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March 19, 2021

Ann-Marie Norio, Regional Clerk  
Niagara Region  
1815 Sir Isaac Brock Way  
Thorold, ON L2V 4T7

Dear Ms. Norio,

At their March 19, 2021 meeting, the Niagara Regional Housing Board of Directors passed the following motion as recommended in attached report NRH 6-2021:

1. That the Niagara Regional Housing Board of Directors **RECEIVES** this report for information regarding the end of provincial funding for the Strong Communities Rent Supplement program.
2. That the Niagara Regional Housing Chief Executive Officer **BE DIRECTED** to send a letter on behalf of the Niagara Regional Housing Board of Directors to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) advocating for a continuation of the Strong Communities Rent Supplement Program or replacement program funding.
3. That the Niagara Regional Housing Board of Directors **FORWARD** this report to the Public Health and Social Services Committee (PHSSC).

Your assistance is requested in moving report NRH 6-2021 through proper channels to Regional Council.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Walter Sendzik', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Councillor Walter Sendzik  
Chair



**REPORT TO:** Board of Directors of Niagara Regional Housing

**SUBJECT:** Strong Communities Rent Supplement Program Funding

## RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Niagara Regional Housing Board of Directors **RECEIVES** this report for information regarding the end of provincial funding for the Strong Communities Rent Supplement program.
2. That the Niagara Regional Housing Chief Executive Officer **BE DIRECTED** to send a letter on behalf of the Niagara Regional Housing Board of Directors to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) advocating for a continuation of the Strong Communities Rent Supplement Program or replacement program funding.
3. That the Niagara Regional Housing Board of Directors **FORWARD** this report to the Public Health and Social Services Committee (PHSSC).

## PURPOSE

To provide the Niagara Regional Housing Board with information regarding the approaching end of Strong Communities Rent Supplement funding.

## KEY FACTS

- Strong communities currently funds 250 Units across Niagara Region;
- Some of the strong community units are funded through agency agreements that support highly vulnerable tenants (Positive Living, CMHA);
- There is currently no plan to replace this funding and if the Province doesn't fund, NRH will have to cancel 200+ agreements or seek levy for 1.7M. NRH is still committed to funding these units beyond March 31, 2023;
- Current funding is set to expire March 21, 2023 (Annual funding allocation \$1,758,387);
- Under the Strong Communities Rent Supplement agreements, all 250 units that are currently in receipt of Rent Geared to Income will continue to receive Rent Supplement for as long as the tenant remains in their unit and maintains eligibility per the agreements;
- Donna Woiceshyn, CEO, NRH has been selected as Service Manager Representative on a committee with other service managers, OMSSA, AMO and the Province, for the Strong Community Rent Supplement Program technical table.

## Summary

Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) administers various rent supplement programs, including Strong Communities Rent Supplement Program (SCRS), funded 100% by the Provincial Government. This 20-year program is set to expire on March 31, 2023. The expiration of this program will effectively leave 250 units unfunded.

SCRS funding is divided into three streams, each of which are required to meet set targets annually. The three program streams are: Regular; Ministry of Health/Long Term Care supportive (MOHLTC); and Ministry of Community/Social Services supportive (MCSS).

- As of April 2021 250 units are supported by Strong Communities Funding:
  - Regular Stream 200 Units
  - MOHLTC Stream 33 Units (Target groups supported include: Psychiatrically disabled, Frail elderly, Adults with brain injuries, Physically disabled, Adults with HIV or AIDS. Individuals recovering from substance abuse)
  - MCSS Stream 17 units (Target groups supported include: Adults with developmental disabilities, Youth under 18, Abused women and their Children, Chronically Homeless)

These funded units are supporting highly vulnerable tenants who will be at risk of homelessness, hospitalization and/or other crisis with a loss of funding. With 250 units being supported by Strong Communities the ongoing well-being of these tenants will require a replacement of funding, a continuation of funding in its current form, or a commitment from Regional levy to keep the program whole.

An important factor in this funding is that Niagara Regional Housing administers it in partnership with agencies supporting people living with physical and mental capacity issues. The method of administration is a safety net for many tenants and allows individuals to remain living as independently as possible.

- Strong Communities Rent Supplement was delivered in partnership with several community agencies who were able to support their clients in maintaining housing through memorandum of agreements to the rent supplement agreements. Community partners who were able to support their clients include:
  - Canadian Mental Health Association
  - Brain Injury Community Re-entry
  - Positive Living Niagara (formerly AIDS Niagara Supportive Housing)
  - Gateway Residential & Community Support Services
  - Grimsby/Lincoln and District Association for Community Living
  - Community Living Fort Erie
  - Oak Centre (Welland)
  - St Catharines Community Living
  - Mainstream Vocational & Residential Services

The combination of the financial and human impact of this funding stream being ended is significant and it is with this in mind that we ask for support in our advocacy to keep this funding intact.

