

HASTINGS COUNTY HOUSING SERVICES

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Hours of Operation: Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Introduction

Hastings County's Housing Programs Branch provides safe, modest and affordable housing and rent subsidy for low income households in Hastings County. The program is managed by Hastings County Social Services and is guided by the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000* and its regulations. Permanent residents and non-residents with landed immigrant status are eligible to apply for rent-geared-to-income housing. The Housing Program Branch manages the centralized waiting list for rent-geared-to-income assistance (subsidized housing & rent subsidy) for housing providers in Hastings County.

There are 2,635 subsidized housing units in Hastings County. There are units for seniors, singles and families. People living in subsidized housing pay about 30% of their income towards rent. People receiving Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program benefits pay rent according to provincial rent scales. Units are located in Belleville, Quinte West, Deseronto, Stirling, Marmora, Madoc, Tweed and Bancroft.

People applying to live in social housing have to go on a waiting list. The waiting list works on a chronological basis, with 2 priorities. The first priority is legislated and is called Special Priority. This priority is reserved for victims of domestic violence. Applicants receiving Special Priority Status are ranked at the top of the waiting list. The other priority is a local priority for households experiencing an urgent housing crisis. This may be due to being homeless, having a medical emergency where a household is unable to live in their current residence, or other emergency housing situations. Please contact the Housing Programs Branch for more details about the Urgent Housing Crisis Status.

The wait for housing is dependent on many things including bedroom size required, area of preference and vacancy turn-over. It is difficult to estimate how long it may take to be housed. Waits can vary to more than five years.

It is especially important that victims of partner abuse understand the following in relation to their involvement with the Housing Branch:

- Victims of partner abuse can receive Special Priority Status upon completion of an application, once they have confirmed their intention to live permanently apart from their abuser, and they have provided a declaration from a third party of their status as a victim of partner abuse.

Overview of Specific Procedures and Services

1. PRIORITY RANKING FOR VICTIMS OF PARTNER ABUSE

Under the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000* and corresponding regulations, victims of partner abuse may qualify for Special Priority Status on the waiting list for rent-geared-to-income housing assistance. The Special Priority Status is reserved for individuals who are or have been abused by another household member. For the purpose of this Special Priority Status, abuse is defined as an incident of physical or sexual violence against an individual, an incident of intentional destruction or intentional injury to an individual's property, or words, actions, or gestures that threaten an individual or his/her property or their pets.

Special Priority Status entitles applicants to receive a ranking date above all chronological applicants on the waiting lists for which they are qualified and/or have indicated a preference. Victims of partner abuse with Special Priority Status appear at the top of the centralized wait list maintained by the Housing Registry, ranked according to their date of application.

Wait lists are updated daily. Housing Providers are aware that an applicant has been granted Special Priority Status when they receive the wait list; however, the specific details of the applicant's situation are not disclosed to the Housing Provider.

2. APPLICATION PROCESS

Victims of partner abuse must complete several tasks specific to their application for Special Priority Status. First, prior to determining eligibility for special priority, the Housing Registry must determine if the household is eligible for rent-geared-to-income (RGI) assistance.

Applicants for Special Priority Status must complete and submit a Request for Special Priority Status form available from the Housing Registry.

The application form includes a statement confirming:

- status as a victim of partner abuse;
- that the identified perpetrator resides with or previously resided with the victim; in the event that the victim and perpetrator no longer reside in the same location,

- the victim must submit their application for Special Priority Status within three (3) months of their most recent co-habitation or offer a detailed explanation of the extenuating circumstances that resulted in a delayed application;
- that the perpetrator is/was sponsoring the victim as an immigrant, if relevant;
 - intention to live permanently apart from the identified perpetrator;
 - preferred method of contact with attention to any safety issues.

In addition to the application for Special Priority Status form, applicants must supply a “Confirmation of Abuse” form completed by an approved service provider as specified in the *Social Housing Reform Act*. Under the Social Housing reform Act, one of several professionals may verify that partner abuse has occurred or is occurring. These professionals include: doctors, teachers, law enforcement officers, social service workers, settlement services workers, guidance counselors, members of clergy, lawyers, social workers, victim services workers, shelter workers, community health care workers, or persons in a managerial or administrative position with a Housing Provider.

Applicants are not required to provide details of the abuse or the name of the abuser, but it is recommended they do so. Providing the name of the abuser may prevent the victim of abuse from being housed near the abuser. If the name of the abuser is not provided, Housing Providers can not provide this extra safety measure and the applicant may, unknowingly to the Housing Provider, be housed near or even beside the abuser. All information provided by applicants is kept strictly confidential.

A face-to-face meeting with Housing Registry staff may be scheduled with the victim of partner abuse following submission and review of the written application and supporting documentation. This meeting will be scheduled in a private interview room, and Housing Registry staff will make every reasonable effort to ensure that the victim feels safe and comfortable throughout the meeting.

The face-to-face meeting would allow the Housing Registry staff to:

- reconfirm the safest and most appropriate way to contact the victim in the future regarding housing options, and
- offer information and referrals to other agencies that provide counselling, support, and secure temporary shelter for victims of partner abuse.

In the event that an individual discloses that they are a victim of partner abuse after they have submitted an application for rent-g geared-to-income housing, Housing Registry staff will provide the applicant with the option of, and requirements for, Special Priority Status, including the need for supporting documentation from an approved service provider.

Housing Registry staff have the authority to conduct an in-depth interview as an alternative to the application process outlined above if the victim expresses concern that the application requirements for Special Priority Status might compromise safety in any way or the applicant is unable to provide the confirmation form completed by an authorized individual.

3. APPROVAL PROCESS

Applicants for Special Priority Status must be eligible for rent-geared-to-income assistance. Under the legislation, a Request for Special Priority Status must be reviewed for completeness within 7 days of receipt. If the Special Priority Status application is complete, and the household is eligible for rent-geared-to-income assistance, an eligibility determination for Special Priority Status will be made within fourteen days of the application being deemed complete.

In the event that the applicant is deemed eligible for rent-geared-to-income assistance and Special Priority Status, they will be notified of the decision within seven days following the eligibility determination.

In the event that the applicant is considered to be ineligible for rent-geared-to-income assistance and/or special priority status, they will be provided with an Opportunity to Comment within fourteen (14) days following the notice of complete application, and will be given 30 days to comment. If the applicant does not respond within the 30-day period, a written Notice of Decision will be forwarded to the applicant. In addition, the applicant will receive confirmation of their right to request an Internal Review of the decision within the next ten days. Any such Internal Reviews are conducted by staff not involved in the original decision-making process in relation to the applicant.

Accountability

A representative from Hasting County Housing participates on the QVVAV. Complaints or concerns regarding the quality or nature of services received or not received by Hastings County's Housing Programs Branch can be provided in writing to the Manager of the program. Should literacy be an issue a meeting can be requested to provide complaints or concerns verbally.

As well, applicants have opportunities to comment on the decisions made by the Housing Programs Branch by requesting an Internal Review of the decision as outlined within the *Social Housing Reform Act*.