

REPORT OF THE
PROVINCIAL TASK FORCE
ON HOMELESSNESS

October 1998

The Honourable Janet Ecker
Minister of Community of Social Services
Hepburn Block
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1E9

Dear Minister:

As Chair of the Provincial Task Force on Homelessness, I am pleased to provide you with our final report.

As you will see in the report, homelessness is a very complex issue that defies a single solution. However, we believe that there are approaches which could, in both the short and long term, improve the system of supports and services for homeless people and ultimately reduce the incidence of homelessness.

I would like to acknowledge the help of my Parliamentary Assistant colleagues who made up the Task Force, including John Parker, Steve Gilchrist, Dan Newman, and Jim Brown.

On behalf of the Task Force, I want to express our appreciation for the support and input of the municipalities who helped to arrange and participated in our consultations. The Task Force could not have completed its work without their enthusiastic support of our approach and objectives, and the valuable input received from them and their community service partners.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be involved in this important issue.

Yours sincerely,



Jack Carroll
Chair, Provincial Task Force on Homelessness

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Homelessness is a complex problem that is rarely the result of a single cause; it usually results from a combination of individual and societal failures. A common characteristic of most homeless people is that they have lost their connection to personal supports--family, employment, community and friends.

Ontario's homeless population includes single adults with drug and alcohol dependencies, post-release offenders, people suffering from mental illness, families with children and young people. Homeless people need help in re-establishing connections to networks of support that foster independence and self-sufficiency.

Ontarians are increasingly concerned about the impact of homelessness on community life, public safety and business. Solutions to address these concerns require the involvement of communities, business owners and operators, municipal officials, the police and service providers.

Current provincial and municipal funds committed to responding to homelessness are significant, totaling well over \$100 million. In addition, the province has announced several initiatives that in the longer term will contribute significantly to addressing the problems that can lead to homelessness. In the meantime, however, too much of current spending is restricted to short-term, band aid approaches to crisis situations.

Services for homeless people are currently variable and fragmented at the community level. Some municipalities are quite active in providing resources, while others are not. It is clear that when communities do not respond to this need, they are very likely adding to the larger problem of homelessness.

The failure of immigrant sponsorships and continuing delays in the refugee determination process result in higher social assistance costs and added pressures on programs and services for homeless people. Inadequate federal support for immigrant and refugee settlement programs makes it more difficult for newcomers to become independent and self-sufficient.

The federal government has been virtually absent from efforts to improve the climate for growth in affordable accommodation. It is essential that all levels of government share responsibility for removing barriers to the creation of additional rental accommodation, and in fostering more creative approaches to its development.

There is growing recognition that municipalities are the level of government best suited to act as the manager of the system of services for homeless people. They are in an ideal position to assess local needs, plan and set priorities, allocate resources and integrate services.

Municipalities are currently frustrated at what they regard as provincial barriers to improvements--unclear expectations and complicated funding rules that favour short-term crisis services and prevent more creative responses.

Long-term solutions to homelessness cannot be compartmentalized between the provincial and municipal levels; they must be coordinated. To build the capacity of municipalities to act as the service system manager for homelessness, the province needs to establish province-wide outcomes, address its program “silos” and provide more flexible support to municipalities.

In late May the Task Force delivered an interim recommendation to the Government--that the province should assume major funding responsibility for domiciliary hostels.

These provide housing and supports to people who might otherwise be homeless. The Government accepted this recommendation, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing announced on June 12, 1998 that the province will provide approximately \$14 million in funding to domiciliary hostels retroactive to the beginning of this year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our consultations throughout Ontario, and based on our review of existing services and programs for homeless people, we offer the following recommendations for measures to create a more effective response to homelessness, and to improve provincial support for municipal efforts to assist homeless people:

- 1. To create an integrated network of accessible, community-based services and supports to reconnect homeless people to society and strengthen their ability to stay connected:**
 - 1.1 A major priority should be strategies that reconnect homeless people to networks of support to foster independence and self-sufficiency.
 - 1.2 Service systems should be encouraged to make their services more accessible to people who have difficulty accessing mainstream services. For example:
 - Mental health reform to address the needs of individuals being discharged from hospitals;
 - The education system for youth at risk of leaving school early;
 - Ontario Works for hard to serve clients;
 - Correctional Services to link post-release offenders to community services and supports.
 - 1.3 Through the Making Services Work for People planning process, communities should consider how local agencies, including Children’s Aid Societies, should respond to the challenges presented by homeless young people. A major priority should be early identification of those at risk of becoming homeless, and homelessness prevention.

2. To support municipalities as the local service system manager for homelessness services:

- 2.1 Municipalities should be designated as the local service system manager for homelessness.
- 2.2 Municipalities should work with community agencies and provincial ministries to develop coordinated strategies to achieve three outcomes:
- Moving people from the streets to emergency accommodation;
 - Moving people from emergency to permanent accommodation; and
 - Preventing homelessness by supporting the retention of permanent accommodation.
- 2.3 The \$4 million homelessness fund should be allocated to municipalities to achieve those outcomes.
- 2.4 Provincial program structures and funding mechanisms should be rationalized to support the planning and management role of municipalities.
- 2.5 Provincial ministries should ensure that their allocations for homelessness services are consistent with municipal business plans and priorities.
- 2.6 The province should confirm its continued funding of emergency hostels at the level of 80%.

3. To ensure greater emphasis on early identification and prevention of homelessness and to support the retention of housing:

- 3.1a Municipalities should work with their communities and service providers to identify and develop successful delivery strategies to achieve the three core outcomes.
- 3.1b Municipalities must be pro-active in reaching out to Aboriginal communities and their leaders in addressing the homelessness problems of Aboriginal people.
- 3.2 The province should provide flexibility that allows municipalities to redirect a portion of emergency hostel dollars to those strategies.
- 3.3 The relevant provincial ministries should assess the levels of service provided to domiciliary hostel clients, as part of developing a long term integrated approach to the housing needs of clients with special needs.
- 3.4 The province should assume major funding responsibility for domiciliary hostels. This was a preliminary recommendation that the government accepted and announced in June 1998.

