

## AUDIT AT A GLANCE

### OPENING DOORS TO STABLE HOUSING: AN EFFECTIVE WAITING LIST AND REDUCED VACANCY RATES WILL HELP MORE PEOPLE ACCESS HOUSING

#### WHY THIS AUDIT MATTERS

For many in Toronto, housing is just not affordable. People are experiencing homelessness and families are living in shelters because they are unable to pay their rent or mortgage. Demand for rent-geared-to-income (RGI) assistance exceeds the supply.

#### BY THE NUMBERS

- 64,391 RGI units in social housing buildings operated by TCHC and 260 other providers
- 2 to 14 years wait time for subsidized housing
- 106,650 applicants on the waiting list:
  - 56% eligible & active
  - 26% interest / eligibility unknown
  - 5% existing RGI tenants needing/wanting to transfer
  - 13% incomplete, inactive, ineligible, or invalid
- 3% of applicants on the waiting list are housed each year
- 13% of the 47,000 housing offers made in 2017 and 2018 were accepted
- 1,400 vacant units on average throughout 2018; based on 2.29% TCHC vacancy rate and 1% vacancy rate at other providers
- \$7 million vacancy loss in 2018
- 140 TCHC units used for purposes other than housing
- 185+ TCHC units held for revitalization could possibly provide relief for the emergency shelter system<sup>1</sup>

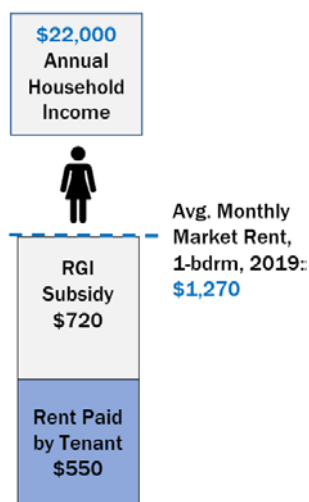
#### BACKGROUND

The City manages the centralized waiting list for RGI. An RGI tenant pays a maximum of 30% of their income on housing – the City subsidizes the rest.

The *Housing Services Act, 2011* specifies the number of RGI households the City must provide in Toronto.

The City has contracted the administration of RGI assistance to TCHC and 260 other housing providers who:

- Select applicants from the waiting list to fill vacant units, when available
- Review RGI eligibility, verify income and assets, and calculate RGI rent, at time of housing and on ongoing basis
- Provide RGI social housing units



#### WHAT WE FOUND

The City, TCHC, and other housing providers must work together to break down barriers that keep people from moving along the housing continuum towards stable housing.

##### A – Improving the Integrity of Waiting List Data

Maintaining an accurate and current centralized RGI waiting list is key to getting people efficiently housed. When housing units become available, many applicants cannot be reached, do not respond, or decline offers. This slows down the housing offer process, and social housing units sit vacant. Better data is needed to improve housing providers' ability to quickly and effectively match waiting applicants with available units. This will help to bring down the vacancy rate, reduce the \$7 million in vacancy losses, and ensure better use of subsidy funding.

##### B – Properly Prioritizing RGI Applicants

5% of applicants are prioritized, and they wait a significantly shorter period of time for housing. All other applicants are managed on a first-come, first-served basis. People can wait more than 10 years for subsidized housing. It may be time to reassess whether the City's current priority categories should be expanded to consider additional factors, so that those most in need receive RGI housing assistance first.

##### C – Making Better Use of Housing Units

There are a number of vacant, rentable units in the social housing system. Other social housing units are used for purposes other than housing. Some are not used to house the optimal number of people. A 50% improvement in these areas would result in 2,200 more people getting RGI housing assistance. In addition, TCHC units being held for revitalizations opens possible opportunities to provide relief to the emergency shelter system and may reduce the City's reliance on hotels<sup>1</sup>.

##### D – Strengthening Controls and Integrating Services

The City needs better oversight to ensure RGI households are selected from the centralized waiting list or from an approved alternate arrangement. The City can also strengthen controls over eligibility reviews, income verification, and calculating RGI assistance.

#### HOW RECOMMENDATIONS BENEFIT THE CITY

Our findings and recommendations will assist the City in setting priority actions to help more individuals and families to achieve stable housing.

<sup>1</sup> A complex matter worth considering further because of the housing crisis