHINs the community agencies which they fund.

Risks and opportunities in consolidation of homelessness programs

The Ontario government is proceeding with the “Phase 1” consolidation of homelessness programs, involving six MCSS-funded programs. The program framework for the consolidation is expected to be announced at mid-year 2012, shortly after this NOSDA report is released.

In several of these programs, significant DSSAB/SM funding is also involved. Emergency shelters and CSUB are cost-shared 17.2 percent at the DSSAB/SM level, but this varies according to the relative size of local First Nations and unorganized territories. Domiciliary hostels are cost-shared 20 percent at the DSSAB/SM level. The large net DSSAB/SM share of shelter funding was noted above, and the same applies in emergency energy programs in several districts.

The provincial intention is to provide for more SM flexibility in determining priorities and administering funding, within a new form of accountability which will emphasize purposes and outcomes rather than adherence to specific administrative rules. It is recognized that consolidation must strike the right balance between flexibility to shape programs in ways that respond to local needs, and clear parameters and accountability for the provincial funding.

Consolidation creates large opportunities at the DSSAB/SM level, but also large risks. It can be a way to rationalize the considerable overlap between the existing programs – for example, CSUB and CHPP funds now used for similar purposes; shelter funding coming from both OW and CHPP. Each program has its own rules on uses of funding and financial accountability, which creates administrative complications and barriers. Per-diems are not the most effective funding vehicle for shelters. More flexible program rules will enable DSSABs/SMs to move toward integrating and streamlining the services under the six separate programs. DSSABs/SMs and providers will be able to respond in more flexible, tailored, and integrated ways to client needs. Each DSSAB/SM will be freer to adapt programs to best fit local conditions.

The risks in consolidation are in part fiscal and in part regarding expectations on what DSSABs/SMs can do in preventing and responding to homelessness.

Fiscally, funding for CSUB and shelters has been open-ended for each DSSAB/SM in aggregate (although capped in terms of individual client eligibility). The expectation is that the allocation for the consolidated program will not be open-ended. The end of CSUB as a distinct funding element was a concern for participants at the Pan-Northern Ontario Homelessness Summit and is of concern in general. Emergency shelters account for the majority of funding under the six programs in larger DSSABs. If consolidated funding is determined for each DSSAB/SM based on historic levels or per-capita shares, shelter funding may prove limited vis-à-vis current needs. There are risks that DSSABs/SMs will be exposed to cover the costs if needs for homeless-related services rise in future, as appears likely in the context of long-run labour market and housing market trends.

Consolidation is occurring at the same time as responsibility to prepare a 10-year plan. Community expectations are high, with rising interest in wrap-around services, Housing First models, intensive case management, and more linking of housing and supports. While there is hope that consolidation can support such approaches, they are resource-intensive, requiring ongoing staffing and mental health expertise as well as housing supports and housing funding. They cross over directly into the sphere of health funding. The risk is that the worthy goals of flexible, comprehensive services will exceed the resources of the consolidated program.

5. Housing with Supports

General points

Housing with supports is a central part of any adequate strategy to address affordable housing needs and homelessness. Housing with supports does not fit neatly within affordable housing, whether in the market or in social housing. And it is more than services for any people who are homeless or at risk. It is a distinct

but essential element in strategies to prevent homelessness among those most at risk, and to re-house people who are homeless.

Housing with supports refers to arrangements where staff are available and mandated to provide services that help clients maintain stable housing and stable lives. Supportive housing is one form of this –housing and support services provided in a particular property in a coordinated package. In other cases supports are provided to individuals in varied forms of social housing or market housing, unrelated to the tenancy or the role of the landlord or housing provider.

The nature of the supports may vary. For frail seniors it often involves housekeeping, some meal preparation, supervised medication, social activities, and active monitoring so as to know promptly when needs change or a crisis arises. For people with severe physical disabilities it involves support with activities of daily living, such as dressing, bathing, and food preparation. For youth and young mothers it often involves life skills, child care, and social support, to enable people to upgrade their education and skills and get stable employment.

Information from DSSABs/SMs in Northern Ontario is that two population groups stand out in terms of numbers in need, urgency of needs, and potential impact on reducing social distress in local communities and alleviating demands for emergency services. These are assisted living for older seniors, and mental health and addictions supports connected with housing.

Assisted living

Assisted living was identified as a strong priority by DSSABs/SMs, exceeding any other need in many smaller communities. It is an identified priority by hospitals, social housing providers, health planners, and local municipalities.

Effective strategies for assisted living will require coordination of public funding for housing, with public funding of supports. It will require the development of new projects or the acquisition and conversion of existing buildings. It will be possible to meet most needs either in social housing or through private-sector retirement homes. While seniors social housing has more and more high-needs tenants with supports, its broader mandate was noted above and its scale is not

sufficient to meet all seniors support needs. Building retirement homes on a market basis is often not feasible or competitive in Northern Ontario, while lower-priced retirement homes need an active public role to ensure standards.