4. To relieve Ontario and its municipalities of the substantial social assistance costs that result directly from federal immigration policies:

- 4.1 The federal government should be responsible for income support for refugee claimants, and introduce tighter sponsorship criteria and more effective monitoring and enforcement measures aimed at reducing the likelihood of sponsorship default.
- 4.2 The federal government should ensure immigrant and refugee settlement and integration programs are adequately funded.

5. To improve the climate for private investment in rental accommodation:

- 5.1 The federal government should review its housing and tax policies to improve their support for the creation of private sector rental accommodation.
- 5.2 The province should identify opportunities for facilitating increased partnerships between the private sector and all levels of government.
- 5.3 Ontario municipalities should consider the following steps to create a more positive climate for rental accommodation development:
 - Streamlining of zoning by-laws and planning approvals to decrease development costs;
 - Taxing new multi-residential rental buildings at the lower single residential rate;
 - Eliminating existing overlaps in building, fire and property standards, and consolidating regulation enforcement through a single inspection authority, and
 - Ensuring that municipal construction requirements do not exceed provincial requirements.

SECTION 1: MEMBERSHIP AND MANDATE

On January 29, 1998, the Hon. Janet Ecker, Minister of Community and Social Services, announced the appointment of a provincial task force to make recommendations on coordinating efforts to help the homeless throughout Ontario.

The members of the Task Force were:

- Jack Carroll (Chair)
MPP for Chatham-Kent
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services
- Steve Gilchrist
MPP for Scarborough East
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Jim Brown
MPP for Scarborough West
Parliamentary Assistant to the Solicitor General and Minister of Correctional Services
- Dan Newman,
MPP for Scarborough Centre
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Health
- John Parker
MPP for York East
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister Responsible for Native Affairs

Each of these Ministries has direct connections to population groups who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

When the Task Force was appointed, the province also announced increased funding of more than \$6 million to support municipalities and community-based organizations in meeting the needs of homeless people locally:

- \$4 million from the Ministry of Community and Social Services to support recommendations from the Task Force; and
- \$2.5 million from the Ministry of Health for front-line mental health outreach programs in Toronto, Ottawa, London and Hamilton.

The mandate of the Task Force was to consider and develop:

- recommendations on how the province might better support municipalities in improving their response to homelessness, including priorities for the allocation of the \$4 million;
- responses which build on community partnerships with all sectors; and
- initiatives to help keep public streets and areas safe.

SECTION 2: COMMON THEMES: WHAT WE HEARD

The Task Force was aware that municipalities across Ontario vary considerably in their approaches to addressing homelessness, and in the range of services present within communities. In recognition of this diversity, a broadly-based consultation process was developed:

- Nine representative municipalities were chosen to take part in the consultations, including Kingston, Ottawa, Durham Region, Hamilton, Kenora, Thunder Bay, Windsor, London and Toronto. In addition, a town hall meeting was held in Newmarket.
- Through their Heads of Council, municipalities were asked to design their local consultation, and to invite service providers, advocacy groups and other key informants.
- Although a general discussion guide was developed to reflect the initial areas of interest to the Task Force, each municipality was encouraged to host a meeting that would strongly reflect local issues, responses and concerns.
- To provide an additional avenue for consultation, a day was set aside for all MPPs to bring forward local issues to the Task Force.
- Throughout the process, the Task Force accepted written submissions from interested groups.

By the end of its consultations, the Task Force had heard from approximately 400 individuals representing at least 150 organizations, including police, school boards, advocacy groups, service providers, business groups, political representatives, and homeless people themselves.

The following findings reflect what the Task Force heard during the consultations across the province. Although each community had its own view of the issues, participants had remarkably consistent comments on the reasons for homelessness, possible solutions and the barriers to improving services.

1. Homelessness is not just a single issue; it stems from a multitude of failures.

A Complex Problem

While participants in the consultations often expressed different views as to the principal cause of homelessness, they generally agreed its roots are many and varied. The faces of homeless people are individual, but the factors that led to their situation are usually a combination of individual and societal failures. The many dimensions of homelessness were captured by a comment we heard in Ottawa: "Please resist the temptation to look for one solution to homelessness. The problem is very complex."

The path to homelessness is not generally traveled overnight. The causes can often be traced to individual or family problems--failed marriages or relationships, physical and sexual abuse, dysfunctional families, poor work skills and unemployment. Some homeless people have made choices, such as alcohol or drugs, that led to the street. Others are there because of circumstances beyond their control, as in the case of people with mental illness and the children of homeless parents.

A common and compelling characteristic of homeless people is that they are unconnected to personal social supports--to family and employment, to their hometown, to people they trust who can help them through a difficult time or link them to a support network. The importance of personal supports is illustrated by a comment at the Toronto consultation: "Most of us say we're independent, yet our connections with families, workplace and community are what enable us to function. For someone with no connections, just providing a roof over his head won't work."

2. The profile of homeless people in Ontario includes five key groups:

- **single adults with drug and alcohol dependencies;**
- **post-release offenders;**
- **people suffering from mental illness;**
- **homeless families; and**
- **young people, including street kids with children.**

Single Adults

This is the largest and most visible group among the homeless. They are typically subject to chronic drug and alcohol addictions, and have often been homeless for a lengthy period. In many cases their addictive behaviour means that even if they can obtain housing, maintaining it is next to impossible without supports. Their work skills are often long outdated, and employment is therefore not an immediate prospect. Members of this group are major consumers of emergency hostel services and other high cost crisis services.

In some communities, a substantial proportion of this homeless population is made up of Aboriginal people. They particularly suffer from the loss of connections to family and community that result from migration to urban areas. In our meeting with Aboriginal leaders, they indicated strongly that the search for solutions to homelessness must involve both them and members of Aboriginal communities. This view was echoed in the community consultations. We were told that municipalities should be more proactive in reaching out to Aboriginal communities and their leaders in addressing the homelessness problems of Aboriginal people.

Post-Release Offenders

For people being released from provincial correctional facilities, discharge planning is made available to ensure that the individual has a place to go in the community. However, although discharge planning is available for all people being released, and indeed is mandated as a condition of release for parolees, it cannot be forced on those who have completed their sentences. Among this latter group, it is estimated that approximately one-third go to emergency hostels upon release.

