

Solutions for Housing and Homelessness Plan

Progress Update
October 2022





A Healthy Nova Scotia: Solutions for Housing and Homelessness

Working with Partners To
Increase Housing Supply

Bridging the Gap

Working with Partners To
Help People Experiencing
Homelessness

Continuing Focused Efforts



Introduction

We know that being able to find affordable and attainable housing is crucial for a healthy and prosperous society. While housing demand is still outstripping supply, the government is working with communities and assisting residents who are seeking adequate housing as our population and economy continue to grow.

Developers can't build apartments or houses fast enough. That's why everyone is doing their part to find innovative solutions. From the manufacturers of modular homes to providers willing to create new affordable housing with government support, Nova Scotians are stepping up to help people find a place to call home.

A year ago, the government inherited a housing supply crisis that still poses significant challenges now fuelled by a volatile housing market, the impact of rising interest rates, and a national skilled-trades workers shortage.

The government tackled these challenges head-on with a broad range of solutions to incent the construction of affordable and attainable housing across the province.

The investments in the Solutions for Housing and Homelessness Plan are foundational to addressing the significant barriers that created the housing crisis. It will take some time to build or repair the stock needed to meet the rising demand and yet, despite the challenges, early results of the plan shared in this progress update are clearly having an impact.

Government is on track to assist 20,600 Nova Scotia households this year in obtaining and/or maintaining affordable and attainable housing.

We have worked hard to achieve this by significantly increasing investments in new affordable housing units being built or planned; financially assisting renters; assisting homeowners, landlords, and community housing providers with repairs; improving access to funding for first-time homebuyers and

community providers looking to buy and maintain affordable rental units; and maintaining our 11,200 public housing units. In addition, to help our most vulnerable residents, the government is increasing access to supportive housing, bridging the connection between housing and health.

We must continue to build on the momentum and not let up. A crisis is not solved in one year.

Addressing the complex problems that created the housing supply shortage requires a multi-pronged approach among government departments and staying in step with our partners—developers, non-profit agencies, other levels of government—to help ensure Nova Scotians can find safe and affordable homes.

Key to planning for future housing is a better understanding of the longer-term need. The Province's first major study to assess housing needs for 49 municipalities is underway with stakeholder and public consultations to provide the government with evidence-based data unique to urban and rural communities. A housing needs assessment for African Nova Scotian communities will also help develop solutions to address systemic barriers to finding housing.

The results of these important studies will inform the government's housing strategy and innovative solutions to help stabilize the supply and demand. A multi-year plan will ensure we make the best use of our investments to help more Nova Scotians find the affordable, attainable housing they deserve.

As promised, an update on the solutions and actions identified through ongoing conversations with the public and our partners follows from many departments including Municipal Affairs and Housing and Community Services, as well as the government's next steps.

Working with Partners To Increase Housing Supply

Investing and Building Now

Nova Scotia has not seen this level of housing starts since the 1980s. From January to July 2022, residential construction was up 39.8 per cent over last year.

- Halifax's year-to-date residential construction was up 56.3 per cent.
- Outside of Halifax, year-to-date residential construction was up 24.9 per cent.

In July alone, there was \$445.5 million of private investment in the construction of new housing across the province, including \$189.2 million in rural Nova Scotia.

Last fall, the government made an investment of almost \$35 million to support 1,100 new affordable housing units (including 425 new rent supplements) in communities across the province. As of the end of July, that investment was tracking to support 1,203 households.

- The government helped kick-start the planning and new construction of three major mixed-income projects located in the Southdale–Mount Hope area of Dartmouth, new affordable units on Hollis Street in Halifax, and new affordable units on Oakdene Avenue in Kentville. These partnerships will see new energy-efficient units built that must remain affordable for the next 20 years.
- In Lantz, 40 new affordable units are being developed as well as the infrastructure to support the growth. Last December, a new interchange opened that will reduce commute times for residents and act as an economic catalyst for the growth the area is experiencing.
- In New Glasgow, the Province contributed \$3 million toward 36 new affordable housing units in Coady's Place, located in a former motel, as part of the federal Rapid Housing Initiative. The Province also invested in Soul's Harbour's new shelter for women and children on the Eastern Shore and helped fund eight new townhomes in Dartmouth designed to support African Nova Scotian men.

In addition to the 425 new tenants who received immediate help with their monthly rent costs last fall, the government also invested \$3.9 million

in this year's budget for an additional 732 new rent supplements, bringing the total number of people receiving assistance with rent to 5,566 as of July 31, 2022.

Helping Nova Scotians move from renting to owning their first home also assists with making affordable housing available. The Down Payment Assistance Program has been adjusted to better reflect current market conditions.


