**RESPONSE TO HOMES FOR SPECIAL CARE**

**MODERNIZING TO BETTER MEET TENANT NEEDS**

**DISCUSSION DOCUMENT**

**ONTARIO HOMES FOR SPECIAL NEEDS ASSOCIATION**

**MAY 2017**

**Modernizing to Better Meet Tenant Needs**

**This document has definitely outlined a model of our vision to modernize the Home for Special Care Program. All home owners agree with the basic principles this document and the new modern HSC program will reflect. There are many wonderful concepts captured in this document that as Home Owners we have identified as crucial going forward.**

**I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate this government and the individuals responsible for making this vision become closer to a reality. Especially Dr. Bell who over two years ago, took the time to tour our homes and hear our needs. We will be forever grateful you were a voice for our clients. As well to the individuals we have worked so closely with; Miriam Johnson, Glenna Smith, Paula Ruppert, Patrick Dicerni and most recently Patrick Mitchell and Jennifer Shiller. Without the work and relationships established with these individuals I do not believe this process would have been able to be fulfilled.**

**This response will outline what we feel to be positive points in the document and the areas of potential concern.**

**Alignment with Government Priorities**

* **The Ontario's Long-term Affordable Housing Strategy Update(LTAHS) was released in March in 2016. It has included new investments in supportive housing as well as Ministry of Health and Long-term Care. This was a very positive step to help develop a plan to modernize the HSC program.**

**Concerns;**

* **A concern would be where the investment money flows to? it is essential the clients and Frontline workers (home owners) finally receive some of this funding to allow for improvements and to be sustainable. The flow chart provided indicates a new level in management by adding a level of a community mental health agency in the delivery model. The history has been most or all funds in recent years for delivery of this program are not going to the homes and or clients. (The evidence-based proof of this is the fact we have not even received cost of living increases over past several years). This has made it impossible to improve homes let alone keep them even sustainable, homes closed immediately after the 3% increase was announced. They were holding on until increase was released, when it was so little they could no longer do it. Our clients deserve and need better, these investments need to reach our homes. Unfortunately, this document has not provided any evidence of it happening.**
* **Continued work and collaboration with the community sector would improve tenants' access to community based services. This would be very beneficial to the clients. Many areas and homes are very connected to community agencies already, depending on the tenant’s desire and motivation to be involved. Having homes create a care pathway as part of tenant’s recovery plan including a list of possible community agencies and resources that they could access would be very beneficial. It would be important to include any community agency involved in the client’s recovery plan to help tenants reach their goals. This will only work with a team approach.**

**Concerns;**

* **This area created the most concern amongst our executive and members, next to lack of funding. Over the past two years the OHSNA executive has agreed working with community agencies as a team is the best approach for our clients. The key position being that of TEAM!**
* **If you give an agency like CMHA the role of inspecting us it would eliminate the entire concept of team approach. This would now give the agency an authoritative position. It is impossible to play both the role of a team member and that of an inspector of its team members. The evidence of this is demonstrated in what happens today already within the HSC program. As soon as our field workers became our inspectors the relationship changed and with that so did the team dynamics. We have consistently asked with conviction for our inspecting body to be a third party not involved with tenants’ care.**

**To have an organization both provide services and contract out services to clients would appear to be a conflict of interest? How can you do a review of services while also providing those services or have created the actual Support Service Plans? This would make a situation that Abuse of Power could be very possible and probable. In addition, having an agency that is an non-for-profit service overseeing a for-profit program would create another example of a conflict of interest. The evidence is over whelming these agencies would need to be working with us as a team not in an authority or inspecting type of role. In all good conscience, we cannot support any process that would not take into account these facts.**

* **It is essential that an arbitrating 3rd party body be in place to deal with conflicts and disagreements within the team regarding tenant’s recovery plan and care. When all is said and done the home owner is liable!**