This has led to frustration in some communities who may feel that the correctional system is "dumping" post-release offenders without the necessary support. At several of the consultations, participants suggested the correctional system ensure that discharge planning is accessed by all offenders who are about to return to the community.

The Mentally Ill

Estimates vary, but perhaps as many as one-third of all homeless people suffer from a serious mental illness. Participants in the consultation agreed that past reforms to Ontario's mental health system were not matched by the development of appropriate community services. As a consequence, deinstitutionalization and early discharge were not in the past supported by the creation of a comprehensive continuum of care. As one participant in the Toronto meeting put it, "Obviously there used to be too many people in hospital, but now there are too many on the street."

Investments are being made to enhance case management, community treatment and crisis response, and these are recognized as making a positive difference. Still, too many mentally ill people continue to be at risk of becoming homeless; many do not have the stability and/or skills to maintain housing.

Many participants argued that it is inappropriate for hospitals to be discharging patients into an emergency hostel. Emergency hostels are not equipped to operate as overflow capacity for the mental health system. Too often, seriously ill people in distress are forced to leave hostels because they pose a danger to themselves or to others. The number of mentally ill people who refuse to take their prescribed medication was identified as an unresolved challenge for the mental health system, and should be addressed through mental health reform.

As mental health reform proceeds, it will be important to continue reinvesting in community services, and to improve coordination among existing services between the provincial and municipal levels.

Families

Several communities are seeing a marked increase in the number of homeless families, predominately single parents with children. A number of causes were cited during the consultations, including spousal abuse and family violence, addictions and unemployment. For families, the route to homelessness often begins with the loss of a job. Low skills and the changing workplace add to the risks of homelessness.

Significant concerns were expressed in all of the consultations about children in homeless families. Meeting their special needs presents a serious challenge for schools and community service providers. The dislocation experienced by these children places them at risk of future difficulties, including their own cycle of homelessness.

In addition, early identification and supports for high-risk families are needed to break the cycle of poverty, and prevent isolation and homelessness. Key early intervention services include parenting skills, budgeting assistance and life skills training.

Young People

The increasing presence of young people among the homeless is a disturbing trend for the future. Growth in the number of homeless youth was cited in practically every one of the consultations we held across the province. The reasons most commonly cited were family breakdown and child abuse. Several communities reported an increase in teenage mothers living on the street with their children. Obviously both mothers and children are at high risk of a repeating cycle of poverty, ill health and homelessness. The high illiteracy rate of street youth was frequently cited as a strong indicator of reduced prospects for employment and self-sufficiency.

A common theme we heard throughout the consultations was the need to make homeless youth a target for preventive approaches. Many participants were critical of the inability of mainstream agencies to respond adequately to the challenges of disaffected youth:

- With respect to Children's Aid Societies, three significant concerns were raised. Participants felt that CASs need to improve their early identification of, and support for, children in at risk families. They expressed concern that some Societies appear to back out of providing services for some 13-15 year old teens in anticipation of their reaching the age of 16, at which CAS involvement ends. We also heard calls for the Societies to develop more flexible approaches to providing outreach, supports and safety to street youth.
- The education system was criticized in several respects--for its inability to motivate young people to stay in school, and for its lack of emphasis on teaching basic life and employment skills and budgeting.
- Many felt that existing youth services at the community level are uncoordinated and therefore confusing to those looking for help.

Homeless youth are particularly mobile, and when they move to another community, they can easily become disconnected. Therefore, a key objective of youth services should be to keep young people in their home communities so that they can maintain their existing support networks, such as family, friends, teachers, coaches, etc. This reinforces the need for all communities to ensure that a reasonable level of youth services are available.

- 3. The failure of immigrant sponsorships, lengthy delays in the refugee determination process and inadequate newcomer settlement support services all result in higher social assistance costs and added pressures on programs and services for homeless people. The federal government's failure to address these issues drains resources from provincial, municipal and charitable programs.**

Sponsored Immigrants

A large portion of newcomers to Canada come to Ontario. Federal immigration policies require that "family class" immigrants be covered by a sponsorship agreement, through which close relatives agree to support the immigrant and his or her dependants for ten years.

Although the federal government sets the rules in this area, the province and the municipalities bear the costs of social assistance when sponsors default on their agreements. In the absence of this support, those individuals would be at risk of homelessness, adding to the pressures on the provincial-municipally-funded hostel system. The roughly 30,000 failed sponsorships cost Ontario between \$242 million and \$278 million per year in social assistance payments. The federal government provides no reimbursement for these costs, or for the hostel costs of those individuals who become homeless.

Refugee Claimants

Individuals who make a claim for refugee status upon or after their arrival in Canada must have their claim adjudicated by the federal Immigration and Refugee Board. This process remains too lengthy. Many spend weeks or even months living in hostels until they can become settled into the community. If they are found to be in financial need, Ontario provides refugee claimants with the same social assistance benefits as landed immigrants or Canadian citizens.

This is a frustrating and costly situation for all concerned--the claimants, municipalities and the province alike. Communities which welcome the largest number of refugees, particularly Toronto, point out that these people typically are strongly motivated to move out of hostels and become self-sufficient. Once out of hostels, they rarely become homeless again.

The estimated current number of refugee claimants receiving social assistance is 10,000, representing annual costs to the province and municipalities of roughly \$80 million. As in the case of failed immigrant sponsorships, the federal government does not reimburse the government of Ontario or municipalities for these costs.

Settlement and Integration Services

We heard growing concern in those communities that receive the largest numbers of newcomers, about inadequate federal support for settlement and integration services for immigrants and refugees. In the absence of these services, some newcomers will remain trapped in hostels and on social assistance, resulting in personal frustration, unnecessary dependence and higher costs.

4. Public concern over homelessness is growing in Ontario. People are increasingly concerned about public safety and the impact of homelessness on businesses and community life.

The public behaviour of some homeless people is a growing issue in several of the communities we visited. Concerns ranged from fears for public safety and personal security, to the frustration of business owners located in areas where homeless people congregate. "From the business perspective, there is fear of being robbed or having your customers hassled." (Kenora Meeting, April 5) Police and community agencies also expressed frustration at being caught between homeless people and community demands to respond to public intoxication and threatening behaviour.

