

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Tuesday, October 4, 2022**

**Committee Room**

**Supportive Housing**

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## **COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Melissa Sheehy-Richard (Chair)

John White (Vice Chair)

Danielle Barkhouse

Tom Taggart

Nolan Young

Hon. Ben Jessome

Lorelei Nicoll

Kendra Coombes

Suzy Hansen

[Melissa Sheehy-Richard was replaced by John A. MacDonald.]

[Nolan Young was replaced by Chris Palmer.]

### In Attendance:

Tamer Nusseibeh  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

### WITNESSES

#### Department of Community Services

Tracey Taweel - Deputy Minister

Joy Knight - Executive Director, Employment Support and Income Assistance

#### Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Paul LaFleche - Deputy Minister

Stephan Richard - Executive Director, Housing Solutions and Development

Pam Menchenton - Executive Director, Client Services, Nova Scotia Housing Authorities

#### Phoenix Youth Programs

Tim Crooks - Executive Director

#### Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia

Jim Graham - Executive Director



**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2022**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**10:00 A.M.**

**CHAIR**

Melissa Sheehy-Richard

**VICE CHAIR**

John White

THE CHAIR: I call the meeting to order. Today we have the Standing Committee on Community Services. I am John White. I'm the MLA for Glace Bay-Dominion, and the Chair of the committee.

I'll ask the members to remember to put your phones on silent, and we'll get the committee members to introduce themselves, starting with MLA MacDonald to my left.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: For the record, we have Tamer Nusseibeh, committee clerk, and Chief Legislative Counsel Gordon Hebb with us.

On today's agenda, we have officials with us from the Department of Community Services, the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Phoenix Youth Programs, and Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia to discuss supportive housing. All witnesses are not able to be seated at the table, so the microphone on the far right is for witnesses in the back row to come up if they're called upon.

I'd like to welcome the witnesses and ask you to introduce yourselves, starting with Deputy Minister Taweel.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Thank you for joining us today. Now we'll begin the line of questioning. I should tell you before we start, in this committee, what we do is 20-minute sessions. The Liberal caucus will be first with 20 minutes of questioning, then the NDP, and then the PC party - government side. If you are in the middle of speaking at the end of 20 minutes, I will interrupt you and stop you speaking whether it's a question or an answer. I apologize up front because it seems terrible, but it's in the interest of time. (Interruption)

Sorry, opening remarks - I forgot. First time in the chair, thank you. (Laughter)  
Opening remarks. We're beginning with Deputy Minister LaFleche.

PAUL LAFLECHE: Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. The Department of Community Services and the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing work together to ensure the housing needs of vulnerable Nova Scotians are met. Our programs at Municipal Affairs and Housing focus on increasing affordable housing supply and ensuring there is sufficient housing supply that meet the needs of Nova Scotians.

We work closely with the Department of Community Services to make sure some of that housing supply is specifically targeted to vulnerable populations. For example, both our departments provided a combined total of over \$16 million in capital operating funding for over 190 affordable units under the federal Rapid Housing Initiative. This includes a supportive housing project in Dartmouth in partnership with the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia, and a contribution towards Souls Harbour Rescue Mission new shelter for women and children on the Eastern Shore.

While our efforts have been focused on rapidly increasing housing supply in response to the strong and growing demand, we do not lose sight of the fact that we must protect and preserve some of our existing traditional rental stock. This is why we recently launched a new Community Housing Acquisition Program, which will allow non-profit groups to purchase existing rental properties and keep these units affordable. This program also allows us to assist the Department of Community Services in expanding supportive housing options for those who need it.

Our department has also committed \$2.5 million to create a new Community Housing Growth Fund, which we expect to be launched this Fall. This funding will help expand the non-market housing supply and further strengthen this important not-for-profit sector.

Our department is also working closely with Community Services to ensure that other programs can better meet the needs of those who are experiencing homelessness or those who are at risk of homelessness, as well as other individuals who may require some level of support to maintain their housing. For example, we are currently undertaking a review of our rent supplement program, which supports more than 5,000 households across

the province. This will ensure that we continue to meet the diverse needs of all Nova Scotians.

We're very proud of the work that the departmental staff do and their commitment to deliver the housing supports Nova Scotians need. We're committed to working with our partners in the Department of Community Services with the populations that they serve. All the while, we must recognize that we have to do more.

THE CHAIR: We now move to Deputy Minister Taweel.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Thank you to committee members for the invitation to be here today. I'm very pleased to have this opportunity to talk about supportive housing and the impact this approach has on improving people's safety and well-being. Joining me here - just sitting behind me - is Joy Knight, executive director of the Employment Support and Income Assistance program.

There is no question that having a place to live provides stability, security, and a sense of belonging. As committee members are aware, the reasons for homelessness are varied and complicated. They may include uncertain physical and mental health, challenges relating to addiction, lack of affordable housing, and community and family breakdown.

As we know, homelessness ultimately may result in increased use of the health care system, an increase in substance misuse and overdose, increased danger of abuse and violence, and an increased chance of entering or re-entering the criminal justice system. We also know that our work to address homelessness has the potential to reduce pressures on the health care system, emergency rooms, hospital beds, and the justice system.

Homelessness and a lack of affordable housing is a problem too significant and too complex for one level of government, one private-sector organization, or one non-profit group to fix on its own. Rather, it will take a focused and sustained commitment to make real change - change that seeks to address the root causes of homelessness and that calls upon us all to take up this challenge. That is why I'm so pleased to be here today with my colleagues from the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing and with our community partners to discuss our collective work to address this shared challenge.

Over the past several years, the Department of Community Services has generally been moving away from a crisis-driven system to one that is more preventive and responsive. This change is also reflected in our work to help those experiencing homelessness. Many of these Nova Scotians have challenges that make it difficult to live in housing without additional supports.

The solutions are often not as simple as finding an available apartment. There are many who need more than a home for stability. This could mean treatment for addiction, harm-reduction services, mental health care, or primary health care, for example. It is our

goal and part of our departmental mandate to provide more permanent supportive housing across the province.

Here are a few examples of recent investments that are helping to move us toward that goal. Through a \$3.5-million investment, the Province worked with HRM and the federal government to acquire the Overlook in Dartmouth. Renovations are well under way to transform the property into a permanent home for 65 people who are chronically unhoused. In addition, the Department of Community Services is providing \$1.5 million annually to our partners at the North End Community Health Centre to deliver wraparound supports to those living at the Overlook.

As committee members would be aware, the department also supported a project led by HRM to put 64 modular units in place in Halifax and Dartmouth. The Out of the Cold Community Association are doing a tremendous job providing wraparound supports at these sites.

In addition, the Department of Community Services is funding projects that address specific cultural needs. We have provided \$350,000 to the North End Community Health Centre to provide supportive housing for men from the African Nova Scotian community. We have invested \$1.6 million for the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre to open the Diamond Bailey House. This project will have 42 transitional and emergency beds for the Mi'kmaw community. Services available in-house will include elder support, cultural mentoring, land-based learning, and life skills development, in addition to mental health and addictions counselling.