Mental health and addictions

Housing with supports is an essential part of strategies to meet the needs of people with serious mental illness, addictions, or histories of repeat or chronic homelessness. For long-term homeless people, it often involves helping people re-learn skills of independent life, such as paying rent, neighbourliness, shopping and budgeting, and meal preparation. For people with serious mental illnesses or with addictions, it often involves social support, case management, liaison with or referral to medical or treatment programs, and intervention if a crisis occurs.

Housing First approaches are widely recognized as a way to enable chronic homeless people, or those with serious mental illness or addictions, to return to stable lives and to no longer use or depend on emergency services. But Housing First approaches require intensive case management for long-term homeless people; and they depend on having ample housing with supports. Jurisdictions such as Calgary which have implemented these approaches have depended on large increases in funding for supportive and transitional housing. It will not be feasible to redeploy existing social housing or homelessness funding to meet the need for housing with supports.

6. Moving Forward on Housing and Homelessness

Moving forward on responses in Northern Ontario in affordable housing, homeless-related services, and housing with supports will require enhanced approaches in three main areas:

- Enhanced DSSAB/SM planning capacity and collaboration (including relations with Aboriginal organizations, the Health sector, and other main partners);
- Sharing and adoption of best practices among DSSABs/SMs;

- Federal and provincial policies that promote affordable housing and reduce homelessness.

6.1 DSSAB/SM capacity and collaboration

Diverse starting points today

Existing planning capacity varies greatly among DSSABs/SMs in Northern Ontario. Planning capacity is not necessarily correlated with DSSAB/SM size. But larger DSSABs/SMs typically have a wider range and complexity of services, and a more developed set of relationships with providers or networks. Planning capacity is a big challenge for a small DSSAB with only 2 or 3 head-office staff and little budget to hire consultants for 10-year planning or priority-setting.

Relationships to other main players vary from one community to another, as noted earlier. Particularly important are the relations with Aboriginal organizations and the Health sector.

Participants at the Pan-Northern Ontario Homelessness Summit expressed a strong interest in participating in 10-year planning processes led by DSSABs/SM.

Planning capacity for smaller DSSABs

Additional resources will be needed to enhance the planning capacity of smaller DSSABs. Many will be able to determine any changes warranted within the consolidated homelessness funding envelope, based on long experience of operating and funding programs. But to take stock and do more systematic re-engineering of programs (if warranted) will require dedicated resources. For example, it takes extra resources to analyze program information, consult with providers and other funders, review best practices and program options, determine new approaches, and set in place administrative procedures, communications, and staff training to implement these. Developing 10-year plans will require dedicated time and resources. The scope of planning processes will be necessarily limited unless there are enhanced resources.

Service Managers and Aboriginal organizations

While most DSSABs/SMs have relationships with Aboriginal organizations in connection with particular social housing projects they fund and particular initiatives, collaborative planning is not very far advanced in most communities. Yet most Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people live in the same labour markets and housing markets, which shape their well-being, opportunities, and living conditions. A stronger array of Aboriginal organizations has emerged in recent years.

The major urban Aboriginal organizations, including Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services, the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, and Friendship Centres in local communities, have expressed strong interest in collaborating with DSSABs/SMs. Most housing providers have relationships with DSSABs/SMs. Meanwhile some First Nation organizations seek an autonomous Aboriginal service system. It is important to ensure that Aboriginal people are well served both by Aboriginal organizations and by “mainstream” services in culturally appropriate ways. As the urban Aboriginal community grows, DSSABs/SMs and Aboriginal organizations will need to engage in joint planning processes and pursue collaborative priority-setting.

Service Managers and LHINs / health-funded providers

Many DSSAB/SM clients in affordable housing and homeless-related programs use or need supports in the areas of mental health, addictions, or aging in place. Such supports are mostly funded through the North East and North West Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs). Most DSSABs/SMs report that their existing relationships to LHIN/CCAC/health-funded providers are about specific projects/services (e.g. support services in a social housing project) rather than in planning and priority-setting.

Identified LHIN priorities include Aboriginal health, mental health and addiction services, aging in place and Alternate Level of Care strategies. Achieving good progress on these will be enhanced by collaboration with DSSABs/SMs. Adequately addressing these needs will require building stronger planning and priority-setting relationships between DSSABs/SMs and LHINs, CCACs, and LHIN-funded providers. This has started in some DSSABs/SMs in Northern

Ontario but is at a very early stage. Effective 10-year plans for affordable housing and homelessness will require a role for Health-funded services.

Moving toward collaborative planning between the DSSAB/SM sector and the Health sector will require relationship-building that progresses step-by-step over an extended period. The North West and North East LHIN should each commit to such an approach to working with the DSSABs/SMs in their respective region. These efforts would be greatly enhanced by a facilitative policy framework at the provincial level Ministry of Health and Long Term Care.