The issue of Bill 47 was raised at several consultations. This 1994 legislation, brought in by the former NDP government, removed the ability of the courts to force rehabilitation on people convicted of public intoxication. At our Kenora consultation, we were told that Bill 47 resulted in the loss of a wilderness work camp that was seen by many participants, including formerly homeless people, as effective in encouraging people to examine their lifestyle and deal with their addictions.

While a very small percentage of homeless people are responsible for these confrontations with the general public, the concerns we heard are impossible to ignore. At several consultations, there was agreement that solutions will require coordination among neighbourhood residents, the business community, municipal governments, police and service providers to ensure public safety. In the longer term, the province may wish to address possible law enforcement responses to this problem with municipalities.

5. The economic case for responding more effectively to homelessness is compelling, but simply spending more money is not the solution. We need to address *how* the money is spent.

Services for homeless people need to be focused on three objectives:

- **Moving homeless people off the streets and into hostels;**
- **Moving people from hostels into permanent housing; and**
- **Prevention of homelessness, ie., services for people at risk of losing housing to prevent them from going to the street or to a hostel.**

High Cost Emergency Services

Homelessness is expensive, but the largest current response--\$70 million for emergency hostels--provides only a short-term, band-aid approach to crisis situations. In the absence of more effective responses, a small percentage of homeless people, most notably single adults with dependencies and the mentally ill, are intensive and often chronic users of other emergency services--policing, criminal justice and health care. These emergency services are expensive. A 911 emergency services response in Toronto costs \$2,400.00. A full police services case profile in Toronto costs between \$11,000.00 and \$16,000. Provincial court time costs \$684.00 per hour, and incarceration in a provincial correctional facility costs approximately \$125 per day.

Because the province does not set a ceiling on hostel expenditures, municipalities are given the flexible capacity to respond to the need for emergency shelter as it fluctuates. We heard a strong consensus that although emergency hostels will not end or prevent homelessness, their continued funding is vital so that homeless people have access to shelter and basic needs.

There is no clear agreement as to how municipalities should respond to situations where people in the same month receive a welfare cheque, which includes a shelter allowance, and also stay in an emergency hostel. Some estimates suggest this practice may involve as many as 60% of the emergency hostel client caseload. If that is accurate, it means that substantial resources are being spent which could be better redirected.

Municipalities, particularly large ones like Toronto, need to ensure that through their policies for emergency hostels they are actively discouraging double-dipping. There may be a need to determine whether there are particular client groups who are more likely to be chronic users of hostels as well as receiving welfare, and develop diversion strategies to discourage such practices. The need for a viable safety net must be balanced with the public's interest in ensuring that resources are maintained for those who truly need them.

More Effective Alternatives

Providing a broader range of support services to homeless people is likely a cost-effective way of reducing homelessness and lessening the use of more expensive emergency services. While the availability of alternative services will not prevent crises from arising that require an emergency response, such services will certainly lessen the need for them. As one presentation in Ottawa put it, "Successful housing of homeless people depends on getting them connected and supported. So, when you give money, tie it so it has to be used to prevent homelessness, find homes or support people."

When our Task Force was appointed, the province allocated \$4 million to improve services in support of homeless people, and asked us to seek advice from communities for their advice on how that money should be spent.

The following chart describes the kind of specific housing support initiatives necessary to create a more effective approach to homelessness. These are the kinds of options being considered in several of the communities we visited.

Objective	Examples of Housing Support Initiatives
Move people off the streets into hostels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Street outreach workers -Street help line -Extended 24 hr drop-in -Meal programs to entice people into shelters
Move people in hostels into housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Housing registries -Portable supportive housing workers -Housing help workers to work with landlords to place "hard to house" -Trusteeship/rent paid direct in exchange for lower rent/waive first and last month's rent -Improved voice mail access -Transportation to find housing
Homelessness prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Mobile crisis support for tenants and landlords -Rent banks for people about to be evicted -Supports for independent living: life skills, money management, literacy, pre-employment support -Facilitation/seed money for community economic development -Landlord mediation and education -Tenant Protection Act education -Community economic development initiatives

The effectiveness of these kinds of services is highly dependent on partnerships among governments, community organizations, faith communities, business groups and the private sector. Throughout the consultations, we heard examples of innovative partnership approaches to providing services to homeless people, many initiated at the grassroots level.

Habitat Services in Toronto, which involves Ministry of Health-funded mental health services, the municipality and private landlords, is but one example of a project that meets these three objectives, and could be considered for adaptation to local needs in other parts of the province. As municipalities move to plan their responses to homelessness, they should consider partnerships such as the Habitat model and others like it.

A key objective in helping homeless people is to ensure that their health care needs are addressed. In many communities, Public Health Units play an important role in identifying and serving the health needs of this population. Community Health Centres were identified as a useful model for providing comprehensive health and social services to this at-risk population.

6. All three levels of government share responsibility for removing barriers to the development of new rental accommodation.

Rental Housing Supply

The private sector is, and will remain, the primary provider of housing for low-income people, including those who are currently homeless or vulnerable to becoming homeless. Therefore, improving the supply of affordable private sector rental housing is a major challenge to be addressed in combating homelessness. We heard extensively in the consultations of the need for more creativity in the design of new and innovative models of low-cost housing. We also heard calls for all three levels of government to share in creating a climate favourable to the development of new rental accommodation.

Federal Neglect

Despite its jurisdiction over a number of key levers that could foster such a climate, the federal government has contributed little to improving the supply of affordable rental units. We heard requests that the province urge Ottawa to consider a number of options in this area:

- The adoption of fair and equitable tax incentives for the development of rental accommodation, for example, by redressing the imbalance in the GST rate which strongly favours home ownership over rental accommodation;
- Lowering CMHC mortgage insurance fees, which have more than doubled in the past few years, representing a growing barrier to rental housing development; and
- Developing a successor to the discontinued Multiple Unit Residential Building program, which successfully spurred growth in private rental supply through the federal tax system.