We also know that young people experiencing homelessness lack many of the social supports necessary for the transition from childhood to adulthood. In such circumstances, they do not have a stable or consistent residence or source of income, nor do they have adequate access to the support networks necessary to foster a safe transition into the responsibilities of adulthood. To that end, we are working to increase our supports for young people.

This past Winter, we supported Pictou County Roots for Youth society to hire trained support staff skilled at helping vulnerable youth stabilize their lives as they transition to independence. The Province also invested \$1.1 million to help The Portal Youth Outreach Association create three new transitional houses for young people experiencing homelessness in the Annapolis Valley. These houses are now providing wraparound supports for young people in Windsor, Kentville, and Middleton. Young people can stay in these homes from three months to three years, depending on their needs and their capacity to transition to permanent housing. These young people are now receiving school and career planning guidance, peer support, and mental health supports.

These are but a few examples of the work that has happened recently, thanks to the partnerships between DCS, our community partners, network of service providers, and

other departments such as Municipal Affairs and Housing, to address the growing issue of homelessness. These initiatives and our work to date is just the beginning.

I am honoured to be part of a group of caring and compassionate professionals who are dedicated to supporting our most vulnerable citizens. Working together across all levels of government, within communities and with our community partners, I am confident we can continue to address this challenge.

THE CHAIR: I move to Mr. Crooks, executive director of Phoenix Youth Programs.

TIM CROOKS: Thank you to the committee members for a chance to spend a little time with you and have this really important discussion today.

I'm Tim Crooks, and as was mentioned, I'm the executive director of Phoenix Youth Programs, often just known in the community as Phoenix. We've been around for 35 years. We're known regionally, nationally, and internationally for our broad continuum of supports and services that we've grown to provide, often in close partnership with our government counterparts, and certainly with huge support from the community.

Those programs range from early intervention and prevention through residential programs to health care and a variety of other key supports, through to a learning and employment centre that is often then the launch pad either into post-secondary education or first opportunity for labour market engagement and ability to support yourself.

I have really appreciated the opening remarks from both the deputy ministers and again am pleased to be here with you this morning. I think it's important if we're going to talk about supportive housing just to spend a minute or two on framing both the challenge and the opportunity. I've read some of the records of previous discussions. You've touched, of course, on really key points, and just a couple of them I wanted to underscore this morning.

If you picture housing on a continuum from unhoused through to home ownership of market housing, there are parts of that continuum that, if you're looking to address the challenges, are best addressed through partnerships in different directions. The divide roughly is between market housing and non-market housing. On the market housing side, often partnerships with developers and supporting them through processes that allow them to do what they're designed to do is really key.

On the other end of the continuum, on the non-market housing, as Deputy Minister LaFleche referenced, there are key partnerships and a key sector to be grown, and that's the community housing sector. In Nova Scotia, that has traditionally been significantly underdeveloped. Really, an opportunity to address affordable housing goes back 10 years,

and the lack of addressing it in a comprehensive way has led in part to the crisis that we're experiencing today.

[10:15 a.m.]

I wanted to start by making the distinction between non-market housing and market housing and understanding, if you're trying to address an issue, what that process looks like and what those partnerships look like. For those clients that we would share with the Department of Community Services, the answer to that on supportive housing is 9.5 to 9.9 times out of 10 going to be on the community housing sector side with not-for-profits. How those relationships are developed and how those not-for-profits are supported is a key consideration.

Now about the opportunity - there's an opportunity in Canada. In June of 2019, the Parliament of Canada passed the National Housing Strategy Act, making housing a human right in Canada. Again, we're drawing a clear distinction here: between housing as a fundamental human right, and housing as a commodity. Housing as a commodity belongs in the market housing side. Housing as a human right is the passion that's held by not-for-profits who are designed to support groups of individuals in very defined ways. That's where partnership between us and the Department of Community Services has been so important and so robust.

Part of the answer - going back to that opportunity that was missed some 10 years plus ago - given that today's government is talking about population growth in Nova Scotia, I think there's a beautiful opportunity there. However, if we want to make sure that the crisis we're experiencing in housing doesn't get worse, then we need to understand housing as an infrastructure crisis in the same way that we would look at infrastructure relating to hospitals or to roads - and the deputy minister to my right certainly knows about the challenges of infrastructure from previous portfolios.

Housing is an infrastructure challenge for this province in all of its fullness, including not only capital investments, but what's required to run supportive housing in a way that's long term and that allows NGOs to do it without feeling crushed every day by that challenge. That's the opportunity to build out the middle of the housing continuum for supportive housing.

Finally, I'd say supportive housing itself and the nature of how we respond is changing in real time. When I was coming up through the ranks earlier in my career, all of the talk was on evidence-based practice. God forbid that you suggest something that hadn't been tried before; unless it was evidence-based, you wouldn't get too far in that discussion. Now, the shift because of the pressures in real time is to practice-based evidence - what we're experiencing in the field and our ability to be nimble and flexible in responding to those pressures.



The final thing I'll say on supportive housing - and anybody will tell you as a provider of supportive housing - is that it's relationship, relationship, relationship, and our ability to provide real-time, flexible supports. That provides a challenge for how NGOs have traditionally engaged with government through service-level agreements that are very structured for very valid reasons, but that's limiting when the needs are changing and our ability to address them has to change in real time as well. I'm thrilled to be here with you this morning.

THE CHAIR: Now, Mr. Graham, executive director for the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia.

JIM GRAHAM: Thank you very much for the opportunity to spend a little time this morning on a conversation about supportive supported housing.

The Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia, or AHANS, is a provider of non-profit housing, a developer of non-profit housing, and a consultant to other non-profits related to affordable housing. I'm here today to speak to you in our capacity as the delivery agent for Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy.

By the end of this program on March 31, 2024, we will have delivered some \$22 million in HRM, and some \$7 million outside of HRM - excluding Cape Breton as they have their own - in funding service providers who work with individuals to end homelessness. We serve Halifax's service provider community in the capacity of manager of CAS - Halifax's Coordinated Access System. CAS is designed to triage a community's homeless population and assign resources - support workers or housing or both - to those most in need first. Generally speaking, CAS identifies those who are chronically homeless as the highest priority for available housing and available support. Chronic homelessness is defined as being homeless for six months or a cumulative six months over a three-year period.

Our role in CAS is managing, on behalf of the service provider, services to that population. We do not provide direct service. We support community-based agencies.

The data that we collect is provided by service providers. We update it every Tuesday. It's posted on our website. It is a by-name list of all of the people in HRM who are currently homeless. Today, when you go and look, you will see that there are 555 individuals on that list. You don't see their names, just the number.

A common attribute of chronic homelessness is characteristic of high acuity - individuals with health, active addictions, and/or mental health issues - Deputy Minister Taweel referred to this - that compromise their ability to sustain their housing. I'd like to frame my comments in the context of the by-name list specifically related to this population.

Since November 2020, community service providers have housed some 210 individuals from the by-name list. Of these, 128 were chronically homeless with high acuity. In the same time frame, 96 of those housed returned to homelessness. They were unsuccessful. Ninety per cent of those individuals who returned to homelessness were high-acuity individuals. Their return to homelessness, the inability to stay in their housing, occurred in spite of the best efforts of housing support workers in the community and intensive case managers that both DCS and Reaching Home fund.