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Financial

The projected annual expenditure for 2021 is estimated at \$1,864,140 (based on April 2021 \$154,345). Spending in excess of annual allocation is due to an approved prior year carryover of funds.

The program currently has an annual allocation of \$1,758,387.00. This figure is the minimum amount to maintain current housing with no new growth. Attrition will happen naturally and therefore there will be movement of tenants but no new net units. Without provincial funding this amount will be required from Regional levy.

### Governmental Partners

Current funding is provided exclusively by the Province and should this cease, the funding will be required to come from the Niagara Region tax levy.

### Public and or Service Users

Ensuring that existing Social Housing Stock in Niagara remains a safe and affordable place for those who need it across Niagara is a priority. If the Province fails to continue or replace this funding, there is a significant risk that many of our tenants will become homeless or cause undue pressure in the healthcare and homelessness sector.

## ANALYSIS

It is essential that our position is shared with the Provincial government as well as OMSSA in an effort to play a role in advocacy and preservation of these units.

### Submitted by:



Donna Woiceshyn  
Chief Executive Officer

### Approved by:



Walter Sendzik  
Chair

*This report was prepared by Jenny Shickluna, Manager Housing Programs with Andrew Hope, Rent Supplement Supervisor.*

Appendix 1: Positive Living Niagara

Appendix 2: Client Testimony

March 15, 2021

To Whom It May Concern,

Positive Living Niagara has been a participant in the Strong Communities Rent Supplement Program since its inception. This program has been crucial in the support of HIV positive individuals in the Niagara Region. As the HIV/AIDS epidemic enters its 40<sup>th</sup> year, this chronic medical condition continues to have profound impacts on physical and mental health, as well as economic well being. For people living with HIV — the majority of whom are men who have sex with men, and Black, Indigenous and people of colour on minimal or fixed income, housing support is foundational to having access to food and life-saving HIV medications. The end of this program in 2023, which has provided housing support for people living with HIV, would significantly threaten individual and population health, particularly for Black, Indigenous and racialized people who are disproportionately impacted by HIV and poverty, many of whom experience stigma and discrimination based on their HIV-positive status as well as Indigeneity, race, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation. Providing access to subsidized rent, enables people living with HIV to have shelter security and focus on medication and treatment adherence.

Below is a small sampling of the benefits of the Strong Communities program has had on our clients living with HIV:

- A 65-year-old senior on OAS, with several co-morbidities associated with HIV and who suffers from the after-effects of a stroke, is able to live independently with the assistance of our in-home support program. Without the rent subsidy, he would be relegated to a long-term care home at considerably more cost.
- A 54-year-old immigrant from Africa, suffering with PTSD as a result of persecution based on sexuality in his home country, is able to focus on his mental health recovery and maintain his connection to HIV treatment, because of the Strong Communities Program.
- A 43-year-old gay man, previously not on any treatment for HIV and living precariously and in poor health as a result has, since benefiting from the Strong Communities program, connected to HIV treatment, is regaining his health and has been able to start part-time employment. The impact on his mental and physical health is the direct result of having stable, secure housing.

As previously stated, those living with HIV are often from racialized and/or marginalized communities who are disproportionately impacted by HIV and poverty. Many of our clients are dealing with homelessness and when access to affordable housing is unavailable, these clients, out of necessity, must focus on finding shelter, rather than managing their HIV health. Others are racialized individuals working minimum wage jobs, who are forced to spend the majority of their income on unsustainable housing costs, which impacts their ability to stay in care and achieve viral suppression. When coupled with case management and in-home care, access to affordable housing directly impacts the lives of those living with HIV, enabling them to focus on treatment and viral suppression, rather than the basic human need of shelter. Not only does viral

suppression lead to healthier individual lives, but people living with HIV who have a suppressed viral load can no longer pass the virus to others.

The Strong Communities Rent Supplement Program has been invaluable in helping those living with HIV maintain their health and become active members of the larger community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Glen Walker", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Glen Walker  
Executive Director

Having subsidized rent has enabled me to focus on my health and ability to maintain my HIV treatment and health, but alleviating the great financial burden (and stress), of rent. With limited ODSP funds, rent is extremely difficult to balance, with hydro, proper nutrition, telephone (for both job hunting and doctor appointments), as well as transportation, laundry, insurance, and miscellaneous bank fees etc. The financial burden is extremely difficult at this time due to the COVID-19 not only severely limited my job hunting options and prospects, but has also brought upon extra costs, such as hand sanitizers, and mask replacements. ODSP has not provided me with any type of financial assistance during this time, that is available to everyone else via CERB, so the need to stretch my money forces me to choose between my own personal health and wellbeing (very important to be hireable), or simply fulfilling financial obligations, which will lead to not being about to maintain my health via proper foods, vitamin supplements etc.

Without the subsidized rent my costs would at this time, be unsustainable.

-45 year old male client