It is unfortunate that the federal government has chosen to be all but invisible on the issue of access to housing.

The Provincial Role

Participants in our consultations suggested that there continues to be an opportunity for the provincial government to play a key role in facilitating partnerships between all levels of government, and both the private and non-profit sectors. The province could support the identification of barriers, and share with the municipal sector innovative approaches and best practices that could spur the development of increased rental housing supply, including innovative new housing models such as single room occupancy units. A number of the steps already taken by the province have improved the investment climate for private residential rental buildings, and removed barriers to new construction.

The province should continue to act as an advocate for reforms needed at the federal level, including the need for incentives which could be provided through the federal tax system to encourage increased development of affordable private rental accommodation.

The Municipal Role

We found little consistency in municipal approaches to the range of unregulated accommodation, including rooming houses, frequently used by homeless people.

While most do not, some municipal governments set, monitor and enforce local housing standards. We heard numerous calls for municipalities to be much more pro-active in ensuring that existing standards are maintained and enforced: “We don’t need more standards; we just need to enforce the ones we’ve got.” (Thunder Bay) It was suggested that additional enforcement resources could be funded through the fines collected by the municipality for infractions under property standards by-laws. In this regard, we were told that an innovative landlord self-regulation approach is being developed in Ottawa Carleton.

Finally, at several of the consultations, we heard calls for municipalities to be more active in encouraging partnerships among the private sector, non-profit community groups and faith communities, to create alternate housing models for homeless people. There are a number of additional steps that municipalities could take to contribute to a better climate for the creation of additional rental housing generally. These include:

- Ensuring that zoning by-laws and planning approvals do not create barriers to development or increase costs of development;
- Utilizing the authority provided by the province through the new *Fair Municipal Finance Act* to tax new multi-residential rental buildings at the lower single residential property rate;
- Eliminating the overlap and duplicated roles of building, fire and property standards officials, and enforcing building regulations through a single municipal inspection authority; and
- Ensuring that municipal construction requirements do not exceed the requirements of provincial construction codes.

7. Housing supports and employment are critical to preventing homelessness.

Housing and Housing Supports

The linkage of housing and housing supports is critical for some homeless groups, especially people with mental illness, single adults with severe dependencies and youth. Members of these groups often lose housing because of unacceptable behaviours or lack of basic life skills. Supports to help them keep housing--to prevent homelessness--are as critical as access to housing.

In all of the communities we visited, we heard of the critical role played by supportive housing programs that link people with special needs to supports and housing. Participants urged the government to reconsider the decision to transfer funding responsibility for the housing component of supportive housing to municipalities as part of local services realignment.

There were also calls for the government to assume funding responsibility for domiciliary hostels, which in many communities function as a form of supportive housing for people with mental illness, and elderly people. As well, the Task Force heard about the range of supportive housing programs and funding approaches used by different ministries, and the need for a more rational approach.

In June, following the consultations the government accepted a preliminary recommendation from the Task Force, that the government should assume majority funding responsibility for domiciliary hostels and conduct a review of the levels of service provided to those residents, as part of a larger review of supportive housing. At that time, the government announced that it would provide 80% funding for domiciliary hostels, at a cost of approximately \$14 million, and provide full funding for dedicated supportive housing at a cost of approximately \$40 million.

We heard that some people need support to ensure that their rent gets paid on time, and that many agencies already provide an informal form of trusteeship for their clients. It was suggested in several communities that increased use should be made of the new trusteeship and rent paid direct provisions of the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program, to prevent homelessness.

Employment Opportunities

Stable employment is critical to securing and maintaining housing. In some communities, we found growing recognition of the need for increased municipal involvement in supporting employment opportunities for homeless people. While many participants acknowledged that employment is not a realistic option for some groups within the homeless population at least in the short term, for others it is not only possible but essential.

Despite facing tremendous challenges in finding and keeping employment, many homeless people are very anxious to work. In several communities, employment through community economic development initiatives is regarded as an effective way of fostering self-sufficiency and independence.

We heard the clear message that municipalities should support linkages between the business community and service providers to develop mutually beneficial community economic development projects. The provision of employment supports would form an essential part of this approach.

8. Services for homeless people are fragmented at the community level.

Perceptions of Homelessness

The extent to which homeless people move from one jurisdiction to another in search of services and opportunities continues to be a focus of debate. Some municipalities clearly fear that providing services will attract homeless people from elsewhere. In addition, some communities are suspected of using what one observer called “Greyhound therapy”, providing homeless people with a bus ticket to another jurisdiction.

Inconsistent Levels of Service

As a result of these long-standing debates, municipal approaches to this issue vary considerably throughout the province. Some municipalities are extensively involved in providing services to the homeless, while others are not. While some make extensive use of emergency hostels, others have chosen not to have such a facility. Some municipalities cap the maximum hostel stay at five days; others allow a stay of 90 days or more. Some municipalities, notably Toronto, provide emergency hostel funding to programs which essentially provide permanent or long term housing. It is clear that when communities do not provide services to homeless people, they are very likely adding to the larger problem of homelessness. As we noted earlier, when homeless people leave their home community, they invariably lose many personal and community supports that could be helpful in solving their problems. As we were told in Durham, “Services need to be available where the need exists...people should have the option of staying in the community they have invested their lives in.”

No Designated Lead for Homelessness Services

There is no designated lead with the mandate and authority to oversee the development, management and funding of the system to reflect local needs and priorities. Even in municipalities that are committed to providing substantial resources to addressing homelessness, services are typically delivered independently rather than as part of a comprehensive local plan. Some communities support local planning groups to bring together the various services involved, but these efforts tend to be informal and voluntary.

9. Municipalities are the level of government best suited to act as the service system manager for homeless people.

The Emerging Municipal Role

We found growing support for the view that municipalities are the level of government best suited to taking the lead in addressing local service needs of homeless people. As we were told in Windsor, “Municipal councils make good choices...they have the most continual contact with their citizens, and the most direct involvement with the grass roots.”

Many participants in the consultations stressed that while municipalities are the most familiar with local issues, priorities and resources, they need the clear mandate to coordinate local services. As one Mayor put it forcefully, “There’s already a lot of money, and throwing more isn’t the issue. We need to get all the parties together.”

