



## Ontario Disability Coalition Accessible Housing Brief

December 13, 2022

Attention Minister Michael Parsa, Associate Minister of Housing

Minister Parsa,

2.6 million people living in Ontario are disabled. Yet no law or regulation requires accessible housing in Ontario. This needs to change.

Just under 400,000 people with disabilities in Ontario are currently receiving the Ontario Disability Support Program and are all struggling in poverty. The lack of affordable housing is a real concern, and access to both accessible and affordable housing being extremely rare - an Ontario unicorn.

We are the Ontario Disability Coalition, a grassroots coalition including people with disabilities, their parents, caregivers, and health service professionals. Our mission is to assist with policy development and issues related to children, youth, and adults with disabilities. Our members are increasingly coming to us with significant concerns about the lack of accessible housing, so we are doing our part to educate and advocate for necessary changes to improve the quality of life for all people with disabilities living in Ontario.

We applaud the Ontario government with the efforts they are taking to address affordable housing in Ontario. However, what is missing from these plans is ensuring that there is a mandated increase of accessible housing, and more especially affordable AND accessible housing.

Further, we are concerned with some of the sections of Bill 23, especially those parts that remove the power of municipalities to enforce rental replacement rules for existing affordable housing units.

### Affordable Housing

The government of Canada has declared that housing is a human right. The need for accessible affordable housing is a crisis. In many municipalities they have also declared an accessible housing emergency. For those who are in legislated poverty, there is no time to wait for changes.

The emergency is almost a disaster. Homelessness amongst the disabled is increasing sharply during the pandemic. Solutions need to be found now.



Part of the problem is the definition of “affordable housing” Bill 23 defines it as “80% of the average market rent”.

Let’s use Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill as an example. The average 1 bedroom apartment in Aurora is **\$1700**. 80% of that is **\$1360**. Single individuals on ODSP receive a maximum of **\$1228** after the 5% increase this summer. Yet The maximum “shelter allowance” portion is only **\$523**.

This is a severe problem for people with disabilities receiving ODSP - this is almost 400,000 individuals and their families. How can they rent anything now, with “affordable” meaning at least \$1360.

The word “affordable” is a loaded term that means different things to different people. A better term for what we are talking about is **rent geared to income housing**.

On top of the definition of “affordable”, there are several pressures that are raising the price of rent and shrinking the number of affordable units. Many existing units are being renovated, as well as landlords eager to sell to those who are unable to buy new houses. “Renovictions” and “sellovictions” are pushing existing tenants out scrambling to find housing now at higher rates, and fewer options.

Changes to the Residential Tenancies Act in 2018, that all new residential units occupied for the first time as of November 15, 2018, are exempt from rent control. This means that no housing unit created after this date are truly affordable past the first year of a lease. With no regulation, rents are being increased by large percentage increase to allow landlords to get rents at high market levels, which has the effect of also forcing any low-income tenants to leave, again scrambling to find housing in a high price, low available rental market.

Finally, there is great concern that a tool that municipalities have had to maintain the level of affordable units has now been removed in Bill 23. With rental replacement rules, municipalities could enter into agreements with landlords who were renovating their rental units, and make deals where there were guarantees that for every affordable unit removed in one place they would make available or build a new unit elsewhere that was affordable, or that once renovated, tenants could return to units in the newly renovated units at the same rent as before.

## Accessible Housing

The **Canadian Human Rights Act**, the **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms**, the **Ontario Human Rights Code** and the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability. Yet, the two acts that should guide and require accessible housing in Ontario fall well short of supporting us.



**The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)** does not mention housing, so it does not have any standards for accessibility in housing. Housing needs to be added to the AODA with the requirement that all new housing be universal design - so anyone of any age or ability can live there.

As well, the **Ontario Building Code (OBC)** now only requires that 15% of new apartments be visitable - this is not accessible enough to live there. We need the OBC changed to require that all new housing be built using **universal design** - so anyone of any age or ability can live there.

**Universal design** will accommodate anyone of any age or ability. A concern we hear often from developers is that this would increase building costs. However, the cost of building a new apartment is the same whether accessible or not - **if it is planned from the design stage**.

(CMHC reports)

As well, by building accessible housing, there will be **huge healthcare savings** if people are not needlessly stuck in acute care hospitals or forced into long-term care because of lack of accessible housing that could meet their needs.

#### **Accessible housing:**

- prevents burn-out among care-givers,
- reduces the need for personal care attendants,
- reduces the need for household help,
- enables people to increase their work hours,

Accessible housing reduces the need for financial support from government or other sources, enhances dignity, freedom, social inclusion, health and well-being

#### **What the Ontario government can do**

We have shared with you the challenges we face as people with disabilities in Ontario, especially those of us who are in poverty. We are asking you and your government to consider some changes to policies and programs that can alleviate the housing pressures we are currently experiencing.



We need a made-in-Ontario solution that protects the right to accessible housing.

- The **AODA** needs to be expanded to include standards for accessible housing
- The **Ontario Building Code** needs to significantly increase the percentage of new apartments that are accessible, and encompass universal design principles.
- The **Residential Tenancy Act** needs to be amended to eliminate the exemption for all rental units created after November 2018 and replace it with a **rolling 2-year exemption** for all new units created before they are bound to the rent increase rent.
- The **ODSP Shelter Allowance** should reflect the actual average market value rent.
- Amend **Bill 23** to return the right for municipalities to enforce rental replacement rules to keep the affordable housing units we currently have.
- Create an **Accessible Housing advisory board** that includes members who are living on ODSP, to provide ongoing recommendations with a disability & accessibility lens.

We look forward to being part of a constructive and collaborative effort to find and fund housing for all. To build a plan that supports affordable housing of every type, and every income. A plan that builds new accessible and affordable housing with inclusive design so that people can have a home that meets their changing needs, through disabilities and allowing them to age in place.

## References:

Chung, K. (2022). Accessible Housing Network.

<https://www.accessiblehousingnetwork.org/support-us>

(2022). *Accessible an Adaptable*. CMHC. <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/professionals/industry-innovation-and-leadership/industry-expertise/accessible-adaptable-housing/universal-design-in-new-housing>

(2022). *The Average Cost Of renting a one Bedroom in Toronto hits \$2502*. thestar.com.

<https://www.thestar.com/business/2022/11/22/the-average-cost-of-renting-a-one-bedroom-in-toronto-hits-2502.html>.

(2022). *Nova Scotia Human Rights Disabilities Housing*. Global News.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/8499118/nova-scotia-human-right-disabilities-housing/>

(2022). *Affordable Accessible Housing Calgary Need*. CBC.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/affordable-accessible-housing-calgary-need-1.6664824>

(2022) Aging in place success stories, cmhc-schl.gc.ca

<https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/professionals/industry-innovation-and-leadership/industry-expertise/accessible-adaptable-housing/aging-in-place/aging-in-place-success-stories>



**Dec. 14, 2020** [Letter from Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on the importance of accessible housing](#)