6.2 Enhancing best practices on homelessness

This report suggests the following as some of the best practices that are needed to address affordable housing and homelessness in a more strategic way in Northern Ontario. These are set out as a basis for discussion among NOSDA members and other funding and delivery partners.

Integrated human services – Coordinated intake and referral

Integrated human services is a priority across Ontario at the local level, and at intergovernmental levels in terms of internet / 211 / counter access. This has several aspects. One relates to coordinated access and referral, and harmonization of eligibility determination and income testing. Another involves protocols and linkages at the front-line level between different agencies and offices, to put into practice “no wrong door” approaches. This enables clients to quickly access services suited to their needs, and enables coordination and case management of clients using multiple services. The Nipissing example was noted above. Such systems necessarily extend to services that are not funded or overseen by the DSSAB/SM.

Systems of coordinated intake and referral to local community and health services are a model to strive for in every DSSAB/SM, in collaboration with other sectors.

Promoting best practices – Some suggested priorities

DSSABs/SMs face great challenges to enhance services and undertake planning while meeting day-to-day demands to operate existing programs and serve client needs with limited resources.

Northern Ontario DSSABs/SMs should seek to identify priority “best practices” that can be included in two major planning and program change processes over the next two years: the preparation of 10-year plans and the implementation of the “Phase 1” consolidation of homelessness programs. NOSDA could play a role in sharing information and mutual learning among its members.

As a basis for discussion, the following are suggested as a potential priority list of best practices to focus on in the short-term context of 2012 and 2013. Not all of these will necessarily be suited to or required by every DSSAB/SM.

- **Systems to use administrative data to analyze homelessness needs and issues**

There is great potential to make use of administrative (program/client) data to analyze clients’ needs, characteristics, and patterns of program usage, to support evidence-based planning. Larger Service Managers have taken steps in this direction. While the Ontario Works IT system (SDMT) has extensive client data, it is not configured to facilitate other uses. The federal HIFIS (Homeless Individuals Families and Information System) system has capacity to serve these service planning needs – not just for shelters – and information on this was provided at the Pan-Northern Ontario Homelessness Summit.

- **Service inventory and gaps analysis in smaller DSSABs**

A basic step in systematic service planning is to construct an inventory of existing programs and who they serve. Many DSSABs/SMs have done this, sometimes related to community planning under the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), but limited resources make it a challenge for others. Collaborating on an inventory and gaps analysis can be an early collaborative step between DSSABs/SMs and other sectors such as

Health, Violence against Women, Criminal Justice, and Aboriginal organizations.

- **Using shelters as a base for preventive programs and rehousing**

The past decade has seen a shift away from emphasis on emergency responses to homelessness, toward preventing people from losing their homes, and helping them regain housing quickly when they are homeless. Emergency shelter intake can help connect people with services that help them avoid losing their home; shelters themselves can be bases where tailored programs are provided to help people regain housing.

- **System change to promote Housing First approaches in larger DSSABs/SMs**

Housing First involves putting housing before treatment, for people whose mental illness or addictions are implicated in their homelessness. This approach, with long roots in Ontario, has been reinforced by the success of these ideas in recent years. But Housing First implies adjustments in funding priorities, agency relationships, and access to housing, to provide “wrap-around supports”, case management, and available housing options. This mostly applies in larger DSSABs/SMs with more complex service systems.

- **Mental health and addiction services for homeless people and shelter users**

While homeless people are diverse in their needs and the factors that led to that situation, mental health and addiction issues are widespread. DSSABs/SMs and homeless-serving agencies find that many homeless clients have unmet needs of this sort. Other homeless clients are connected to mental health or addiction services but these do not address the income and housing issues that also destabilize their lives.

- **Planning groups on assisted living in local communities.**

Of the affordable housing and support issues noted in this report, assisted living is perhaps the most widely understood. The connection is clear between the needs of seniors who can no longer live independently, and the need to maintain stable population and jobs in

smaller communities. There is an opportunity to involve local communities in exploring options for assisted living, and working with the DSSABs and LHINs on this.

- **Connections between DSSABs and Municipalities**

DSSABs have complex relations to municipalities in their area. It is important for local communities to understand that ordinary local residents are accessing DSSAB services, and the stresses that a lack of affordable housing places on local communities. It is important to ensure that municipal servicing, fees/levies, and regulatory approvals are favourable to housing solutions. The 10-year planning processes can be one means to identify shared interests and possible solutions and develop more effective collaboration.

Special information-sharing efforts for 2012 and 2013

DSSABs/SMs do much sharing of information, and NOSDA plays a role in this. The period of 2012 and 2013 presents special needs and opportunities for information-sharing relating to development of 10-year plans and local implementation of the consolidation of homelessness programs. These efforts can produce broader results in priority-setting and program delivery.