- During the month of July alone, 30 Nova Scotians applied for assistance to help buy their first home, triple the number of applicants over previous months.

New Program Initiatives

Having a vibrant community housing sector is critical to ensuring an adequate supply of affordable housing in the long term. As a way to support our important partners, the government launched a new lending program that helps the non-profit community purchase and preserve existing rental units. The new Community Housing Acquisition Program (CHAP) offers up to \$10 million in repayable loans to encourage community housing providers to play a major role in the long-term solutions to adding or preserving affordable supply.


- CHAP provided a low-interest mortgage to the Housing Trust of Nova Scotia to help purchase five existing rental properties with 295 units.
- The John Howard Society of Nova Scotia is purchasing and renovating a multi-unit home through CHAP for eight men exiting correctional facilities in central Halifax.

To support and expand the community housing sector in Nova Scotia, the government also launched a new \$2.5 million Community Housing Growth Fund in partnership with the Community Housing Transformation Centre. Nova Scotia also contributed to the new national Black Communities Housing Technical Resource Centre, which will be based here and help Black-led organizations across Canada improve housing for Black and racialized communities.



“With the changing market in Nova Scotia, and the demand for housing continuing to rise, realtors are thrilled to see meaningful and impactful changes to the Down Payment Assistance Program. This program will allow more Nova Scotians to achieve their dreams of home ownership.”

*– Roger Boutilier, CEO,
Nova Scotia Association
of Realtors*



“I was so relieved to hear that the Housing Trust has taken over ownership of the building. So many Nova Scotians are concerned about the rising costs of renting, particularly in Halifax, so I'm grateful that my building is now owned by a group who are making efforts to help solve this issue.”

*– Trisha Estabrooks,
tenant in Crown Drive
apartments.*



Creating Future Options for Student Housing

The Department of Advanced Education consulted post- secondary institutions and college and university students to identify their housing needs. The Department is developing a post-secondary student strategy that will present creative solutions and options to increase student housing.

Planning for the construction of new residences at the Akerley, Ivany, and Pictou Nova Scotia Community College campuses was supported in the 2022/23 budget. The government is also exploring where else new student housing can be built.

Approving Projects More Quickly

To speed up the increase of housing supply in our largest city, the government passed the Act to Establish the Executive Panel on Housing in the Halifax Regional Municipality last fall. It established a provincial-municipal task force. Since then, the joint planning task force has:

- recommended a multitude of legislative amendments to reduce red tape and barriers. The amendments were approved and passed in spring 2022.
- identified nine special planning areas, representing approximately 22,000 new units, in which to speed up approval processes and expedite housing development.

In March 2022, the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) received a \$2.3 million grant from the Province to advance land suitability assessments, and transportation and wastewater studies.

Freeing Up Land for Housing

Making underused land available across the province to build new housing is a strategic solution. The Land for Housing Initiative supports the creation of a new supply of affordable housing by making provincially owned land available specifically for housing development. So far, 37 parcels of land have been identified as potential sites for affordable housing development. The government will continue to identify more land parcels for this purpose.

Providing More Tools for Municipalities

Last October, the government passed a suite of legislative changes that helped address the housing plan, including:

- amendments to the Municipal Government Act and the HRM Charter to allow for inclusionary zoning for all municipalities.

- amendments that provide financial incentives for private sector developers to increase housing supply.

Addressing the impact of short-term rentals on the availability of existing housing for rent began last spring. Government amended the Tourist Accommodations Registration Act to remove exemptions of a person’s primary residence from registration as a short-term rental and allow regulations requiring compliance with land-use bylaws as a condition of registration.

Finding, Attracting, and Training More Skilled Tradespeople

Tradespeople under age 30 will benefit from the new More Opportunity for Skilled Trades program launched in June 2022. If they are employed and registered as apprentices or certified journeypersons in skilled trades and occupations, they will not pay income tax on the first \$50,000 earned. While the number of apprentices is growing, even more workers are needed to meet labour market demand. The Province reduced barriers to youth apprenticeship by exempting them from the journey-to-apprenticeship ratio and added supervision flexibility. It also changed legislation so more apprentices could train with a journeyperson.

- The Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency helped increase the number of equity-seeking apprentices by 17.7 per cent (1,304 apprentices) in 2022 and the number of women rose to 8.4 per cent (614).

The government launched a marketing campaign last December to attract immigrants and interprovincial migrants to live in the province, with a focus on attracting health-care and skilled-trades workers. Phase II of the campaign is expected to be launched this fall.