Quickly, credit to the Department of Community Services for recognizing the need for permanent supportive housing, for place-based supports combined with affordable housing, and for successfully convincing Treasury Board of the critical need for this investment.

The Overlook, Yorkshire - we call our properties by the street name - is an example. AHANS has a partnership with Coverdale Courtwork Society where we provide the property and the management, and they provide the service to women involved in the justice system.

I have to say though, as Deputy Minister Taweel also said, this is a complex problem. I would suggest to you that we are not going to solve this without another partner at the table, and that partner's not here today. That partner is the Department of Health and Wellness. That partner is the Nova Scotia Health Authority. In other communities, community service providers have access to an ACT or a FACT team. It stands for Flexible Assertive Community Treatment, or just Assertive Community Treatment, and it's a program offered to those over 18 with severe mental illness. It aims to support individuals as they recover, integrate into the community, and increase their autonomy. The intensity of treatment is dependent on the needs of the individual.

The critical thing here is that they have access to professional services - mental health nurse, social workers, specialized educator, and most importantly, psychoeducator, occupational therapists, and a psychiatrist. This kind of interdisciplinary team goes directly to the people in their living environment. They support those who have a serious mental disorder and a high need for services requiring the support of a caseworker in various aspects of their life - finances, social networking, housing.

As a landlord with affordable housing, AHANS can attest to the challenges of all landlords and support workers alike trying to keep some individuals stably housed. Without the kinds of support I've just named, it does not happen. Without it, this revolving door experienced by high-acuity individuals will just keep spinning.

THE CHAIR: Now we'll move to questions, beginning with the Liberal Party, but just before we begin, just a reminder to the witnesses that you shouldn't reply until I recognize you as speaker and your microphone goes on, just so it's recorded for you.

MLA Nicoll.

LORELEI NICOLL: Welcome and thank you for your presentations. I came here today always interested in learning more. As many of you know, I was previously a municipal councillor for 12 years. This issue was certainly something that was top of mind in trying to address, and the understanding of role clarity was always an issue. I thank you, Mr. Crooks especially, for providing that more so than government themselves, in providing that take.

When we were in the crisis with homelessness and trying to understand - and I thank Mr. Graham for saying that Public Health needs to be here as well, as far as the role that they would play, and Mr. Crooks said that it's about practice-based evidence. When we were in the crisis, why was it the municipality that had to provide the temporary units that were established, and the Province responded with wraparound services? It is about the infrastructure and having that put in place. I just wondered why, when we were in the crisis, that we didn't look at the infrastructure provincially. Federally, housing is a human right, and like you said, we need to work with the infrastructure in place and housing is a provincial jurisdiction.

Going forward, because municipal units across Nova Scotia own property where housing is required, will municipal units be required to be those that provide the property or land mass where you want to do it? I'm just trying to get some role clarity with regard to what the municipal responsibility will be to address this crisis. I'm currently hearing from residents that there are unhoused people who are setting up in other green spaces all through the municipality, and I don't know who to address that to. They're now in some green space behind a house and they feel unsafe and they don't know whether - Winter's coming. I'm really at a loss as to whom I'm supposed to address that situation.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Crooks.

LORELEI NICOLL: She's putting her hand up.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Taweel.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I'd love it to be Tim, but I think it's me. I will start, and then colleagues may want to jump in to respond. There's a lot in your question, but where I would start is with my comments, and I think all of my colleagues at this table have made the same comments.

This is a very complex challenge. I wish you could put it in a bit of box to say it squarely rests here, and this is the only place where it rests. That is not accurate. It is very complicated, and as populations grow and as the needs of populations grow, it is incumbent upon all levels of government and service providers at the local, regional, and provincial

levels, to work together to support our shared citizens. For example, HRM working in partnership with us around the modular units.

The partnership we have with HRM, I would say - and witnessed most recently through even the response to shelter homeless individuals during the hurricane - we have reached a level of quite an exceptional partnership with HRM where we meet on a weekly basis. We work together to bring to bear the resources that each level of government has at its disposal to bring to bear.

The Department of Community Services doesn't have all of the resources to solve this problem alone - we would be foolhardy to think that we do. We need our partners in the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Phoenix, AHANS, and all municipalities to work collaboratively to support citizens who most need that support. We're at the table bringing all that we can bring, and the Province will continue to do that, but it is far too complicated for one level of government or one department to solve on its own.

[10:30 a.m.]

LORELEI NICOLL: Just for clarity, my question was trying to isolate who is responsible for the infrastructure itself for homelessness, not the - I know it's complex, but in these partnerships, who is responsible to build the infrastructure for the homelessness crisis, at the end of the day? I understand we have great partnerships and things like that, but to Mr. Crooks' point, we need the infrastructure. Is the reliance going to be fully on not-for-profits? You mentioned how you went into - I like your term - real time. That's where we are in trying to address the crisis, and as you grow your populations, there's a lot of immigration. People move around the province themselves, so there's a lot of that as well. How you're addressing it - to Mr. Graham's point, CBRM has their own - trying to address with that, but, again, trying to sort of say who's going to be responsible to build the infrastructure for the homeless?

TIM CROOKS: Thanks for the question. It's a hard one to answer, and maybe we can call a little bit on some examples from other regions. The municipalities in other provinces - the larger municipalities - are significant players in addressing it - their citizens on their streets - and view it as their responsibilities. We know the historical challenge with amalgamation and why things have ended up the way that they have between HRM, as an example, and the Province, but the answer to your question is it falls to everybody, and part of how we respond is decided from the get-go on how the issue is framed. That's part of what I think is important to spend a little time on today.

I've spoken about the feds and their orientation to the issue, identifying it as a human right. If it was framed in this province - which would be a beautiful thing - that housing here is also a human right, then it changes the nature of those discussions and it calls to action a really integrated, collaborative approach that helps build out the

community housing sector in a way that it starts to have expertise that it doesn't presently have, in the way that it starts to have the wherewithal to do the essential things.

This problem is going to get worse at an expedited pace before we have signs of it getting better. It's the nature of it, and that won't be a shortcoming on Deputy Minister Taweel's part or a shortcoming on Deputy Minister LaFleche's part. It's about how as a province we're framing the challenge, and then how we decide we're going to respond. It is significant to think about the scale that Jim has referred to, that we're in the range of 500 individuals at any given time. We know, coming up on two years ago, there was an announcement of \$10 million invested for the creation of 50 beds. It doesn't take long to do the math to say, "Well, if there are 500 individuals . . ."

We're in the magnitude of investment of \$100 million, and that's only to get us to a catch-up point of the imminent crisis. It doesn't deal with future population growth. It doesn't deal with the need to view housing as an essential part of our infrastructure going forward, and it doesn't address the supportive housing, and exactly the way that Jim described: supportive housing that provides wraparound supports that are trajectory-changing and life-changing and that lead to the greater good for all of us, for quality of life in Nova Scotia.

The final thing I'll say, just quickly, on this - and I don't think it matters where you fall on the political divide - people come to this work, whether we're on the bureaucratic side of things or the community service provider side of things, or whether you come to it politically, there's a belief in people, there's a belief in the ability, in the importance of living vibrant lives and of having strong communities. The simple reality is that healthy individuals lead to healthy neighbourhoods, and healthy neighbourhoods - let's not deny it - lead to healthy commerce. Healthy commerce leads to healthy communities, which are more likely to support healthy individuals. That's the dynamic nature, and again, how we get at that is less of a consideration. Acknowledging that dynamic is there - and again, no matter where you fall on the political divide - is one that we need to understand the nature of.