During 2012 and 2013, NOSDA could facilitate a special process of information-sharing among DSSABs/SMs in Northern Ontario. This can include electronic means (email and website), peer-to-peer learning, and quarterly learning meetings during this period. Priority areas would include:

- Approaches to community consultations, community liaison groups, and related processes in preparing 10-year housing and homelessness plans;
- Needs assessments for preparing 10-year housing and homelessness plans;
- Service planning under the new consolidated homelessness funding;
- Monitoring and metrics in the context of 10-year housing and homelessness plans;
- Understanding the implications of clients' migration across DSSAB/SM boundaries.

Intersectoral liaison bodies

Affordable housing and homelessness cross boundaries between the DSSAB/SM sector, Aboriginal organizations, and other sectors particularly Health, Criminal Justice, and Violence against Women. Systematic liaison is important to move toward more effective planning and priority-setting, building on the examples started in certain DSSABs/SMs.

The DSSAB/SM is seen as the “natural” body to lead collaborative planning in much of the community-based service sector. However, this is not necessarily the case from the point of view of the Health sector, Criminal Justice sector, or all Aboriginal organizations. In many communities special efforts may therefore be needed to achieve collaborative planning.

DSSAB/SM steering or coordinating groups for developing 10-year plans need to include representatives of Aboriginal organizations, and representatives of Health-sector organizations.

In addition, it may be useful to consider intersectoral liaison bodies in each DSSAB/SM that would meet on a regular basis – for example, a set of quarterly meetings from fall 2012 through fall 2013 as a pilot phase. Special emphasis could be placed on Health and Aboriginal services.

- A DSSAB/SM-Aboriginal liaison body in each DSSAB/SM could discuss the needs of clients served by Aboriginal and by DSSAB/SM funding and services, and from there explore shared issues, and potential for collaborative solutions and advocacy.
- A DSSAB/SM-LHIN liaison body in each DSSAB/SM could discuss the needs of clients served by Health and by DSSAB/SM funding and services, and on that basis identify shared priorities, issues, and opportunities for collaborative planning and priority-setting.

6.3 Federal and Ontario policy

DSSABs/SMs operate within broader economic and legal/institutional structures that are established, managed, or strongly influenced by the federal and provincial governments. These include broad policies that shape investment, economic growth, labour markets, and the role of the private sector. They include funding and overseeing education, health care, the largest elements of the social safety net, and the majority of non-DSSAB/SM community-based social services. They include federal responsibilities for First Nations and the well-being of Aboriginal people. They include setting the institutional structure, legal powers and fiscal resources of DSSABs/SMs. And they include many specific funding flows, program structures, and administrative rules that determine what DSSABs/SMs do and how they do it.

These larger “upstream” spheres primarily determine social well-being, housing conditions, housing investment, and risk of homelessness. They shape the social and economic realities that determine what the “downstream” DSSAB/SM affordable housing and homelessness programs must grapple with. Effective responses to housing and homeless issues in Northern Ontario will depend on federal and provincial actions at least as much as on action at the DSSAB/SM level.

Within affordable housing and homelessness, the federal government oversees the tax and financing systems that determine housing investment. The new provincial policy framework for affordable housing affirms it as a sphere where responsibilities are shared by all levels of government. DSSABs/SMs operate within a housing policy framework which is set provincially and which is cost-shared. A segment of supportive housing is directly overseen by MOHLTC and MCSS. Assisted living and the mental health and addictions services provided by MOHLTC and the LHINs serve many people using DSSAB/SM housing and homelessness programs.

Priority-setting and funding in social housing, housing with supports, new supply and repair programs, and housing allowances are therefore concerns of all levels of government.

The following distills some key issues identified in this report which most directly related to this federal and provincial policy role, and presents related recommendations. These are organized into federal actions, provincial actions, and joint ones.

Joint Federal and Ontario

Issue: There is strong concern in Northern Ontario about the future of federal-provincial funding once the Investment in Affordable Housing Program ends in 2014; this includes repair funding formerly provided through the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP).

Recommendation #1: The federal and Ontario governments renew capital funding for assisted new supply, home repair, social housing regeneration, and housing allowances / rent supplements, in 2014 at the end of current Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) funding.

Issue: Aboriginal people are a growing part of the Northern Ontario population, and migration from reserves greatly affects affordable housing and service needs in towns and cities. Housing and homeless services of First Nations, urban Aboriginal organizations and programs, and DSSABs/SMs, involve all levels of government in three largely uncoordinated systems.

Recommendation #2: The federal and Ontario governments establish a collaborative liaison group on Aboriginal housing and social services in Northern Ontario, jointly with First Nations, urban Aboriginal organizations, DSSABs/SMs and other sectors.

Recommendation #3: The federal government fund a general needs assessment, to be defined in collaboration with NOSDA and Aboriginal organizations, on housing and homelessness needs associated with migration from First Nations to urban centres in Northern Ontario.

