



# Housing and Shelter in Niagara

People having a safe, acceptable, affordable place to live is fundamental to the well-being of individuals, families and our community. Being part of a secure home contributes to people's wellness and allows them to pursue what's important to their future, whether they are growing, learning, belonging to a family, connecting to employment, participating in the community, or simply 'being'.

## Rating

**2** of concern,  
needs  
attention



## Things we are doing well!

In 2013, Niagara Region approved a 10-year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan (HHAP), focusing on eliminating homelessness; maintaining existing housing stock; increasing the supply of affordable housing; and improving coordination and decision-making among funders, agencies and housing providers.

In 2012, the Raft's Youth Reconnect (YR) program was cited nationally as an innovative approach to solving youth homeless in rural areas. YR's Niagara-wide response helps youth remain connected to social supports and stay in school, thus reducing their vulnerability and preventing a first episode of homelessness that could lead to a life of social exclusion.

People working with low-income clients experiencing housing issues are sharing information to strengthen the impact of their work. The Niagara Poverty Reduction Network Housing Working Table and a collaborative of Community Health Centres and Niagara Region Community Services are examples.

The Wellness Supportive Living Program provides support services to seniors in four Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) communities, helping them to age at home longer and more successfully. This is a partnership between NRH, March of Dimes, Niagara Region Community Services and Community Support Services Niagara.

Options exist for some low income households to achieve home ownership. Examples include Habitat for Humanity Niagara volunteers building 42 affordable homes in the past 21 years, and the Niagara Regional Housing Welcome Home Niagara 5% forgivable loan program which has assisted 249 low to mid-income households to purchase their own homes.

## EMERGING ACTIVITIES

1

Youth homelessness in Niagara is on the decline; a contributing factor is the provincial government's realization that supporting youth to re-link with their family helps to reduce homelessness now and for the future.

2

Niagara is increasingly able to describe and understand intertwined factors influencing the root causes of poverty. Collaborative work of community partners, such as the building of the HHAP, the Niagara Mental Health and Addictions Charter and the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network, is illuminating clear action steps to address poverty, with 'suitable housing for all' being pivotal

3

There is renewed focus on planning for action to address the lack of new affordable housing, and make updates to existing affordable housing in Niagara.

4

The NRH Rent Supplement Program has expanded to include the Niagara version of "Housing First", to move people more quickly from homelessness to their own home. A collaboration of NRH, Niagara Region Community Services, community agencies and private landlords, 122 Housing First units are funded through to March 2017.

5

NRH opened its first new owned community in more than 30 years on Fitch Street in Welland. With 67 units, the design of this senior community emphasizes accessibility, support services and environmental sustainability.

# Indicators

## Housing Availability

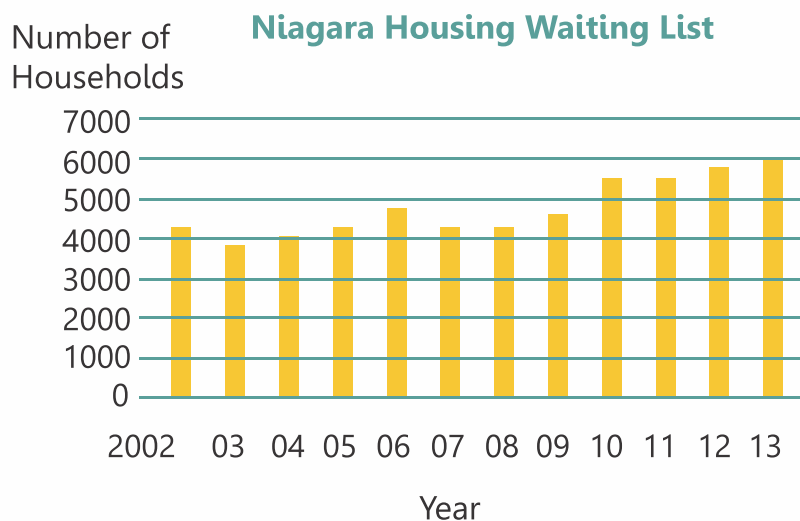
- Housing Demand Trends
- New Housing Starts
- Vacancy Rates

## Housing Affordability

- Spending 30% of Income on Housing and Shelter
- Average Market Rent
- Average Monthly Rent Trends
- Purchase Price of a Home in Niagara
- Market Absorption Rate
- New Housing Price Index

## Affordable Housing and Homelessness Prevention

- Wait Times and Availability of Affordable and Subsidized Housing in Niagara
- Core Housing Needs
- Homelessness and Use of Shelters
- Housing Initiatives



Source: Niagara Regional Housing 2013

# Suggested Action Steps

Support implementation of the Niagara Region HHAP through inter-agency collaboration and development of a common monitoring report to measure a key cross section of housing-related indicators over time.

Pay attention to key contributing factors affecting homelessness in Niagara, as outlined in the Niagara Region HHAP, including supported and supportive housing for people requiring assistance to live independently.

Explore potential for implementing the federal concept of 'Housing First' in Niagara by surveying culture orientation/philosophy of local organizations, analyzing availability of suitable housing, and reviewing models such as the Mental Health Commission of Canada At Home/Chez Soi research.

Utilize our common understanding of what affordable housing means as a benchmark to monitor progress of the number of affordable housing new starts in Niagara.

Work with local municipalities to track average cost of utilities in Niagara, an underlying measure of rent costs, and an indicator of cost of living.