It comes back to quality of life, not just for those individuals living in tent towns, whom we have a responsibility to provide support to in very meaningful, very dignified ways - not only those individuals. If you asked the neighbours to Meagher Park about quality of life for them, they would say that theirs is connected to those individuals as well. There is a tethering here of one to the other, and we have a responsibility to that at all levels, in all directions in Nova Scotia.

LORELEI NICOLL: I do agree wholeheartedly with what you've said, but I also realize that the affordable housing report was commissioned and approved, but it's in abeyance right now. I just wanted to ask, the first recommendation was to create a group that would look at it, and the second recommendation was to say that housing was a human right. Yet we are still here wondering where that report is and how it's being worked on. I

will ask the government, either deputy minister, to respond to where that report is and if a committee has been struck. Are you working on it to address the homelessness crisis?

PAUL LAFLECHE: I have a copy of the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission report here. I can, indeed, table it. The first recommendation is, in fact, to establish an arm's-length, independent provincial housing agency. As you know, the minister announced in June that he would go ahead in the Legislature and create such an entity. It will be one of the new Crown corporations that the government is creating.

Pamela Menchenton here is the executive director of Client Services for that corporation. As we get through the legislative agenda and we get approval through the Lieutenant Governor and a proclamation of the legislation, we will be putting in place all of the things to have that independent corporation stood up. It will, of course, be owned by the Province, as will all of its public housing assets. It will be advised by a board, and it will have a full staff complement and provide services to Nova Scotians. How and what services, that's probably something I should leave for another day, but the minister will have further information on that.

You said the second recommendation was recognizing housing as a right. It doesn't say a human right, as a right and a key strategic sector for economic development, health, and social equity. There is a report the minister put out recently, which was the response to all 17 recommendations of the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission report, and the government has signed onto that one too. Status as of August is green. I have the minister's report card here, which was delivered in late August. You may recall there was a press release and there were a number of interviews in the media. I can leave a copy with the committee for distribution of that report - with Tamer.

I have all of that. I don't know if I want to waste the time of Ms. Nicoll because she probably has other questions - going through all 17 recommendations, which I think I did at a previous Public Accounts Committee meeting and got slapped on the wrist for that. So I will not do that; but if you would like me to do that, I can. I think you probably have other questions.

As you can see, if I went through the responses of the report, which were reviewed by the full committee, you will see that we have a lot of green dots, which means we've done it, yellow-green dots, which means we're just about there, yellow is in progress, and there's a lower number of those, and there is actually a red dot. Everybody wants to know the red dot. (Laughter) The red dot means we haven't really got started, and that's work with stakeholders who support development of a voluntary online rental housing registry operated by landlords to attract and connect prospective tenants seeking affordable housing. Anyway, you can go through this. There's a second red dot here, and then there may be - there's no more red dots. We've got two red dots.

I think we've had a very good response. We've had two report cards out, and I will turn them over to Mr. Tamer at the end of this session. They are available publicly on the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing website.

THE CHAIR: MLA Nicoll, you have another five minutes.

LORELEI NICOLL: I know that Mr. LaFleche is very technical, but at the end of the day, housing is by default a human right even though it wasn't mentioned in the report. I'm going to pass to the Honourable Ben Jessome, MLA.

THE CHAIR: MLA Jessome.

HON. BEN JESSOME: Deputy Minister LaFleche mentioned that the Community Housing Acquisition Program will allow not-for-profit groups to purchase existing rental properties and keep units affordable. I'd like to ask about the balance that needs to be placed, perhaps generally from the table but from a government perspective initially. What's the balance that we try to strike around upkeep to existing properties and creating new ones, and if the intended accomplishment is to acquire these existing rental properties and they need upgrades, is there going to be money to support the upgrades of these spaces to keep them in the state that we need them in?

PAUL LAFLECHE: I think that's a great question, Honourable Ben Jessome, and I think you've really put a key point down that the Auditor General brought up. If you go through the Auditor General's report on public housing, you will see that we've really had a challenge over the last, say, almost four decades, in some cases, since we've inherited these properties - almost all inherited. Very few were built by the provincial government. They've all been inherited from the federal government, so some of them are 40 years old, some are 30, 25. The only new ones, built in the last few years, are small seniors' units - 10, 20 units. All of the big bunches of properties are very old, very much in need of maintenance. There's been maintenance over the years, but as is the case of many public sector pieces of infrastructure, the Auditor General has pointed out that maintenance has not been on par with where we need to be. That will be a key function.

What you're pointing out is that if we encourage co-operative or community non-profits - to acquire more housing - not public housing, but more affordable housing, low-income, vulnerable housing targeted to specific groups - as in, maybe, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives report - which is in the package here - we need to ensure that the ability to maintain those units and renew them is there. That is - that will be a challenge. That was pointed out by the Auditor General, and we're with you on acknowledging that the challenge is there. Maybe I'd best defer that to Mr. Graham, who might know how the non-profit sector is struggling with maintenance.

BEN JESSOME: Do you want to weigh in?

AN HON. MEMBER: Do you want to weigh in?

BEN JESSOME: You don't have to if you -

JIM GRAHAM: I could weigh in very quickly. I'd like to come back some other day and talk about housing. Today, I would really like to talk about supportive housing, but to speak to Deputy Minister LaFleche's comments, yes, there's an acquisition program for non-profits to acquire existing housing. It needs some overhaul, and I'll just leave it at that.

[10:45 a.m.]

BEN JESSOME: Just a quick short snapper, a yes-or-no answer: Can we expect to see an increase to income assistance in the not-too-distant future?

TRACEY Taweel: That's a decision that will be made by government throughout the budget process.

THE CHAIR: MLA Jessome, you have 20 seconds.

BEN JESSOME: I had to try. (Laughter) I'll defer to my colleagues from the NDP.

THE CHAIR: Time has expired for the Liberal caucus. We'll move to the NDP. MLA Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: I want to talk a little bit about homelessness during crisis and disasters, first and foremost, because right now that is pretty much what my community is in.

In a report from April this year titled *Homelessness during a pandemic*, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives recommended that the government create an action plan and policies to support people experiencing homelessness during disaster events. Along with the pandemic, we recently saw with Hurricane Fiona how the effects of disastrous events are borne by the housing insecure.

We also have an influx of displaced and homeless persons right now in many of our communities, especially in the CBRM. In the CBRM and my community, this influx of homelessness is a direct result of the storm damage. Assuming that future disasters such as extreme weather events are inevitable - and with our climate crisis, it is inevitable that we are going to have another one - what is government doing to prepare and support these communities?

TRACEY Taweel: I will start, and my colleague Deputy Minister LaFleche may also have some comments to make.



I would say, from the Department of Community Services' perspective, we've been working very collaboratively with municipalities and with service providers right across the province to identify immediate pressing needs, but also, as we start to address those immediate needs, to begin to plan, to look forward and to plan for exactly what you've just articulated. Certainly, there is an aspect of supporting individuals when they are in crisis that we will always deal with. We need planning, absolutely. We need infrastructure in place. We will always need to also have crisis response plans in place.