Federal

Issue: The resource boom along with migration to towns and cities has led to higher rents and lower vacancies, severely squeezing the housing options and

housing stability of lower-income people in Northern Ontario. Adequate rental supply is a rising issue in the region.

Recommendation #4: The federal government re-examine the steps recommended in 2012 by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to preserve and create rental housing, including financing and tax changes to promote non-profit acquisition and private rental production.

Issue: The steadily declining annual federal social housing transfer to Ontario poses a large fiscal pressure for DSSABs/SMs as well as a threat to the viability of the social housing system, especially affecting deeply targeted urban Aboriginal and older DSSAB/SM-owned housing.

Recommendation #5: The federal government replace expiring housing transfers to the provinces with funding of at least similar magnitude, to address good repair of social housing, housing allowances and rent supplements, new affordable housing, and related needs.

Ontario

Issue: The large gap between market rent levels and the shelter component of social assistance limits the housing that the lowest-income residents can get, puts them at chronic risk of arrears, and creates excessive pressures on homeless prevention services delivered by DSSABs/SMs.

Recommendation #6: The Ontario government raise the shelter component of social assistance to a level equal to at least 60 percent of average market rents by local housing market.

Issue: Many people using DSSABs/SMs homeless services have mental health or addiction issues, stable housing for them requires support services, and alternate levels of care options for seniors are few in Northern Ontario. Effective 10-year planning for housing and homelessness requires collaborative priority-setting between DSSABs/SMs and Health funding bodies.

Recommendation #7: The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care establish a policy framework to foster collaboration between LHINs and

DSSABs/SMs on mental health and addictions as they relate to homelessness and housing stability, and assisted living for seniors.

Issue: The principle of strategic planning, and the acknowledged provincial and district/local roles in housing and homelessness, are not yet matched by an equivalent funding framework.

Recommendation #8: The Ontario government establish a framework of multi-year provincial funding to support the priorities established in DSSAB/SM 10-year housing and homelessness plans.

Issue: DSSABs/SMs are under much fiscal pressure and some, especially smaller ones, cannot easily find the staff or financial resources to carry out 10-year planning including associated needs assessments and consultations across dispersed local communities.

Recommendation #9: NOSDA work with potential granting bodies including foundations and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, to identify options for grants of \$50,000 per DSSAB for preparing 10-year plans and associated needs assessments and consultations.

Issue: Two significant provincial housing allowance programs end in 2012–2013, putting more lower-income residents at risk of arrears and eviction.

Recommendation #10: The Ontario government provide funding for housing allowances and rent supplement sufficient to extend benefits in place under ROOF and STRSP for a further five-year period, above and beyond the existing IAH envelope.

Issue: Long-term asset strategies are required for social housing in Northern Ontario, as reflected in the repair issues and identified mismatch of waiting list to available social housing units. Such issues are recognized in the expanded mandate of the Housing Services Corporation.

Recommendation #11: The Housing Services Corporation work with Northern Ontario DSSABs/SMs on long-term asset strategies for the

social housing stock, and financial strategies in the context of expiring mortgages and expiring federal subsidy.

Issue: Mining booms are creating intense housing demand pressures in some Northern Ontario communities, without any market housing supply response. These issues require a government role to ensure housing supply to meet demand. Experience points to options that could help channel some of the economic benefits of mining development to help meet these needs.

Recommendation #12: The Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Northern Development and Mines fund a needs analysis, to be defined in collaboration with NOSDA, on housing market impacts and housing investment requirements associated with mining booms in Northern Ontario towns; and fund a companion study to explore Community Benefits Agreements or Impact Agreements as one potential tool in this regard.

Appendices

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Participants in the Pan-Northern Ontario Homelessness Summit (June 12-13, 2012)