With the right provincial supports, municipalities have an opportunity to become more effective managers of the service system for homeless people. Several municipalities called for the flexibility to redirect money from the emergency hostel system to alternative models, to support a more preventive approach rather than a short-term crisis management approach. As we were told in Ottawa, “There should be consistency in policy and directives from the provincial level, with the flexibility to fine-tune the approach at the local planning level.”

As noted in several communities, giving municipalities clear accountability for designing and managing an efficient and coherent system, would lead to:

- more rational planning and balanced resource allocations within communities;
- more integrated services and fewer competing agencies; and
- greater emphasis on prevention.

10. The provincial response to homelessness must change. The province must set clear province-wide expectations, address the barriers caused by provincial program “silos,” and provide flexible support to municipalities.

Municipal Frustrations

We received a strong message of municipal frustration at unclear provincial expectations and complicated funding rules that prevent coherent planning and service delivery at the municipal level. Participants argued that the solutions to homelessness cannot be compartmentalized between the provincial and municipal levels; they must be coordinated. Above all, we were told, the imposition of a “made in Toronto” approach must be avoided.

Homelessness does not currently fit neatly or exclusively within the mandate of any provincial ministry. The Ministries of Community and Social Services, Health, Municipal Affairs and Housing and Correctional Services all support parts of the service system that responds to homeless people.

Differences in the policies and funding approaches among and within provincial ministries have contributed to fragmented services at the local level that are confusing to all concerned. Because provincial funds come with so many strings attached, there are few opportunities or incentives for municipalities to develop more creative service delivery models. “Silos” at the provincial level often end up being reproduced at the municipal level. Agencies at the local level spend too much time chasing funding, or trying to fit within the various provincial funding criteria. As we were told in Thunder Bay, “Each funder has its own priority, which may change every year. Agencies wanting to develop long-term programs are forced to make their applications fit.”

As we have noted at several points in this report, current funding approaches limit the use of resources to managing homelessness once it has occurred, rather than addressing the problems that lead to homelessness.

Remove the Barriers

The strong message we received from the consultations was that these barriers to improvements in homelessness services must be removed. Many participants felt the role of the province should be focused on:

- establishing expectations, outcomes and accountabilities for the municipal level and;
- creating clearer, more coordinated mandates, program definitions and funding criteria at the provincial level.

These improvements would effectively support the assumption of a more comprehensive and creative role by the municipal level in providing services to homeless people.

SECTION 3: PROVINCIAL RESPONSES TO HOMELESSNESS

Since our findings and recommendations build on existing resources devoted to homelessness, it is useful to summarize the various supports currently available to homeless people in Ontario.

The province, municipalities and their voluntary sector service partners together provide a wide variety of services and programs for homeless people. These resources are specifically directed towards people who are already homeless, or who are likely to become homeless if they did not have access to these supports. The value of these resources is significant, totalling well in excess of \$100 million.

HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

Emergency Hostels provide emergency and temporary shelter for homeless clients who are in transition to permanent accommodation. Municipalities administer emergency hostels in three ways:

- by operating the hostels themselves;
- through purchase of service agreements with not-for-profit community agencies to provide shelter and basic needs; and
- through arrangements with hotels, motels and other providers.

Emergency hostels are financed through Ontario Works (formerly General Welfare Assistance), and are cost shared 80%-20% between the province and municipalities. The entire program costs approximately \$70 million annually.

Domiciliary Hostels are residences typically run by for-profit operators, and provide permanent housing for people with special needs. The majority of domiciliary hostel clients have mental illness, and a significant percentage are elderly. Under a fee for service arrangement with municipalities, the hostel operators receive a per diem to cover residents' accommodation and the cost of supports to daily living. Domiciliary hostels cost roughly \$18 million annually.

As part of provincial-municipal restructuring, responsibility for domiciliary hostels was devolved to the municipal level effective January 1, 1998. On June 12, 1998, following an early recommendation of this Task Force, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing announced that the province would fund 80% of domiciliary hostel costs pending the results of a broader review of housing programs for people with special needs. This decision will relieve municipalities of more than \$14 million in annual expenditures.

Homes for Special Care provide permanent accommodation in private group homes and residences to persons discharged from provincial psychiatric hospitals. They are funded by purchase of service agreements between the hospitals and the operators. Homes for Special Care are financed by the Ministry of Health and cost \$25 million annually.

Community Health Centres provide primary health care services to people who have difficulty accessing health care and those who have a higher burden of ill health or a higher risk of developing health problems. Many homeless people receive their primary health care through community health centres.

Community Mental Health Programs are funded by the Ministry of Health's Mental Health Programs and Services Group (MHPS). They provide a wide variety of services used by people with mental illness, including housing support, crisis intervention, social and vocational rehabilitation, treatment programs, self-help, information and referral. A number of drop-in centres and hostel outreach programs in major cities are specifically dedicated to assisting and supporting homeless people.

Support Services for tenants living in both private rental and publicly-funded accommodation are financed by the Ministries of Community and Social Services and Health.

The **Community Partners Program** supports Housing Help Centres, which connect low income and homeless people with private and public housing, through landlord registries, counselling and follow-up supports. Community Partners also supports outreach staff to help people living in hostels and marginal housing access permanent housing. The program has a budget of \$2.3 million, and is funded by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

RECENT PROVINCIAL INITIATIVES

Throughout this report, we have noted the importance of early identification and intervention in preventing homelessness. The province has recently taken a number of initiatives that respond directly to the key themes arising from the consultations--the need to address the human problems that are known to lead to homelessness. These are summarized in the following table:

KEY THEMES	PROVINCIAL INITIATIVES
Need more employment opportunities for homeless people	<p>Since September 1995, the Ontario economy has created 302,000 net new private sector jobs.</p> <p>Ontario Works has returned welfare to its original purpose--emergency help and transitional assistance--by linking welfare recipients to work through community participation, employment supports and employment placement. Over 300,000 fewer people are on welfare today than three years ago.</p> <p>A joint provincial-municipal working group is studying how best to help Ontario Works participants who have significant employment barriers.</p> <p>The Ontario Disability Support Program focuses on opportunities instead of impairments. It delivers practical employment supports which recognize that many people with disabilities want to work and can work.</p>