The most recent hurricane - I totally understand why it's very top of mind for you and your constituency - we worked collaboratively with municipalities and service providers across the province to ensure that those individuals, at the moment, who were experiencing homelessness, recognizing that others may now be precariously housed as a result of damage - we worked with those service providers and municipalities to help put supports in place to ensure that people could shelter appropriately during the storm.

Since the storm has occurred, and in the recovery post-storm, government has made investments to provide support to individuals who may be experiencing homelessness, who may have lost food, who may require additional shelter. You'd be very familiar - I know in your constituency we've provided funding to the Cape Breton Community Housing Association to set up a hotel fund to support individuals who may have been precariously housed prior to the storm or are now precariously housed because of the impacts of the hurricane. We established that fund working with our partner in the form of CBCHA.

We've also been working with the Canadian Red Cross. We provided funding to United Way to support food banks and other organizations. We've supported Feed Nova Scotia, providing them with funding as well in response.

All of these items that I've listed are immediate kind of recovery responses. Our work in terms of forward planning is happening day in and day out as a regular course of business working with our service providers. I'm really happy with the relationships that we have forged with municipalities and with key partners at the community level. There's a lot of work that we still need to do, some of which, as we develop the Province's first supportive housing action plan - some of that work will manifest through that action plan.

Work is progressing on that front in partnership with colleagues - some of whom are at this table - and other departments in government to make sure that when we plan for the future and when we invest in the present that we are actually taking into consideration the infrastructure needs, the client needs, and exactly what government needs to do to ensure that we are in the best place possible so that we can withstand either weather-based events or any other event, such as impacts of pandemic or illness. My colleague may have other comments, I'm not sure.

KENDRA COOMBES: Within this, after the hurricane it's been reported from Dalhousie Legal Aid Service that the \$150 is only if you have an address. That is what's

being reported - that people who are homeless or precariously housed are only going to get this \$150 for things that they may have lost during the storm if they have an address. Given that Employment Support and Income Assistance no longer has the address policy, can you please explain this concept, keeping in mind that the income assistance rate for unhoused people is \$358 and average rent is between \$900 to \$1,700 a month.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I'm very happy to clarify that. To be clear, we reached out to Dalhousie Legal Aid Service yesterday to make sure that they actually had the accurate information. That news release did not accurately capture the supports that are being provided to those who are in receipt of - it's called the Essentials Allowance. Income assistance recipients, for every case - they received \$150 to help support replacement of essentials that they may have lost. As well, income assistance recipients will be eligible for the \$100 food replacement, so they can apply for that.

Individuals who are in receipt of the Essentials Allowance, some may be receiving much more than \$150. Any items that they have lost have all been replaced, they are being provided with food gift cards, they're being provided with whatever they need to re-establish themselves with the appropriate level of support. While they're not in receipt of the \$150, they are, in fact, in receipt of exactly what it is that they need to receive.

KENDRA COOMBES: So to clarify, no address is needed to receive this \$150?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: It is not. It's not address based. It's based on what you are in receipt of through the Income Assistance program, through the ESIA program. Individuals in receipt of income assistance have received - received it last week - the \$150. Individuals in receipt of the Essentials Allowance have received whatever it is that they need. It could be replacing all of the goods that they may have lost. It may be money for food. It could be any number of things.

I think it's important to note that individuals in receipt of the Essentials Allowance can include people who reside in shelters, they may be in hospital, they may have been in a hotel. Some of them did not lose food, did not lose - they were provided with supports all the way through the storm. Having said that, we recognize that there may be other needs that they have, so we are providing those on a customized basis, on a person-by-person basis.

KENDRA COOMBES: It was reported that there were 697 people in Halifax experiencing homelessness at the end of September. Keep in mind, we do not have the full numbers for anywhere else, such as Cape Breton, but these numbers - even the 555 that we heard today - are staggering considering that the number was over 200 people less just six months ago.

In your opening statement, you described the department's approach as moving away from a crisis-driven system to one of prevention and response. Given those numbers

we're seeing, I just have to ask how is this anything but a crisis? I'll give kudos to MLA Brendan Maguire who expressed concerns on March 1<sup>st</sup> at this committee that these figures collected only represent Halifax and not Nova Scotia as a whole. This would help to understand the scope and spread of this crisis. Have there been any efforts since to collect the data from other regions of the province, from Yarmouth to Cape Breton?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Certainly, other parts of the province do point-in-time counts, and there are other counts that are available in other parts of the province. You're quite correct that the by-name list Mr. Graham was quoting from is in HRM and is a requirement, as I understand it, of the federal government - part of the federal funding - to have this particular type of count.

You're right, I mentioned in my remarks about a shift from being a crisis-driven system to a system that is much more preventive and less reactive. I'm sure all committee members will recognize, for a system that has traditionally been built on a foundation of reacting, it takes a long time to shift that system. When you're trying to shift a system in the midst of providing real-time support to individuals who need the support, it will take some time to do that.

I would point to a few areas where I would suggest we're making some progress. We've provided a number of service providers with diversion funding, for example. That diversion funding is intended to support individuals who are at risk of experiencing homelessness, to provide them with all that they need to remain housed. That may be to help support rental arrears or to provide them with some supports so that they can remain housed. That type of diversion funding didn't exist prior to a year ago. We continue to work with our service providers in a very open and collaborative way to identify what supports we need to put in place now to try to stem the tide, if you will, in terms of the growth in that number.

At the front lines, our Income Assistance case workers and folks who work within the DCS system also work individually with all citizens who are on their caseload to try to support them - be it to cover Nova Scotia Power arrears, or work collaboratively with the landlord to try to help that individual stay housed.

The topic today is supportive housing, and I guess that's the other area and final response to your question. As we move toward more supportive housing and we make these types of really significant investments - the creation of the Community Housing Acquisition Program is one great example. Not-for-profits can only access that program if they are in receipt of operating funding from the Department of Community Services. That operating funding will provide that wraparound support to keep people successfully housed.

To the point that Mr. Graham made earlier, we don't want to see people in this revolving door. It's traumatic for individuals to go through that, and every time they are

displaced, it's harder to place them successfully. If we can stop that by supporting our service providers working in partnership and creating more wraparound supports that include addictions, mental health supports, primary care, whatever it may be - how to live with other people, how to successfully integrate into community. All of those supports are critical to ensure that people have safe, stable, and dignified places to live.

JIM GRAHAM: Quickly, MLA Coombes, on your point about data. AHANS supports something called the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System. We have over 70 agencies in Nova Scotia from Yarmouth to Sydney that use that database. It's many databases, it's not one database. The challenge is actually having service providers use the database that's been provided. Reaching Home in HRM mandates that you have to use HIFIS or you can't be funded. Even that is a challenge - looking over their shoulder, are they doing it, are they not? Outside of HRM it's voluntary.

[11:00 a.m.]

The platform is there to actually collect a lot of useful data. There is, however, a lot to overcome. Service providers are nervous about being judged. Frankly, some need to be, to be fair. That's something that needs to be thought about going forward, how to make best use of what's already in front of us.