**This area needs extensive review and discussions. Would make or break the success of the modernization process!**

**Funding Structure;**

**It was very positive to see the document identify the need for a flexible and predictable funding structure.**

**Key Points of Importance:**

* **Need for stable and predictable monthly funding, including vacant beds as expenses remain the same. Would also be very important to banks for financing. The idea of providing stable funding will alleviate the fear of losing a client to independent living. In the current model to lose a client to independent living means to have an empty bed and reduced income. This along with the 90% cap on filling beds make it hard to serve our remaining tenants. The current system results in the discouragement for a client to move on independently.**
* **Funding to homes should reflect services provided and levels of care required by tenants. The current same rate of perdiem for all clients does not best meet our tenants needs. This area is probably the most important Best Practice not being met today for our tenants. It is very important we go forward with the first phase of the modernization of the program as soon as possible so we can start best meeting the needs of our tenants. The levels of care are probably the single most important step that is necessary for a true modernization that actually meets the individual needs of our clients and reflects the true definition of "Best Practices".**
* **As many homes would like to do renovations to improve homes and update them to the standards that best reflect modernization we will require the resources, tools, interest free loans and grants that will be necessary for these capital costs. As well a sustainable perdiem is needed to keep up with day to day repairs and maintenance.**
* **Compensation for damage done by tenants is a necessity in our homes. This area is very different from your regular wear and tear, it was good to see this recognized.**
* **Home owners having to Provide money ahead of purchases for things like clothes and entertainment has become a real issue. Too often the home owner is asked to pay for so many things out of their funding and wait for its return, which is in many cases months later. This is not feasible when trying to operate a business and provide housing and meals for our tenants. Our perdiem is not for clients clothing and taxi bills!! We need the very little funding we receive just to keep our homes a float. This serious issue needs to be resolved quickly.**
* **Multi-year agreements in place of annual licensing, could be seen as a positive step to banks and more security to homes. Annual inflationary increases promised will also help with this area.**

**Concerns;**

**At the present time, the current funding rate has made this program and homes not sustainable. Without the government acting quickly to address this area more homes will close as we have begun to see already. This will be especially true in the case of small homes which is what we consider Best Practice. We have asked the government to consider providing more funding to help the struggling smaller homes that cannot make it anymore. The closing of homes will result in the goal of ending homelessness not being met. Our homes need to be compensated for the years without even a cost of living increase. If our funding had followed even a cost of living increase annually over past 10 years we would be at what was recommended by the Grant Thornton report in 2014. This does not even take into account the recent skyrocketing costs with hydro, heat and food. Nor does it consider the cost of real estate now to purchase housing. Real estate has escalated to the point our homes are worth more in real estate than as a business.**

**Over the past two years we have continued to meet with the government individuals involved in this process and we have consistently agreed the modernization of this program would work only with the proper tools and funding. To date this commitment has not been met to the homes. We have done our due diligence by providing the evidence based reports, documents and financials to support our position. It is now time for the government to act in good faith with this evidence. Without first fixing the program funding today we cannot possibly see any way of going ahead successfully in this process (It is genuinely not feasible and homes are closing). On a personal note, I was very discouraged with the recent 3% increase. I have continually been told at all meetings this government understood we would need increased funding and tools. I truly hope the commitment made at our recent annual general meeting that more funding will be coming as soon as possible happens quickly. More importantly it reflects the amount required presented with the information given and lack of increases provided over numerous years. We need to catch up from being so far behind with our expenses. At that time the series of increases promised through the modernization of the program will be greatly appreciated and used to go forward with the implementation of this process.**

* **A concern regarding funding flowing through a body such as CMHA would be whether or not they had ability to altar the funding to the home owners. Could they flow HSC dollars to other programs (This occurs now with new design of Supportive housing in regions).**
* **The only perceived drawback of contracts would be the possibility of having to compete with other homes for contracts. This would put current owners on edge as we have invested so much into our current homes.**
* **Many home owners have a concern regarding the security of contracts. Questions that have been asked were;**

**1. Why can the contracts not be open ended? The renewal of contracts is very important to security.**

**2. Would there be an appeal panel for disagreements with contracts?**

**3. How would the transference of contracts through home sales work?**

**Home owners feel beds from closed homes need to be looked at in new contracts not given away to other programs as happens with today’s model. When the modernization of this program is complete and proves to be successful it is time new licenses were offered. This would show confidence in the new modernized HSC program.**