Planning for Transportation and Community Needs

Nova Scotia passed a major population milestone last December by exceeding one million people and more newcomers want to make our province their permanent home. Transportation to get people to and from



“We want young skilled workers to know they have a bright future in Nova Scotia, where they can work, build their lives, and contribute to the incredible growth our province is experiencing. Nova Scotia isn’t alone in facing gaps in our labour market, but what sets us apart is the concrete actions we are taking to address the problem.”

– Premier Tim Houston



work, recreation, and other important services in communities is key when considering increased housing development. Building needed roads and schools, and creating welcoming communities, has a major impact on the overall well-being of people.

The government passed the Joint Regional Transportation Agency Act, creating an agency to guide coordinated planning of the transportation system in HRM and the surrounding area to support growth. It will conduct a comprehensive review of all modes of transportation and associated infrastructure within the region, including roads, bridges, highways, ferries, transit, rail, airports, and ports, for the purpose of creating a regional transportation plan to ensure an approach to transportation consistent with region's growth and development, and the safe, efficient, and coordinated movement of people and goods.

The agency's technical advisory board includes senior representatives from various organizations, including HRM, Nova Scotia Department of Public Works, Halifax International Airport Authority, Halifax Harbour Bridges, the Halifax Port Authority, and Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

Bridging the Gap

Until the housing supply increases over time, the government is protecting renters with legislation passed last fall to continue a 2 per cent rent cap until December 2023.

The government also amended the Residential Tenancies Act in October 2021 to improve renter protections against evictions due to renovations. New protections include the following:

- A landlord can't proceed with a renoviction until they first contact the tenant to reach an agreement.
- If tenants and landlords don't come to an agreement, the landlord must apply to the Residential Tenancies Program.
- The tenant must be given at least three months' notice before the renoviction is scheduled.
- The landlord must give the tenant between one and three months' rent as compensation (depending on the size of the building and regardless of whether the renoviction was a mutual agreement or went to a hearing). Additional compensation may be awarded to the tenant if the landlord does not follow the new rules.

Working with Partners To Help People Experiencing Homelessness

Finding solutions for homelessness is complex and takes a collective approach. This is why the Province is working closely with the federal government, municipalities, and service providers to design and deliver on the Province's first supportive housing mandate, ensuring that a full continuum of housing exists so that all individuals and families are able to secure safe, affordable, and dignified housing.

Since last fall, Nova Scotians experiencing homelessness, or who are at risk of homelessness, had more supports, services, and housing options made available, including an increase of nearly \$17 million in this year's budget for new and continued supportive initiatives to improve Nova Scotians' safety and well-being. These supports include the following:

Increased Frontline Support:

- 10 new housing support workers across the province.
- Funding to stabilize volunteer-based shelters through paid staffing and to expand services within rural communities.

Emergency Housing Options:

- Continuation of the Shelter Diversion Support Program, which provides emergency housing support for individuals and families in HRM.
- Establishment of a rural hotel model to expand emergency sheltering and diversion support.
- Extension of the emergency overnight shelter in Halifax to ensure that people experiencing homelessness have a safe and warm place to sleep.

Last October, the government announced over \$10 million to further strengthen the foundation for Nova Scotians experiencing chronic homelessness. These efforts include the following:

New Supportive Housing:

- The Overlook, a former Travelodge hotel in Dartmouth now, owned by the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia and the North End Community Centre was funded by the Province. It is the first harm reduction-

focused housing project in Nova Scotia. Wraparound services for residents are available 24/7 and include occupational therapy, onsite nursing and addictions counselling, harm reduction services, and peer support. It will soon provide supportive housing for 60 chronically unhoused individuals.

- The delivery of wraparound supports at the 38 new modular units constructed by HRM in Halifax. This approach funds staffing costs and programs to ensure the residents' safety and well-being, including harm reduction services supported by the Out of the Cold Association.
- **Individuals Exiting Corrections:** The government provided funding to support individuals transitioning out of correctional facilities. This includes funding for the John Howard Society and the Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia.
- **Journey Home:** The government provided funding to Adsum for Women and Children for the new Journey Home Program in East Preston, working directly with families who are in crisis due to homelessness or impending homelessness.

Culturally Responsive Housing:

The government invested in projects that address specific cultural needs of people experiencing homelessness. These investments include:

- funding to the North End Community Health Centre to purchase and operate a supported housing building for seven men from the African Nova Scotia community
- annual funding for the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre to develop the Diamond Bailey House, an Indigenous supportive housing initiative in Halifax

Continued Focus and Next Steps

Ministers from across government will continue to focus on solutions to address the housing crisis. The student housing strategy currently underway will assist with the clear challenge our post-secondary students face trying to find temporary housing.