THE CHAIR: MLA Coombes with five minutes.

KENDRA COOMBES: I'll just add one thing - and this is a yes or no for the Deputy Minister of Community Services. You mentioned working with groups, organizations, not-for-profits for housing. But has the government itself - and I know you're going to say this is for another department, but really, all departments need to be working together, and that needs to stop as an excuse in this committee room, because I've heard it too many times.

So I'm going to stop it right now, at this point. Has the Department of Community Services talked to the other departments about long-term rent controls, strengthening renovation laws to prevent homelessness, as well as the right to first refusal for government to buy properties that are affordable housing, and if they were to be sold, would no longer become affordable housing?

Yes or no: Have you been talking to other departments about this?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: The answer would be that we talk all the time about all issues, including some that you've listed there, as well as how to best support our common clients. You will never hear me say that is not my responsibility, because I recognize that at the Department of Community Services, we can't be successful without all of our partners across government. I would say without hesitation that my colleagues in other departments and their teams recognize the same thing, that we're all in it together.

THE CHAIR: MLA Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm not going to go into a big, old spiel about some stuff. I'm going to ask the Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: we know that Hurricane Fiona has put everyone in a tough situation, and housing members in particular. There have been a number of stories we've heard across our desk about tenants not being able to access certain things, not being able to get on elevators - a number of things within the building.

I wanted to know specifically, what will the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing be doing to prepare for future power outages? Does the department have an emergency plan, and can it be provided to this committee?

PAUL LAFLECHE: Yes. Every storm is a learning opportunity. This storm was very different from most we've experienced in my time here in Nova Scotia. This was mainly a power failure storm, as opposed to a flooding storm, a washout storm, a building-damage storm. A lot of it was power failure, and we learned a lot of lessons.

We learned, for one, that the maintenance and supply of generators is a key issue in our public housing infrastructure. That was somewhat pointed out by the Auditor General. We experienced some of that last year, but now we know it's a really critical issue.

You may have heard the government announce a \$2-million annual program for non-profits - volunteer fire departments, et cetera - to purchase generators for community space that is used during emergencies. We will be looking to document our own issues with respect to generators in buildings with vulnerable residents, if I can put it that way.

So that was a learning experience, and we will profit from that. We will put together a plan, as the member suggests, for all types of emergencies in the future, be they of a power nature or be they of a weather-damage nature.

Maybe I'll turn it over to Pamela Menchenton to talk about this to some extent.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Menchenton.

PAM MENCHENTON: I could tell you what we did in Cape Breton, in particular - I'll just use it as an example because, of course, that was one of the areas most profoundly hit by the impacts of Fiona.

We had communication challenges, as so many of us did, so one of the things that we did was we deployed staff to go and actually knock on doors of particularly vulnerable populations - seniors and so forth - just to do a wellness check, to see what people needed. As the deputy minister talked about, the generators were a bit of an issue, so we've learned

some things that we may have to do next time which is to have backup generators to our backup generators. They're not really meant to be run 24/7, all the time.

There definitely will be things that we'll try to do differently if there is another event. As you all mentioned, of course there will be. We have debriefs and so forth planned once the crisis has truly passed for the eastern part of the province and Cape Breton . . .

THE CHAIR: Order, the time for the NDP caucus has come to an end. I move to the PC caucus. MLA Palmer.

CHRIS PALMER: Thank you all for appearing this morning. This has been quite a conversation, and a lot of education, I know for myself. Obviously, it's a challenge that exists not only in urban centres, but all over Nova Scotia. Representing a rural constituency, I guess I bring that perspective to the table this morning. Through my office as well, we see people coming in my office with homeless situations looking for housing. An organization doing a lot of work in my area that my office deals a lot with is Project H.O.P.E. They have been supportive in doing some good work with people coming in looking for housing.

What's also been mentioned is collaboration and working together - an all-hands-on-deck approach to the problem we're facing right now. My question, I guess, will be for maybe Deputy Ministers Taweel and LaFleche. Our budget this Spring allotted about \$10 million for supportive housing initiatives. Could you tell us, maybe expand a bit more on the collaboration between departments, and how you look to maximize those resources and working with partnership to create those partnerships like Project H.O.P.E?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Yes, as has been mentioned a number of times, we do work very collaboratively across departments. While Community Services and Municipal Affairs and Housing are represented here today, I think it's important to note that we work with the Department of Justice, Department of Health and Wellness, the Nova Scotia Health Authority, the Office of Addictions and Mental Health.

There's quite a lengthy list of individual departments that we work with as a collaborative team, if you will. Particularly because we have been given the mandate to develop the province's first supportive housing model, it's incumbent upon us to bring together all of these different departments so that their respective expertise can be brought to bear on the development of what we actually need to deliver to the citizens of this province who are in need of support.

Mr. Graham referenced individuals who are high acuity. I think certainly we are all very focused on individuals who would be at the end of that continuum, if you will - high acuity, high needs. But there are also individuals who would be considered lower acuity, if you will. That doesn't mean they don't need a level of support - they just may not need the same supports as someone who is further up on that spectrum.

Regardless of where an individual lands on that continuum, they are deserving of and in need of support of government, supports that come through all of our respective departments and that are delivered very ably by our service providers at the local level within your constituency and within all constituencies right across this province.

To that end, we have made a number of investments with organizations, some of which I mentioned in my opening remarks. The Portal Youth Outreach Association in the Valley I think is a great example. We've worked collaboratively with Phoenix Youth for many years. We work in partnership with AHANS to support community-based organizations like the North End Community Health Centre to deliver some really innovative programming, I would say.

Mr. Crooks' comment about evidence-based versus real-time practice-based learning - we have been invited to step into a space to try things. To work with your partners and try things, take risks, do what's best to meet the needs of your client, learn from it and develop programs from that.

That is absolutely the mentality and the approach that we're taking in the Department of Community Services, and that my colleagues are adopting right across government: step in, provide the support that's needed, try something different. We weren't in Community Services talking about wraparound supportive housing 10 years ago. We recognize now we must provide these wraparound supports if we're going to stabilize the current situation that we find ourselves in and provide the supports that individuals need.

CHRIS PALMER: Deputy Minister Taweel, you've mentioned a couple of times, the The Portal Youth Outreach Association. I've had the privilege of meeting Russ Sanche and his group there on a few different occasions and understand the work that they do very well. That \$1.1 million investment that you've mentioned, could you expand just a bit more, and just talk about how that area of the Annapolis Valley - how those three projects are really going to have an impact on youth housing in that area, if you don't mind expanding a bit more on that?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Anyone who's met Mr. Sanche knows his passion, and he brings that to everything that he does, as do his team members. The three homes that I referenced in my opening remarks, they are providing supports to youth for the first time in the Annapolis Valley. As I mentioned in my remarks, youth can be housed from three months to three years, depending on their needs.

To harken back to my response that I just provided, youth certainly can fit along that spectrum in terms of lower acuity, if you will, to higher acuity. That kind of sounds a bit technical; I don't want it to sound that way. I really want to impart to the committee that all of the things that we're investing in are meant to meet people where they are and provide them with the supports they need to be successful. Certainly, Mr. Crooks can

provide much more in-depth perspective on the needs of youth, but they are not the same as a 55-year-old individual who may find themselves precariously housed.