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April-May 2012

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	Algoma	Cochrane	Greater Sudbury	Kenora	Manitoulin-Sudbury	Nipissing
Affordable Housing						
Largest challenges in housing market (supply, demand, and needs)						
to follow	Very low vacancy rate. Virtually no new supply at almost any price range, owner or rental, despite rising demand and serviced lots available.	Tighter rental market. People with low incomes cannot afford market rents, too few affordable units.	People with low incomes cannot afford market rents, too few affordable units. Extreme variations between local communities – boom and decline, seniors and Aboriginals, etc.	Lack of affordable housing especially social housing	Loss of rental units to condo conversions	
Main factors contributing to housing needs						
to follow	Many fly-in workers coming to Timmins or via its airport, raising local housing demand in ways that are poorly understood.	Strong economy is not helping those at the low end of income scale. Significant aging of the population.	Affordable housing isn't located in communities where jobs and/or population has shifted to.	Shift of population to older age groups and unskilled people, as working people migrate out	Rising student population due to expansion of university/colleges	
to follow	Seasonal labour in forest industry and construction	OW benefits are low compared to rents. Greatest unmet needs among low-income singles and couples.	Large migration from reserves to towns, extreme situations in Kenora town, Red Lake & Sioux Lookout	Many Aboriginal families with various needs, and homes in poor repair		
Main housing program challenges						
to follow	Mining boom contributes to high contractor prices	Reduced funding to create new affordable housing – much less in IAH than AHP	Aging social housing stock, needing repairs.	Need for supports for tenants with mental health issues and addictions	Lack of small social housing units re waiting list profile	
to follow	Reduced funding under IAH, cancellation of RRAP – much less funding overall	Maintenance/repair of social housing, and non-profit governance/capacity	Social housing stock mismatched to those on waiting list (non-senior singles & couples) plus mismatch of locations/towns. Statutory (H.S.A.) hurdles to sell and redeploy assets	Reduced funding under IAH, total allocation is too small for new development, prioritizing repairs in IAH	Reduced funding under IAH, cancellation of RRAP	
to follow	Small contractors are few and need cash ASAP – challenge in repair programs	Social housing communities can be destabilized socially if supports not provided.	Various support services are needed for low-income singles in social housing, and for old elderly	Shortage of family units and of accessible units in social housing		
to follow		Need for more rent supplement	Distances make it costly to operate programs – staff spend time on the road	Need a better range of types and sizes of social housing units	IAH is all committed to new affordable project(s), no dollars for other priorities	
Other points on housing						
to follow	High construction costs, high energy costs, shorter lifespan of building elements	Older housing stock needing repair	Housing allowances are main IAH priority – best use of limited funds in context of migration and change.	High cost of building. Distances make it costly to operate programs – staff spend time on the road	Older housing stock needing repair	

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Affordable Housing

Largest challenges in housing market (supply, demand, and needs)					
	Vacancy rate is low, and rents are high relative to incomes in low-paying service/other jobs.	People with low incomes cannot afford market rents, too few affordable units.	Sharp rise in market rents in past 3 years, very low vacancy rate, and scarcity of low-rent units	Tighter rental market, scarcity of low-rent apartments	Poor repair of some housing
Main factors contributing to housing needs					
	Rising seniors population; lack of housing, home supports, supportive housing and long term care for seniors	Shift of population to older age groups and unemployed as working people migrate out (decline of pulp and paper sector)	Strong economy (resource boom spin-off + construction in education / health sector) means fewer options in market for lower incomes.	Shift to a population with more elderly people and more Aboriginals	Strong need for assisted living. Few or no options between one's own home and long term care.
		Strong need for assisted living.	Influx of young Aboriginal people. Also more seniors.	Shift to higher-skilled jobs in city labour market, but many of the in-migrants are lower-skilled.	Boom and bust in the mining sector
Main housing program challenges					
	Not enough rent-geared-to-income housing	Aging social housing stock, needing repairs. IAH does not address this.	Mismatch of unit sizes in social housing stock vs. waiting list	Mismatch of unit sizes in social housing stock vs. waiting list	Seniors social housing is becoming assisted living by default (lack of other options)
	See above – lack of supports to seniors.	Total IAH allocation is too small for new development, prioritizing repairs in IAH		Landlords are less interested in rent supplement in tight market, less willing to take high-needs tenants	Lack of accessible units (people with disabilities)
	Also lack of transitional housing	High vacancies in some older social housing that is lower-quality, in low-demand locations, or lacks accessibility		Maintenance/repair of social housing, and non-profit governance/capacity	High vacancies in some social housing that is in remote/rural locations
			Main chosen priority in IAH is renovation	Limited capacity to deliver new affordable housing	
Other points on housing					
	Much housing stock is in poor repair		Economic decline has not made conditions easier for low-income renters		