A planned campaign to recruit more skilled-trades workers will help increase the workforce we need to build the necessary housing supply identified by the provincial needs assessment. Work is also underway to improve recruiting and training of building inspection officials in Nova Scotia.

Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister John Lohr is continuing to meet with municipalities as well as leaders from community organizations. Work is underway to review the Municipal Government Act and the HRM Charter, and applying a housing lens will be a priority when it is time to update the legislation.

The minister will also receive the housing needs assessment final report this winter. That report and consultation input will inform the province's first provincial housing strategy in a decade, with core solutions to drive supply in the coming years and ongoing implementation of the Affordable Housing Commission.

The government must continue to take a leadership role to get shovels in the ground as quickly as possible. By building critical partnerships and removing barriers, we can combat the complex challenges head-on. For some Nova Scotians, the solution is more than finding an available apartment. They require supportive housing as well to be successful. A supportive housing approach will provide a continuum of supports and services from connections to local community-based agencies to access to mental health-care and financial literacy programming as part of wraparound care. Nova Scotians are counting on us to find solutions as fast as we can. Key initiatives underway or on the near horizon include the following:

Expanding Programs To Meet Demand

The government is addressing the current waiting list and increasing demand for the homeowner repair program that enables many low-income seniors and persons with disabilities to age safely in place. This year, additional funding will help approximately 300 more households with home repairs. A review of homeowner programs will be undertaken to ensure program policies and guidelines evolve to meet current and future household needs.

More Nova Scotians are struggling to pay rent. The government will continue to help alleviate the burden by responding to the rising demand for rent supplements. In addition, a review of the rent supplement program is underway to ensure it is meeting the increased need for housing support while exploring ways to streamline and improve the delivery.

Supports to first-time homebuyers are a key component to freeing up affordable rentals in our housing market. The government will explore more ways to support homebuyers and incent new development, while committing to a review of the regulations and policies for our programs to ensure the right levels of support.

HRM Task Force Action Plan

The HRM Housing Task Force will move forward with recommendations to help address HRM's housing supply needs in the short-, medium-, and long-term. Through an in-depth review of barriers to development and resulting recommendations, Deloitte laid out an ambitious path that will address the urgent housing challenges and build the foundation for future and ongoing housing development. Key actions will include:

- establishing a parallel planning team to address the backlog of applications and accelerate approval of new development
- allowing more development within available land by amending regulations and zoning
- reducing complexity and time by simplifying and streamlining strategies/ bylaws
- focusing a level of efficiency and increased predictability by establishing clear timelines
- reviewing the roles and responsibilities of HRM staff and council

Creating a New Public Housing Entity

The government will create a new public housing entity to provide oversight governance and be accountable for improvements to the way that government-owned subsidized housing is managed.

The first task for the entity will be to continue implementing changes recommended by the auditor general on behalf of the families and individuals by managing the buildings efficiently and effectively. The government will focus on improved services to clients and repairs to preserve the affordable households and to make units more accessible and energy efficient.

Regulating Short-term Rentals

With the introduction of Bill 154, the government announced the amendments to the Tourist Accommodations Registration Act, which will be accompanied with the development of regulations to support enforcement of the act and to make compliance with municipal zoning and bylaws a requirement of registration. The work on the regulations is ongoing with plans for their approval and proclamation of the amendments to the act later this fiscal year.

Exploring Innovation

Innovative new models for the delivery of affordable housing to seniors, students, and families are underway and more will be explored.

Modular construction is a fast way to get access to housing, and the Province will work with municipalities and the federal government to develop partnerships with modular construction companies to expedite these housing communities across the province.

We know innovation is fostered through community engagement. Through the Land for Housing Initiative, the government will continue to seek innovation from the community through its Partnership Opportunity Notices. Partnerships between the developers and community housing organizations are growing in ways that demonstrate that private/not-for-profit partnerships can offer successful models of community housing.

Government is committed to the creation of a new provincial non-profit housing association that will be a catalyst for growth and development in the community housing sector to help develop ideas for the long term.

Looking at models of affordable housing across the globe, Nova Scotia will seek to pilot new approaches to increased density and affordability to ensure all Nova Scotians have access to adequate housing.

Federal and Provincial Partnerships

The Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing will collaborate with the federal government to ensure that we continue to leverage funding through a CMHC–Nova Scotia Bilateral Agreement. This partnership will increase the supply of affordable housing, improve the sustainability of public housing, reduce public housing waiting lists, and provide direct household support to improve housing outcomes for some of the province’s most vulnerable populations.

More details will be shared later this year in a new multi-year housing plan.



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