There are a lot of other challenges, and opportunities, that youth have. We want to make sure that we help to stabilize them, provide the supports that they need so that they can transition successfully into adulthood. The work of The Portal Youth Outreach Association in the Valley is providing those very essential wraparound supports to both help youth address some of the challenges they may be experiencing, but also recognize their inherent worth and all that they have to offer to the world. It's a remarkable project, and we're really excited to see how it will grow and expand over time.

THE CHAIR: Deputy - is it MLA Palmer again?

CHRIS PALMER: Is that a promotion or a demotion? I don't know.

THE CHAIR: You've been promoted, buddy. (Laughter)

CHRIS PALMER: Just one more quick question - and I guess this is a question I'll direct to Mr. LaFleche. Further down the continuum, basically my question to you is that the idea of home ownership is still there for a lot of people. It's a dream for a lot of people, and has become out of reach for some. With higher construction costs, inflation, different things happening, could you just speak briefly about how your department is helping people in those situations to achieve home ownership?

PAUL LAFLECHE: Yes, I'll try not to be too technical because she stole my thunder on the technicalities. We do have some initiatives - some of them new - to create some affordability on the housing side. I want to temper those with the reality that until construction prices come down - either on the labour side or the material side - it will be hard to build new homes which are extremely affordable, but things will happen. As you know, there are cycles in the economy, and we will arrive at a better spot. We're at an abnormally high spot in the last year, we were in a low spot some years ago. It goes up and down, and housing stock prices reflect that market phenomenon.

The cost of construction is a considerable thing, and I will allow Stephan Richard, maybe, to discuss our programs. First, I want to say we've taken some initiatives to ensure that we have an increased production of stock which will naturally make things affordable because you have more supply.

One of the things that I find peculiar is that in many conversations, no one ever discusses the supply-demand balance. That is truly something that drives home prices. Even if you can build cheaply, if you don't build enough and your demand is huge, your price is going to go up due to bidding. The supply and demand balance is really important.



[11:15 a.m.]

We had an excellent balance, the envy of Canada, until about five years ago, particularly in the urban centres, and then things started to go the other way. In the last two years, they've gone the other way all across Nova Scotia in the rural areas. Even in places where the housing was extremely affordable, we've now got a supply-demand imbalance with a lot more demand than supply.

One of the things the government has done - like strike the taskforce in HRM to deal with a particular issue here because things that add cost to construction or delay supply - delay costs money, but also supply not coming on results in cost increases. We've done some things in HRM, and we have initiatives all across the province to look at supply-demand issue, which causes some degree of indigestion, I agree, for council members and others out there, but we've had to do this just as other cities in North America have had to do this. Other provinces have had to do this, even in their smaller rural areas where we have that supply-demand balance. Affordability is a big part of that.

Getting that equation right, ensuring that we can get supply on the market quickly, even if we have to take some risk, we kind of reduce risk in many urban centres to zero in building. Maybe we could have it at 90 per cent. Every once in a while, we do make a mistake, but on the other hand, we get a lot more supply out of it, and that will moderate prices. That's one big thing.

The other side of the equation is what programs - in addition to the federal programs through CMHC and the federal ministers - have we instituted recently to try to make people at the first rung, the get-in-the-market people, have an easier time getting into the housing market? Maybe, Stephan, you could - there he is. Man, that guy is fast, or I talked long.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Richard.

STEPHAN RICHARD: On the home ownership side of the housing spectrum, there are really two key programs that we offer. The first one is the Down Payment Assistance Program. That's helping first time homebuyers to purchase a home. What we've seen in the last two years is - I'm sure every member of the committee knows the housing market has shifted completely. Home values have gone up considerably, so it made it really difficult - especially for first-time homebuyers who are typically younger households - to really afford to buy a home, despite our programs.

What we've done is we've changed some of the parameters. Now, we've increased the home value threshold to \$500,000, and in the Annapolis and the Western Regions it is \$375,000. I just have to look at my notes here. In the rest of the province - Cumberland, Colchester, Pictou, Antigonish, Guysborough, Cape Breton, and Yarmouth - now the limit is \$300,000, and it was \$200,000 before. That was a change that we introduced in the Summer. We've seen an uptick in the number of applications, which is a good sign.

Unfortunately, you all know that interest rates have gone up, so it's now making it even more difficult and challenging for a lot of Nova Scotians to afford to buy their homes. Down Payment Assistance Program is a very important program. It helps to support our younger Nova Scotians to establish roots in communities and buy their homes.

The second program is the Home Ownership Preservation program, which has a budget of around \$20 million. It helps on an annual basis around 2,000 low-income households. Really, it's meant to do repairs that are health and safety related adaptations so that we can keep our seniors, mostly, in their homes for a longer period of time if that's their choice. Those are our two main programs, I would say, on the home ownership side of the spectrum.

THE CHAIR: MLA MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: This is to Deputy Minister Taweel, just because I've had to ask it twice over here under the thing. Can you actually define high acuity - because I'd like to know the term. I actually didn't know what it meant. I had to ask somebody. I'm just wondering if somebody else is watching this and going, what does high acuity mean? I got the right answer, I'm being told, but I'll ask the expert on this.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I'm not certain I'd be an expert. I will look to my colleagues as well to add to this.

When we consider a client, someone we're supporting, to be high acuity, we're thinking of individuals who require multiple supports to help them be successfully housed. It may be harm-reduction supports, addictions, mental-health supports, primary health care. It could be any number of supports that they require in order to remain successfully housed.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Actually, Mr. Graham wants to add to it, if he could, Mr. Chair.

JIM GRAHAM: I would compare it to a health assessment around activities of daily living. It's very similar to that. So in the health system, can you dress yourself, can you cook your own meals? It's a spectrum like that.

There are various tools - there are two main tools used in Canada to assess acuity. One is called VAT - Vulnerability Assessment Tool - and the other is called SPDAT, which stands for - they're assessment tools. They have a range of questions. In Nova Scotia, SPDAT is the one that's used, and it's a scale that goes from zero to, I think, 16 or 17. When you get up at that upper range, you essentially cannot live independently.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Yes, she was pretty well right.

Back to Deputy Minister Taweel, you mentioned a Community Housing Acquisition Program. Can you tell me how the investment with this program will create more supportive housing?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Yes, absolutely. To be clear, the Community Housing Acquisition Program is administered through the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing in partnership with DCS. Essentially the way it works is to provide - and I'll invite my colleague to jump in if I do anything wrong here - low-interest loans to not-for-profit service-provider-based organizations. In order to qualify for those loans, the service provider needs to also be working with the Department of Community Services. We provide them with the operating funding to provide those wraparound supports that will be provided to individuals who will live in the home that is acquired through the loan program.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: The other deputy minister seems like he's happy with her answer, so I'll ask him a question anyway, and then defer to MLA Taggart.

Deputy Minister LaFleche, we're aware of the impact that's happened with Fiona. Can you give us some more details on how the financial support for Fiona is helping community organizations, such as shelters?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister LaFleche, with two and a half minutes.