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	Algoma	Cochrane	Greater Sudbury	Kenora	Manitoulin-Sudbury	Nipissing
Homelessness prevention and response						
Largest challenges in homelessness and related risk						
to follow		homeless people – new data released April 2012. Homelessness is ill-defined, i.e. it's mostly couch-surfing and doubling up etc. Hasn't	Pressure on City to fund homeless services is an annual/ongoing concern.	Generally very under-served in the three main communities. No overall coordination of supports for high-needs populations.	Lack of mental health supports to prevent homelessness / keep people in stable housing	
Main factors contributing to homelessness needs						
to follow			Complex range of urban homelessness needs	Extremely high utility costs, high demand for assistance	High utility costs, high demand for assistance	Lack of affordable rental homes
to follow		Minimal mental health support services available, minimal seniors supports, few family doctors.	See above – low-income people cannot afford market rents	Few or no places for low-income people to live, so many are using shelters as interim housing	Lack of public transport to get to medical services, training, jobs, etc.	More families at risk since the 2008-10 recession
to follow			Crisis in hospital discharge re lack of Alternate Levels of Care options, suitable housing with supports	People with mental health issues and addictions – chronically homeless and needing support	No shelters except 1 Aboriginal shelter	Many unskilled and socially disconnected youth
to follow				Low-income singles unable to afford market rents	OW rates are too low for people to afford market rent, local funds are being used to provide a top-up benefit	People with mental/psych disabilities needing support
Main homelessness program challenges						
to follow		Although there is a good sense of the needs based on service delivery experience, there is little systematic evidence to base program planning on.	Need for mental health supports to achieve a true Housing First model. This	Need for core funding for shelters	Extremely high demand on EEF and LEAP funds for utility arrears	Long shelter stays (VAW & other) due to lack of affordable housing
to follow				Lack of supports generally, lack of detox in smaller communities, no residential treatment programs		
to follow				Few supports to help high-needs homeless people get housed and stay housed		
to follow		Need for a youth shelter, women's shelter, and expanded detox	Need for a Harm reduction facility and a Family shelter	Uncertainty about service implications of homeless program consolidation	Need for supports to tenants entering social housing via VAW Special Priority Policy	Need for a comprehensive approach to homeless mental health or addictions
Other points on homelessness						
to follow		Other needs (e.g. VAW, mental health) exacerbate housing problems but also vice-versa.		Income disparity, high needs, culture gap between Aboriginals and rest of community creates challenges	Affordable housing as a necessary part of responses to homelessness	Affordable housing as a necessary part of responses to homelessness
to follow				Lack of public transport to get to services, training, etc.		

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	Parry Sound	Rainy River	Sault Ste. Marie	Thunder Bay	Timiskaming
Homelessness prevention and response					
Largest challenges in homelessness and related risk					
No emergency shelter for men	Lack of affordable housing	Lack of affordable housing	Challenge of understanding the issues in a systematic and comprehensive way. Lack of good data for analysis is part of this.	Homelessness is ill-defined, i.e. it's mostly couch-surfing and doubling up etc. Hasn't been "on the radar"	
Main factors contributing to homelessness needs					
Housing that is not affordable	High utility costs, high demand for assistance	Difficulty keeping high-needs people housed	Large migration of Aboriginal people from north, large proportion of homeless population	High utility costs, high demand for assistance	
Housing that is in poor repair (if resident cannot afford to maintain it)	Lack of public transport to get to medical services, training, jobs, etc.	See below – assisted living	Lack of transitional housing for homeless people, especially families with children (VAW + others)		
	Some youth get asked to leave the parental home at 18, end up couch-surfing	Evictions arising from low income, job loss, arrears	Loss of jobs in resource towns, migration into city		
	Significant addiction issues among youth	Lack of supports for people with mental health issues	Mental health issues or addictions among homeless people		
Main homelessness program challenges					
Lack of housing with supports for people with mental health issues or addictions	No emergency shelter except VAW (but motel rooms rented if required)		Need for Intensive Case Management and related supports to achieve true Housing First model	Few support services and social workers for seniors tenants needing supports	
	Native Friendship Centre lacks sufficient resources		Need for culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal clients. This includes shelters.		
	Insufficient funding overall		How to achieve a comprehensive system of homelessness prevention and response		
	Need for a homeless coordinator to assist in prevention and link clients to the right services	Need for a family shelter	Identified need for a youth shelter. Need for harm reduction facility + related skills in existing shelters.		
Other points on homelessness					
		Couch-surfing among Aboriginals, but there is little good information on this	Affordable housing as a necessary part of responses to homelessness, lack of it as a major cause		