**Recovery Focus/Independence/Privacy**

**When discussing greater independence, it is a difficult area as it addresses the issue of whether we are a "care" home or just housing. If we are a "care" home than efforts to try and promote independence can often be at odds with trying to care for the tenants. When homes first get a new client, we assume the tenant is as independent as our home operations allow (i.e. they handle their own money, buy their own clothes, do their own ADL etc.). It is only when we find they are not able to handle these aspects of life and it is causing harm to themselves or others do we attempt to provide care to prevent this from happening. To have an independent client makes our jobs easier and increases the chance of recovery. The desire to become independent must come from the tenant. When this happens, it is the home owner and community workers involved that are in the best position to determine the supports necessary to facilitate greater independence and success. The modernization of this program needs to allow for flexibility in assisting with independence. It must acknowledge some tenants will handle many roles of independence such as finances, whereas others will need assistance with most aspects of life.**

**It was encouraging to see importance placed on transportation to jobs and the ability for tenants to make money without being punished.**

**Concerns;**

* **The home owner needs the rent/perdiem to be able to operate and care for all clients. To give tenants independence to pay rent could jeopardize the homes operations and care for all clients. We strongly suggest rent is kept separate from financial independence.**

**Two questions asked;**

**Is there a backup plan for tenants when they make mistakes with their funds and do not purchase necessities or pay bills?**

**What is the financial literacy you are planning to provide the tenants with?**

**Who will be responsible for deciding clients are capable or not of being financially independent?**

* **Home Owners do not disagree with private bedrooms for those that want them. However, this would require significant help from the government with capital costs and a much higher rate of perdiem for that service, as occurs with any other industry i.e. retirement homes, nursing homes etc. It is also important to note many individuals with mental health illness do much better and prefer a roommate.**

**Home Owner Accountability;**

**This is a difficult area if the Ministry supports a for profit model of care. HSC home owners have invested a lot of money (most of their personal life savings) to provide an infrastructure to the province in order to care for the most vulnerable. A reasonable expectation would be return on that investment, just as most employees expect a return on their pension savings in order to provide for their retirement. The difficulty becomes what a reasonable return(profit) is on the investments provided. For the homeowners to provide financial accountability (audited financial statements) to the government it could cause a home intensive work and costs especially to those small homes. As our homes are owned privately much of our personal and private financial information are in our financials. We would suggest accountability to areas that relate to tenant care such as food and amounts spent per day being disclosed through notice to reader unaudited financials. These are prepared by an accountant and are not as costly, they still require proof of expenses and receipts attached. We would propose it is the Ministries responsibility to determine the financial effectiveness of the program as it relates to its desired outcomes from the homes. These outcomes will drive the accountability and a regular analysis of financial effectiveness would need to be done to ensure the best "bang for your buck". When we are compared to other housing programs it must be done fairly and equitably. The HSC program is one of the only housing programs that provide 24 hour a day supports. Too often we are compared to those community programs that only have supports coming in daily or even periodically. That is in no way even similar to the support or services we provide. This comparison has to stop with this process please.**

**Going Forward**

* **As the new modernized program, will go forward in a phased approach, we are encouraging the first step be done as soon as possible in a responsible manner. By waiting any longer, we are risking more home closures, a possible election and further delays. This will only impede the chance of success of this process and the failure to Best meet the needs of our tenants. This needs to happen now!! Issues that may come up can be dealt with as we proceed. With a flexible program changes and improvements can be made as you go forward. An ongoing continual evaluation of this program should be required.**
* **While we are waiting for the first phase to be implemented an immediate increase of funds to an sustainable amount to the homes needs to be implemented. (Reflecting Grant Thornton’s Report and lack of cost of living increases over several years)**
* **Continue regular meetings with OHSNA executive and government individuals responsible for the modernization to ensure the process is done effectively and successfully (vital at these meetings OHSNA executive are given all information especially funding concepts going forward.)**
* **Going forward we are asking the government to remember and give serious credit to the home owners who have owned and operated these homes for years. All of the education in the world could not replace the knowledge and experience we have received working and living with our tenants 24 hours a day. We have seen and are available to deal with all the good and all the crisis that occur within the homes. As far as qualifications, training and or experience goes, no one in any community or program has seen of done more than your HSC owners and operators that serve this program today. Please show the respect and acknowledgement of this going forward with the decision-making process.**

**Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this valuable discussion document. It has been a pleasure being a part of this group developing the modernization of the Home for Special Care Program.**

**Connie Evans**

**President of OHSNA**