

Media Release

February 21, 2018

Provincial Government Invests Funding to Help Prevent and End Homelessness

Today, the Honourable Lisa Dempster, Minister Responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC), announced \$740,000 in funding for The Gathering Place and End Homelessness St. John's as part of NLHC review initiatives. This funding, provided through the NLHC, will assist the two non-profit organizations to prevent and end homelessness, foster long-term housing stability and provide on-site and outreach support services.

The Gathering Place will receive \$500,000 to support an enhanced service model that looks at health and wellness, personal well-being, ability enhancement and sustainability which is supported through the work of over 760 volunteers. This is in addition to in-kind supports The Gathering Place receives from Eastern Health and the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

An investment of \$240,000 is also being provided to End Homelessness St. John's. The funding will assist in expanding the delivery of rent assistance for clients with complex service needs. It will also advance work in key areas of coordinated access and triage for persons experiencing, or at risk of homelessness and help improve data collection and information sharing on the homeless population.

This funding supports the Provincial Government's commitment in The Way Forward to partner with the community sector to improve service delivery by implementing collaborative and client-focused interventions to improve support to individuals with complex service needs. Today's announcement is one of a number of initiatives identified in the review to improve both the efficiency and services of NLHC's programs. Further initiatives are highlighted in the backgrounder below.

The NLHC is continuing to develop a new and comprehensive provincial housing and homelessness plan. All provinces and territories are currently working with the Federal Government to confirm funding allocations and define how the National Housing Strategy, released in November 2017, will support provincial priorities for housing while contributing to shared national housing outcomes.

Quotes

"Safe, stable and affordable housing is fundamental to the social and economic well-being of individuals, families and our communities. We recognize the tremendous benefit of having strong and dedicated community-based organizations throughout the province. We also look forward to working with them and the Federal Government as we move forward in the development of our provincial housing and homelessness plan."

Honourable Lisa Dempster

Minister Responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation

“The Gathering Place is a street level community centre dedicated to providing health, social and supportive living needs to over 2,000 marginalized people in St. John’s and surrounding areas. This funding will help us continue providing these critical supports and services to those who struggle daily with mental health issues, addictions, poverty and homelessness. Our facility is largely resourced through the caring contribution of over 760 volunteers along with the dedication of 10 full-time staff members.”

Sister Elizabeth Davis
Co-Chair, The Gathering Place

“We welcome funding from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation to help us assist people who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness. We are also delighted to receive funds to coordinate our community’s homeless-serving system and improve access to housing and community services.”

Shawn Skinner
Chair, End Homelessness St. John’s

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Learn More

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation – www.nlhc.nl.ca

The Gathering Place – kindnesswanted.ca

End Homelessness St. John’s – www.nlhcn.org/ehsj-a.htm

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BACKGROUNDER

Highlights of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Review Initiatives

Increase the supply of affordable housing

Government will invest \$6 million to create additional affordable housing units in partnership with the private and non-profit sector, to benefit as many low income households as possible. An invitation for proposals was issued through NLHC on January 20, 2018. This will bring the total of new affordable units created through the Federal/Provincial Investment in Affordable Housing Agreement spanning 2003-2019 to close to 1,700.

Improve the Rent Supplement Program

In fiscal year 2018-19, government will provide additional funding under the Federal/Provincial Social Infrastructure Fund Agreement towards this program to increase the number of rent supplement units.

Government will introduce a portable rent supplement pilot program. Currently rent supplements are attached to a unit, not the individual client and are not portable in nature. Government recognizes that portable rent supplements support Housing First principles and a client's right to self-determination. The program will select up to 100 clients over a two-year period to evaluate portability. The pilot group will comprise 50 existing clients who have requested a rental transfer and 50 from the waitlist as budget and vacancies allow.