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	Algoma	Cochrane	Greater Sudbury	Kenora	Manitoulin-Sudbury	Nipissing
Needs of particular populations						
Seniors	to follow	Lack of assisted living. Access to CCAC services is limited.		See above – supports in seniors social housing	Lack of supports and medical care in small communities	Many requests for retrofit for seniors CCAC clients
Aboriginal People	to follow	Aboriginal migration is big, including seasonal or longer-term migration across DSSAB boundaries.		Many migrants from reserves have low income, high needs, and in many cases addictions		
Mental Health and Addictions	to follow	Lack of crisis supports for social housing tenants outside business hours		Lack of supports generally, lack of detox in smaller communities, no residential treatment programs		
Other points on particular needs	to follow	Need to better document the health-care savings arising from housing with supports.		Need for a stronger federal policy/program response on Aboriginal housing and homelessness; the issues on reserves and in towns are quite interrelated	Strong collaborative relationship on Community Living (developmental HC)	
Relations with other key sectors						
Seniors supports	to follow	Program/project level collaboration	Program/project level collaboration	Program/project level collaboration with NWLHIN	Program/project level collaboration with CCAC	
Aboriginal Organizations	to follow		Program/project level collaboration	Collaboration on particular projects, e.g. rent supp	Limited relationships, except reporting by funded housing providers	Good collaboration with Aboriginal housing providers
Mental Health Sector	to follow		Program/project level collaboration with providers, but coordination/links with NE LHIN are at early stages	Few relationships with LHIN or providers in the area of mental health & addictions	Limited involvement, overall lack of sufficient services	Have started toward collaborative planning with the NE LHIN
Local Municipalities	to follow	Complex relationship of DSSAB to local municipalities, competition for DSSAB resources.		Strong needs in several communities, competition for resources. Municipalities see social housing as a burden, not a solution	Complex relationship of DSSAB to local municipalities	Complex relationship of DSSAB to local municipalities
Comments on ...						
Migration	to follow	Steady out-migration, mostly youth and young adults. Not having services in Cochrane leads people to migrate to use services in larger centres.	Much in-migration from elsewhere – for jobs, education, health care, social services, etc. Many shelter users come from other communities.	Accelerating Aboriginal migration – see above. Steady out-migration of youth and young adults in many communities, leading to aging population profile	Many residents in scattered locations go into towns for services. Many go into Sudbury City.	Many transient people needing emergency assistance
Planning Capacity	to follow	Almost no head-office staff except director, for doing development of 10-year plan.	Sufficient capacity in place to prepare the 10-year plan. The current OP review, 2006 housing strategy, and 2011 HPS community plan will be part of the foundation.	Capacity is limited. Housing needs assessment done in 2009 will be helpful as one foundation; likewise existing capital plan for social housing.	Capacity for process to develop 10-year plan is a big challenge. Housing needs study was undertaken, should help. Distances also make consultations time-intensive.	Allocating resources for strategic planning processes is a challenge
Fiscal Concerns	to follow	Lack of resources to implement a plan. Hopeful that a good plan will become a basis to find the resources.	See above – Pressure on City to fund homeless services.	Concern about capping CSUB funds as part of homeless program consolidation		Concern about capping CSUB funds as part of homeless program consolidation
	to follow	Concern about consolidated homeless funding level for SM's that did not use all six related/prior programs	Fiscal considerations likely to constrain scope/priorities in 10-year plan.	Insufficiency of funding across almost all program areas		
	to follow	Concern about declining federal subsidy.	Concern that 10-year plan in context of reduced federal-provincial funding amounts to new download	Concern about rising pressure to fund social housing from local tax base, which is declining with pulp & paper / forestry sector.		Concern about declining federal subsidy.

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Needs of particular populations					
Seniors	See above – critical shortage of assisted living and long term care options	Strong need for assisted living.	Need for more assisted living	Need for more assisted living, especially in the smaller communities.	Assisted living is too costly for most of those who need it
Aboriginal People		Aboriginal migration into town is part of the range of clients and of needs	Many with low incomes needing small units; many reported couch-surfing.	Big issue – See above	
Mental Health and Addictions	Lack of housing with supports attached	No housing with supports for people with mental health issues or addictions	Need more support services to keep people housed	DSSAB serves homeless/at-risk people with mental health issues or addictions in shelters, social housing, and OW. Need supports and tailored services for them.	
Other points on particular needs				Seniors supportive project is main IAH priority.	
Relations with other key sectors					
Seniors supports	Insufficiency of support services	Program/project level collaboration with CCAC and seniors support agency	Mostly program/project level collaboration with CCAC	collaboration with CCAC. Ongoing collaboration with CMHA. Have started toward collaborative planning	Mostly program/project level collaboration with CCAC and home support agency
Aboriginal Organizations		Program/project level collaboration but no collaborative planning	Good relations with Aboriginal housing providers	DSSAB sits at table for Urban Aboriginal Strategy.	Limited relationships
Mental Health Sector	Pressure on seniors social housing to serve seniors discharged from acute care (no assisted living options), so other RGI needs go unmet	Weak relation with LHIN			Program/project level collaboration with CMHA
Local Municipalities	Devolution of housing to DSSAB "has not been well received" by municipalities that must pay for it		Necessary to balance needs of City with smaller communities in DSSAB	Visible homelessness is large issue in Thunder Bay city, vs. assisted living is large issue in smaller towns.	Complex relationship of DSSAB to local municipalities
Comments on ...					
Migration	No significant net migration in or out	See above – mostly out-migration		Many people migrate in for jobs, health care, and education; often with housing needs / risks.	
Planning Capacity	Complex relationship with 22 municipalities complicates the preparation of 10-year plan	Allocating resources for strategic planning processes is a challenge. Local group doing assisted living survey	Sufficient capacity to prepare the 10-year plan, although it is a significant extra load	Sufficient capacity to prepare the 10-year plan. Community looks to DSSAB to lead; challenging to manage expectations. Housing strategy (2010) will be part of foundation, and helped build relationships. DSSAB, City, United Way moving toward coordination; HPS entity separate from DSSAB.	Limited capacity, but have started preliminary steps with key partners to set basis for process to develop 10-year plan
Fiscal Concerns		Social housing repair falls to the municipal tax base to cover, and that tax base is declining		Per-diem shelter funding not high enough, chronic financial pressures	Lack of resources to implement a plan
				Concern about declining federal subsidy.	