



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Social and Affordable Housing Needs Growing While Supply Has Been Declining: Auditor General

(TORONTO) There are more households on waiting lists for social housing in Ontario than there are actually living in social housing, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says in her *2017 Annual Report*, tabled today in the Legislative Assembly.

“The Ontario wait list for social housing, representing about 185,000 households, is one of the biggest in the country relative to population size,” Lysyk said after her Report was tabled. “Under Ontario’s *Housing Services Act*, the Province is required to ensure that approximately 187,000 households receive social housing each year. However, since 2004 only about 167,000 households on average have received social housing annually.”

There is no Provincial strategy to address the growing social housing wait lists (185,000 households waiting as of 2016), the needs of the growing number of low-income Ontarians (1.9 million in 2016), and the risk of losing almost one-third of the existing affordable rental units in the Province (about 83,000 of 283,000 units).

Currently, there are 285,000 affordable housing units in Ontario. Despite increasing demand in Ontario for social and affordable housing, only 20,000 affordable units (below-market rental units) have been built in the last two decades. We found that Ontario’s stock of affordable housing as a percentage of its total population was about 2%. In comparison, Denmark and England’s percentages were 8% and 11%.

Construction of new affordable housing slowed considerably after 1996, and the number of affordable units is dropping as contracts with housing providers begin to expire. The Province does not have complete information on how many affordable units have been lost, and what the impact has been on tenants.

Other findings in the audit include:

- Wait times for social housing are lengthy and growing even longer. Applicants on wait lists can only obtain social housing when a vacancy arises, but only 5% of people on the lists obtain housing in any given year. Wait times tracked by the municipal service managers we visited ranged from two to nine years.
- Social housing in Ontario is provided on a first-come, first-served basis rather than on assessed need (except for abused victims, who receive priority). Most other provinces use assessed need to provide social housing. The only financial eligibility criterion to qualify for social housing is household income—however, applicants on wait lists have been found to own significant assets. As well, some applicants on wait lists do not live in Ontario, but will be entitled to a unit when their turn comes on the wait list.
- Contracts with other pre-1996 social-housing providers (i.e., not-for-profits, cooperatives and private landlords) obligate them to provide about 83,000 below-market-rate rental units in Ontario. These contracts are beginning to expire (about 50% will have expired by the end of 2020, and the last by 2033). Some housing providers have already increased rents, and are converting below-market-rate rental units to market-rate rental units. The Ministry of Housing does not have complete information on how many below-market-rate units have been lost, and what the impact has been on tenants.

- Ontario does not do enough to integrate its housing and employment supports to encourage and help social housing tenants to move to a market-rate unit. Other provinces such as British Columbia and Saskatchewan have better integration of housing and employment supports

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