KEY THEMES	PROVINCIAL INITIATIVES
<p>Need for more early identification, intervention and prevention</p>	<p>The Healthy Babies, Healthy Children Program screens all newborn children and uses community resources to connect children at risk with the supports and services they need. The 1998 Budget doubled current year funding to \$20 million, growing to \$50 million per year by 2000-2001.</p> <p>A \$10 million grant to the Invest in Kids Foundation is supporting skills development and training in early identification of children at risk.</p> <p>The Better Beginnings, Better Futures Program provides regular home visits, enhanced child care and parenting skills to more than 5,000 high risk families.</p> <p>The Learning, Earning and Parenting Program (LEAP) announced in the Spring Budget will provide \$25 million for child care subsidies and other supports to help single parents on welfare finish school. Child care assistance for other parents on Ontario Works has been increased from \$30 to \$40 million.</p>
<p>Need for more supports for at-risk families, children and youth</p>	<p>The provincial-municipal commitment to child care totals up to \$663 million in the current year, the highest level in Ontario's history.</p> <p>The 1998 Budget expanded the Ontario Child Care Tax Credit to create the \$140 million Ontario Child Care Supplement for Working Families. It will provide up to \$1,020 for 350,000 children under age seven in working families with low to moderate incomes.</p> <p>The provincial tax cut has relieved 655,000 low income Ontarians of paying any income tax at all. Taxes have been reduced by 41% for those earning less than \$14,900 per year.</p> <p>A new mandatory risk assessment system is being put in place to assist front-line CAS child protection workers across the province. In 1997, an additional \$15 million was committed to support the hiring of 220 additional front-line workers and for staff training. In January, 1998, the province assumed 100% funding of CASs, and the 1998 Budget announced an additional \$170 million to support child welfare improvements and reforms.</p> <p>In partnership with the Canadian Living Foundation for Families, the province is supporting 581 child nutrition programs reaching more than 39,000 children.</p> <p>See Healthy Babies, Healthy Children, Better Beginnings, Better Futures and LEAP above.</p>
<p>Need more coordination of services at the community level to combat fragmentation; communities need more say in how services are organized</p>	<p>Communities are using Making Services Work For People to decide on priorities and to identify the agencies best suited to deliver necessary services to children and people with developmental disabilities. A key objective of this planning framework is to give greater emphasis to early identification, intervention and prevention.</p>

KEY THEMES	PROVINCIAL INITIATIVES
KEY THEMES	PROVINCIAL INITIATIVES
<p>Need more community-based supports for people with ongoing care needs.</p>	<p>The province recently announced \$60 million in improvements to community-based mental health services. 21 Assertive Community Treatment Teams will be established to strengthen services and improve quality of life for persons with serious mental disorders.</p> <p>An additional \$6 million has been allocated to Community Health Centres to improve the access of homeless people to health services.</p> <p>In April, the province announced a \$1.2 billion multi-year plan to expand long-term care for elderly people. The equivalent of 175 nursing homes and homes for the aged will be added as well as \$551 million in enhanced community-based services and supports.</p>
<p>Need more rental housing</p>	<p>The <i>Land Use and Planning Act</i>, proclaimed in 1996, streamlined development approvals</p> <p>The <i>Tenant Protection Act</i>, proclaimed in 1998, reformed the rent regulation system, improves the maintenance of rental buildings, and helps create a better climate for the construction of new rental housing.</p> <p>The new Ontario Building Code became effective in 1998, reducing the regulatory complexity of rental development.</p> <p>The <i>Development Charges Act</i>, proclaimed this year, reduces the burden of development charges by requiring clear accountability on how they are used.</p> <p>The <i>Fair Municipal Finance Act</i> allows municipalities to tax multi-residential property at the same rate as single-family dwellings.</p> <p>Lower employer health taxes and reduced workers compensation premiums are reducing rental housing construction costs.</p>
<p>Need more community-based supports for people with ongoing care needs.</p>	<p>The province recently announced \$60 million in improvements to community-based mental health services. 21 Assertive Community Treatment Teams will be established to strengthen services and improve quality of life for persons with serious mental disorders.</p> <p>An additional \$6 million has been allocated to Community Health Centres to improve the access of homeless people to health services.</p> <p>In April, the province announced a \$1.2 billion multi-year plan to expand long-term care for elderly people. The equivalent of 175 nursing homes and homes for the aged will be added as well as \$551 million in enhanced community-based services and supports.</p>

KEY THEMES	PROVINCIAL INITIATIVES
<p>Need greater efforts by education system to ensure that young people are prepared for the workplace</p>	<p>The new four year high school program announced in January, 1998 places an increased emphasis on preparing young people for life, whether the chosen destination is post-secondary education, apprenticeship, or work. The new program will require students to complete 40 hours of community involvement, to provide young people with first-hand experience in contributing to their communities.</p> <p>Reflecting the rapidly changing workplace, the reformed high school program will provide more relevant guidance and career education programs, and expand existing cooperative education and school-to-work programs in conjunction with business, educators and the voluntary sector.</p> <p>In June, the Ministry of Education and Training announced that a revitalized Ontario Youth Apprentice Program (OYAP) will enable 2,000 students to begin apprenticeship training while completing high school. OYAP's funding will be increased by \$1.4 million, to a total of \$2 million annually, to help district school boards create programs.</p>

SECTION 4: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. HOMELESSNESS IS ABOUT LOST CONNECTIONS

Homelessness is a complex phenomenon that rarely happens in isolation; it is usually the result of a combination of issues. More than anything else, homelessness is about people who have lost their connections--to family, to work, to education, to community, to their personal support system.

What Are The Needs?

An integrated network of accessible and effective community-based services and supports that will reconnect homeless people and strengthen their ability to stay connected.

How Should These Needs Be Met?