Unlike tenants of NLHC's public rental units, rent supplement clients in the private market are required to pay a security deposit to the landlord. For some low income households, this required security deposit can be a barrier to being housed. Government will work in partnership with landlords of its rent supplement program to eliminate this barrier. In cases where the security deposit is a housing barrier, landlords will collect the security deposit from the tenant over a period of six months, with flexibility for extenuating circumstances. NLHC will provide a guarantee to the landlords until the security deposit is collected.

Enhance and extend the Downpayment Assistance Program

To provide continued support to new homebuyers, government will extend and enhance its pilot Downpayment Assistance Program for an additional year. The extension will provide program adjustments to address the impact of new mortgage rules introduced by the Federal Government in October 2016 and the results of the two-year pilot. Program enhancements include increasing the average household income maximum from \$65,000 to \$75,000, allowing a guarantor for mortgage financing, and requiring applicants to have conditional pre-approval for a mortgage from a financial institution.

Improve support to community centres

Community centres contribute substantially to the quality of life in the social housing neighbourhoods they serve. To improve support to these centres, NLHC will fund two social worker positions to work directly in the five community centres in the St. John's area. These positions will provide proactive interventions to youth and families to help improve academic performance and increase engagement in education by youth and parents. Such positive interventions can also promote healthy lifestyles and capacity in the community to connect with community resources to address mental health and addictions and other social issues. An evaluation of the results will be reviewed during 2018-19, including consideration of how this model, if successful, can be adapted to the remaining community centres.

Transform programs using Housing First

A Housing First approach recognizes that permanent housing, combined with individualized flexible supports, without preconditions of wellness or sobriety, is essential to promote housing stability for individuals with multiple and complex needs. Implementing a Housing First approach for programs and a provincial response to homelessness that incorporates Housing First principles will improve housing stability and client outcomes, reduce the amount of time that clients spend interacting with various systems and reduce demand for costly emergency response services.

To further align more immediate opportunities within government for improved collaboration and coordination for emergency shelter and housing for the homeless, effective June 1, 2018, NLHC will assume accountability for coordination of access to emergency shelters and accommodations from the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour and accountability and support of transition housing from the Regional Health Authorities.

Establish an eviction prevention framework

Evictions and multiple re-housing are common challenges in Housing programs and result in costs to the tenant, landlord and the public. NLHC will move forward to develop a comprehensive eviction prevention framework to improve housing stability. An eviction prevention framework can assist individuals to remain housed. Components of such a framework include, for example, identification of at-risk individuals, developing indicators that trigger early interventions, identifying key points of intervention in the eviction

process, developing partnerships with landlords and community services providers, and educating tenants on their role and responsibilities for a successful tenancy.

Improve stability of funding for housing support workers

Under the Supportive Living Program, Government provides funding to various community agencies to employ nine housing support worker positions in rural parts of the province – Carbonear, Burin, Clarenville, Gander, Grand Falls-Windsor, Corner Brook, Stephenville, Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Labrador West. These housing support workers work directly with individuals who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness to find stable and affordable homes. Currently, these community agencies are required to reapply for funding for housing support workers on an annual basis. Government will provide stable funding for Housing Support Workers through a two year commitment of funding for 2018-19 and 2019-20.

Optimize the use of NLHC public rental housing

NLHC has a rental portfolio of 5,599 units that vary in size and bedroom count. The housing stock, which consists of mostly larger units, continues to pose a challenge in accommodating today's applicants who require primarily one or two bedroom units. This represents the shifting demographic over the years from larger to smaller families, an aging demographic as well as an increased percentage of single individuals comprising clients receiving income support.

To assess opportunities to improve the overall utilization of stock to meet current and future housing needs, NLHC will look at current use of and demand for housing units, changing demographics, and regional needs. During 2017-18, NLHC will complete a comprehensive assessment of options for improved utilization of the NLHC housing portfolio to inform development of the Provincial Housing and Homelessness Plan. This will include assessing, for example, opportunities to utilize federal funding on reconfiguring existing units where it is effective to do so, increasing the number of accessible units, exploring the feasibility of further piloting shared accommodations, and exploring partnership opportunities with community organizations for use of some of NLHC units for housing and other social uses.

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