

# Communiqué

Issue

March 26, 2020

2020-1

*The Requirements, Recommendations and Guidelines in this Communiqué are applicable to the social housing providers administered by the City of Hamilton.*

✓	Providers Under <i>Housing Services Act, 2011</i>
✓	Providers Under a Federal Operating Agreement
✓	Requirement

## **SUBJECT: COVID-19 Update**

The purpose of this communicate is to inform Housing Providers about the most recent COVID-19 updates that impact their business.

As you know, the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve. We recognize this is a challenging time for you and your tenants/members and very much appreciate the work that you do to keep your communities safe. While the City of Hamilton has been closed to the public and visitors, Housing Services staff remain available by email and phone to discuss any questions or concerns you may have.

As an overarching principle, tenants are still expected to pay rent and housing providers are expected to collect rent. The provincial and federal governments have put in place a number of measures to support people whose income may be reduced. It is important to support tenants and housing providers staff at this time, so we are offering some ways to do that.

Here are the most recent COVID-19 related updates that may impact community housing providers:

- **Eviction Suspensions**
- **Covering Arrears**
- **Vacancies – Offers and Refusals**
- **Suspension of RGI Annual Renewals**
- **Extension of rental subsidies**
- **Social Housing Review Panel**
- **Absence from Unit**
- **Guest and Visitors Policy**
- **Guidance on Cleaning and Disinfection and Funding for Expenses**

## Eviction Suspensions

On Thursday March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020 the Superior Court of Justice granted an order suspending the execution of all writs of possession to evict residents from their homes during the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The Landlord Tenant Board has also suspended all hearings related to eviction applications, unless the matter relates to an urgent issue such as an illegal act or serious impairment of safety. This information can also be found in the following links:

Court Order: <https://www.ontariocourts.ca/scj/chief-justice-court-order-susp-resid-evict/>

LTB: <http://www.sjto.gov.on.ca/en/latest-news/>

Rental Housing Enforcement Unit: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/solve-disagreement-your-landlord-or-tenant> Telephone: 416-585-7214 Toll-free: 1-888-772-9277

## Covering Arrears

The provincial and federal governments have put in place measures to help people continue to pay their rent. The stay on evictions, however, has the potential to reduce Housing Providers' revenue for a prolonged period of time. To reduce its impact, we will cover lost revenue. We will ask for monthly reports of arrears and make an equivalent payment as part of the next month's subsidy payment. As part of the year end reconciliation, we will account for any revenue that has been recovered.

## Vacancies – Offers and Refusals

Based on the directives to observe social distancing, the Housing Services Division is directing all Housing Providers to stop renting vacant units until April 6, 2020. All Housing Providers are required to honor lease signings and move-ins as previously arranged. Therefore, effective immediately:

- Please do not refer vacancies to Access to Housing (ATH) until further notice.
- Move-ins previously arranged are not affected by this Directive
- ATH staff will follow up with community housing providers that have vacancies currently in the 'on offer' process to determine status and next steps.
- For vacancies that are currently posted, Housing Providers are not obligated to contact Applicants and fill these units until April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Should the request for social distancing continue beyond April 6, 2020, we will work with Housing Providers to identify ways in which apartment viewings, offers and lease signings may be conducted with minimal risk to staff and prospective tenants.

## Suspension of RGI Annual Renewals

As Tenants strive to deal with rapidly changing events such as employment loss and office closures, we realize they are facing many challenges. They may experience increased difficulty in providing documentation, pursuing income and divestment of residential property in the context of business closures and social distancing. Please defer all RGI Renewals until April 6, 2020.

In addition, Housing Providers may be experiencing an increase in Tenant inquiries requesting assistance. Tenants/members should be directed to following contacts:

The **Ontario Works** application Centre is 1-877-678-6333.

Employment Insurance (EI) Benefits through the [online application](#).

The Federal Government has announced new benefits to help people who have been impacted by COVID-19.

Emergency Care Benefit for workers who are not eligible for EI sick and who are quarantined or sick with COVID-19, taking care of a family member sick with COVID-19, are parents who are unable to work due to childcare/school closures (regardless of whether they are EI eligible or not). This program will be managed through the [Canada Revenue Agency \(CRA\)](#). Applications for this benefit will be available in April.

Emergency Support Benefit for workers who have lost their job due to a closure related to COVID-19 and who are not eligible for EI. It will also be managed through CRA.

Applications can be completed online using the normal EI portal (<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/ei-sickness/apply.html>). The dedicated phone line for inquiries related to EI and COVID-19 is 1-833-381-2725 (toll-free) or Teletypewriter (TTY): 1-800-529-3742.

## Extension of Rental Subsidies

The City of Hamilton has decided to extend all applicable subsidy expiry dates from March 31, 2020 to April 30, 2020. In an effort, to remove undue hardship on our tenants during this unprecedented closure, no RGI Tenants will be required to pay market rent as of April 1, 2020.

Housing Providers however are still required to keep track of the units affected and Rent Calculations will resume upon the return of normal operations. This strategy will ensure:

- Tenants will not experience a rental increase in a time when many of them already have increased financial struggles;
- Arrears will not be artificially inflated until Annual Renewals are completed

Housing Services asks that Housing Providers' staff and/or Boards share this strategy with any tenant that calls in with concerns. Tenants should be advised to continue to pay their rent as per their current rent calculation. We will also be sharing this information via our web-site. We encourage providers to be flexible in the application of surcharges (late payments).

### **Social Housing Review Panel**

Based on the directive from the City of Hamilton and Public Health to close offices to the Public, the Social Housing Review Panel will be suspended until April 6, 2020. We encourage social housing providers to be creative and flexible in the provision of Internal Reviews. Any Request for Review forms received by our office may be completed in an alternate form such as via teleconference.

### **Absence from Unit**

The City of Hamilton's Absence from the Unit policy states that a tenant may be absent from the unit for no more than 120 days within a one-year period. Given travel restrictions that are starting to occur, we ask that Housing Providers be lenient should someone be caught outside the country for a prolonged period.

### **Visitors and Guests Policy**

In this period, visitors and guests may be affected by travel bans and requests from officials for isolation. We ask that new requests for visitors and guests be considered carefully in light of the need for social distancing.

### **Guidance on Cleaning and Disinfection and Available Funding**

Public Health Ontario has released a factsheet on [COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings](#) that Housing Providers may find useful. Please, also stay tuned to the City of Hamilton's website [www.hamilton.ca/coronavirus](http://www.hamilton.ca/coronavirus) for further updates on COVID-19 as well as ONHPA's website <https://onpha.on.ca/covid19>.

The City of Hamilton recognizes the costs associated with increased cleaning, the provision of PPE and creating different ways of delivering services. To address these costs, we will be providing additional funding in the amount of \$20 per unit. This funding will be issued in early April.

We will continue to monitor the changing events and will be in touch to address any additional situations as they arise. Housing providers are encouraged to contact their City of Hamilton Housing Administration Officers if they require any clarification.

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