- 1.1 A major priority should be strategies that reconnect homeless people to networks of support to foster independence and self-sufficiency.
- 1.2 Service systems should be encouraged to make their services more accessible to homeless people and others who have difficulty accessing mainstream services. For example:
 - Mental health reform to address the needs of individuals being discharged from hospitals;
 - The education system for youth at risk of leaving school early;
 - Ontario Works for hard to serve clients;
 - Correctional Services to link post-release offenders to community services and supports.
- 1.3 Through the Making Services Work for People planning process, communities should consider how local agencies, including Children's Aid Societies, should respond to the challenges presented by homeless young people. A major priority should be early identification of those at risk of becoming homeless, and homelessness prevention.

2. EFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO HOMELESSNESS REQUIRE AN EFFECTIVE AND COORDINATED LOCAL SERVICE SYSTEM.

Current Situation

Services and supports for homeless people are fragmented, and there is no single body with the authority to plan and manage the local service system.

The mandates and funding structures of provincial ministries are complex, rigid and do not support a consistent approach to homelessness. They prevent flexibility and creativity at the municipal level.

What Are The Needs?

An effective local service system manager is needed with the authority and flexibility to:

- Plan and manage a comprehensive local resource system for homeless people; and
- Establish effective linkages with provincial service systems which serve homeless people.

How Should These Needs Be Met?

- 2.1 Municipalities should be designated as the local services system manager for homelessness.
 - 2.2 Municipalities should work with community agencies and provincial ministries to develop coordinated strategies to achieve three outcomes:
 - Moving people from the streets to emergency accommodation;
 - Moving people from emergency to permanent accommodation; and
 - Preventing homelessness by supporting the retention of permanent accommodation.
 - 2.3 The \$4 million homelessness fund should be allocated to municipalities to achieve those outcomes.
 - 2.4 Provincial program structures and funding mechanisms should be rationalized to support the planning and management role of municipalities.
 - 2.5 Provincial ministries should ensure that their allocations for homelessness services are consistent with municipal business plans and priorities.
 - 2.6 The province should confirm its continued funding of emergency hostels at the level of 80%.
- 3. SUPPORTS AND SERVICES FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE NEED TO FOCUS ON LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS RATHER THAN CRISIS RESPONSES.**

Current Situation

Responses to homelessness rely too much on crisis intervention and emergency services. This approach is not only expensive but is also ineffective in reducing or preventing homelessness.

What Are The Needs?

Greater emphasis should be given to early identification and prevention of homelessness among at risk populations, as well as helping people retain and maintain housing. Municipalities should have the flexibility to make more creative and preventive approaches with at least part of the money currently devoted to emergency hostels.

How Should The Needs Be Met?

- 3.1a Municipalities should work with their communities and service providers to identify and develop successful delivery strategies to achieve the three core outcomes.
- 3.1b Municipalities should be more pro-active in reaching out to Aboriginal communities and their leaders in addressing the homelessness problems of Aboriginal people.
- 3.2 The province should provide flexibility that allows municipalities to direct a portion of emergency hostel dollars to those strategies.
- 3.3 The relevant provincial ministries should assess the levels of service provided to domiciliary hostel clients, as part of developing a long term integrated approach to the housing needs of clients with special needs.
- 3.4 The province should assume major funding responsibility for domiciliary hostels. This was a preliminary recommendation that the government accepted and announced in June 1998.

4. THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD ASSUME COMPLETE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ITS OWN IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE POLICIES.

Current Situation

The failure of federal immigrant sponsorships and continuing delays in the refugee determination process cost Ontario well over \$300 million in social assistance and services every year. Without Ontario's support, many of these individuals would become homeless. In addition, federal funding for immigrant and refugee settlement programs is insufficient to meet the needs.

What Are The Needs?

Last November, the federal Minister of Citizenship and Immigration received the report of the 1997 Immigration Legislative Review (*Not Just Numbers: A Canadian Framework for Future Immigration*). The report strongly recommended that the federal government:

- take responsibility for enforcing sponsorships and the related costs of enforcement;

- assume financial responsibility for all social assistance costs resulting from failed sponsorships and delays in refugee determination; and
- provide adequate funding for immigrant and refugee settlement and integration programs.

A positive response to these recommendations is long overdue. The federal government should stop imposing on Ontario's generosity.

How Should These Needs Be Met?

- 4.1 The federal government should be responsible for income support for refugee claimants, and introduce tighter sponsorship criteria and more effective monitoring and enforcement measures aimed at reducing the likelihood of sponsorship default.
- 4.2 The federal government should ensure that immigrant and refugee settlement and integration programs are adequately funded.

5. ALL THREE LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT SHARE RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPROVING THE CLIMATE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADDITIONAL RENTAL ACCOMMODATION.

Current Situation

During the past three years, the Ontario Government has undertaken a number of initiatives to improve the investment climate for private residential rental buildings:

- The new *Land Use and Planning Act*, proclaimed in 1996, streamlined decision-making related to development approvals.
- The *Tenant Protection Act* came into effect in 1998, reforming the system of rent regulation, setting the stage for improved maintenance of rental buildings and creating a more positive climate for the construction of new rental accommodation.
- The new Ontario Building Code became effective earlier this year. It simplifies and reduces the regulatory complexity of rental development.
- The *Development Charges Act*, also proclaimed in 1998, reduces the burden of development charges by requiring clear accountability in how these charges are used.
- The *Fair Municipal Finance Act* allows municipalities to tax multi-residential property at the same rate as single family dwellings.

The federal government has been virtually absent from efforts to improve the climate for residential accommodation development.

What Are The Needs?

Ontario needs more affordable rental accommodation, and more creative approaches to its development. All three levels of government need to focus on removing barriers to the creation of an adequate supply of affordable housing.

How Should These Needs Be Met?

- 5.1 The federal government should review its housing and tax policies to improve their support for the creation of private sector rental accommodation.
- 5.2 The province should identify opportunities for facilitating increased partnerships between the private sector and all levels of government.
- 5.3 Ontario municipalities should consider the following steps to create a more positive climate for rental accommodation development:
 - Streamlining of zoning by-laws and planning approvals to decrease development costs;
 - Taxing new multi-residential rental buildings at the lower single residential rate;
 - Eliminating existing overlaps in building, fire and property standards, and consolidating regulation enforcement through a single inspection authority; and
 - Ensuring that municipal construction requirements do not exceed provincial requirements.