PAUL LAFLECHE: So maybe I should actually let Deputy Minister Taweel start, because she gave - first of all - okay, well, let me start, since I'm talking. (Laughter) You talked about community organizations. The majority of the support that has flowed through my departments has gone to individuals, and through Deputy Minister Taweel's, to organizations.

As you know, we increased the Seniors Care Grant by \$250 for seniors who are eligible for the other \$750 that we've already dispensed. This year, an eligible senior - a low-income senior - will get \$1,000 if they're eligible for it at all, through the Seniors Care Grant. So that was one thing that was done immediately. If you happened to have gotten the first \$750 or the first \$500, the next \$250 was for heating. So if you got either of those, you automatically get a payment into your bank account for the last \$250. Presumably those payments have gone out or nearly gone out. Tracey Barbrick, my associate deputy minister, will be jumping through the phone if I said that wrong. I'm assuming they've gone out quite rapidly. That is one way we dealt with vulnerable populations during the crisis.

I mentioned the generator fund. That's through the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. I've always got a challenge with departments changing their name; I've got to change my shirts all the time. There were a number of other things. We gave \$500,000 to the Canadian Red Cross through the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing to disperse immediately in envelopes up to \$1,000 for those who were

displaced by officials from their housing. Those payments - I'm not allowed to call them cheques, apparently, because the vast majority of them are direct deposit or pre-paid Visa or Mastercard - have already started flowing out. They flowed out within 48 hours.

There were a number of agencies - that's what you first mentioned - that were paid through the Department of Community Services to deliver an amalgam of services. Maybe I'll turn that over to Deputy Minister Taweel . . .

THE CHAIR: Order, please. The time for the PC caucus has come to an end. For the second round, we're going to do five minutes per caucus, starting with MLA Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Mr. Graham, you did make an important distinction that as a new Community Services critic, I didn't really flag out of the gate - I asked a question about housing, but we are here to talk about supportive housing. I appreciate your recognizing that and making that distinction, so I will note that on a go-forward basis.

In keeping with the spirit of that supporting element to the housing continuum, you referenced the value that health plays. Through no fault of perhaps anybody here - they're not at the table here today - I'm wondering if you can expand a little bit on your comments pertaining to what I understand is called the Flexible Assertive Community Treatment program.

JIM GRAHAM: It is essentially a team of health professionals who work in community with individuals who have mental health or addiction issues and don't necessarily have a professional diagnosis. It's not a place-based service where you have to go to an appointment. It is in community where people live.

As a landlord, I can give you a really simple example of a particular challenge. We have a tenant who's a hoarder. (Interruption) Just one so far. We only have a small number of units, but we have a tenant who is a hoarder. It's a challenge to get inside the apartment. He does not want us to come in; I have not been in. When our property manager goes in, it's essentially a rabbit warren is what it is. You can hardly move. It's dangerous.

There's no support for him. He doesn't have an official diagnosis, there's no professional that we can access to support that person. That's one example of something that Flexible Assertive Community Treatment team would be able to access. We do have mobile crisis teams. If someone's having a mental health crisis, they show up - and then they go away. There's no ongoing support, no ongoing service provided to help that person avoid those crises.

That's the challenge that I was trying to express, that until we actually find a way to get more professional services at the community's disposal in people's houses, we will have that revolving door.

[11:30 a.m.]

BEN JESSOME: Mr. Crooks, your diplomacy is outstanding. I'm going to put you on the spot here and ask if there was one thing that you would like from either or both deputy ministers sitting beside you, what would it be?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Crooks, you have one minute left.

TIM CROOKS: I suppose if I speak slowly (Laughter), it's only a matter of time before order is called. Let me just say this for the record because I think it's really important. Both deputy ministers have been highly, highly responsive. I've worked most closely with Tracey, who is accessible all the time, and I just want to underscore that, because the relationships and our ability to respond to this crisis, those relationships need to be solid. Again, both deputy ministers - and most notably, again, I work most closely with Tracey and her staff - have been exceptional.

What I would look for is actually from you at the political level, and it's an acknowledgement of the size of what's coming at us. If there are opportunities to speak to that in more length around . . .

THE CHAIR: Order, please. Sorry. The Liberal time is up. NDP caucus, five minutes.

SUZY HANSEN: Quickly - obviously five minutes goes really fast here - the Auditor General's report from June 2022 highlighted many issues with the management and structure of public housing, but also with the long wait times for these units, in some cases exceeding two years. My question is: Does the department plan to address these wait times by building new units, and, if so, what is the timeline? I'm going to keep adding: When can we expect legislation to create Housing's new structure?

I just want to go back to what the deputy minister said about supply and the demand for supply, and the costs of that and how it is a challenge to create affordable housing based on the cost of the supply. I can tell you that in my riding specifically, there are over eight developments just being built, so I know that the timeline can be done quickly. I think it's the drive and the push that needs to be done in order to house people who need it the most. I'm saying this now because I know our government is - we're all sitting here, and when we sit next, I want us to all remember that at the end of the day it's not about making sure that we profit off the housing that is being built, but that we make sure that everyone has a home and a roof over their head that is safe and supportive, with wraparound supports around them. I just want to say that in particular, but to the deputy minister, I just wanted to ask if there's a timeline for new units, and if so, can that be brought forward?

PAUL LAFLECHE: There's a lot in that question. I appreciate there was a little summary at the end, but there were a lot of questions there. I also live, bizarrely, in the

same riding as the member, although I don't know if you live in the riding, but you represent it, so I shouldn't predict that you live in it. You do, okay. There seems to be more than eight units going up - or eight buildings. My wife often complains about the number of buildings going up, and I'm in the other business. I want more to go up. It's an interesting dinnertime debate.

You asked about the timing of legislation on public housing. I'll give that diplomatic answer that you won't like, the same one Deputy Minister Taweel gave on the budget for Income Assistance, which is we'll wait and see what the minister says when the Legislature opens and when he stands up and introduces bills, but he did promise in June that he would introduce legislation. That means it's in the Fall, the Spring, or the next Fall, the next Spring, et cetera. Before he expires, he will be introducing legislation, and I can't say anything more than that because it's not my position to decide how bills get introduced, but all of you - there are about 10 of you here - you're in the Legislature and you know how that works.

We do need new legislation. The legislation, the way it works, is all outdated. The Auditor General pointed that out. Many people have affordable housing - the commission did - and we'll get to new legislation. You pointed out that we have a lot of things to clean up. The Auditor General's report is very specific on that regarding the existing stock. We need to understand the existing stock. We need to know how it works, how it's serving people, and whether it's reliable, and we're in the middle of that process right now. At some point, the minister will and the government will decide about more stock, or less stock, or whatever. Right now, my focus is on really getting the stock we have running efficiently and making sure all units are occupied.

We have a long wait-list. It's not quite clear what the wait-list is all about - in other words, there are a lot of duplicates on there of people just put their hat in the ring years ahead of time, I don't know. It's the same with long-term care. You have to figure that out and get to the bottom of it. In any event, that's not to say there isn't a significant wait-list, and we have to get to the bottom of it.

At the same time, we have a lot of units which aren't being occupied, bizarrely. I was up in Wallace in the Fall, and we have 10 units there for seniors, and nine are occupied. When I asked how long nine have been occupied, it was quite some time. That means, I know it's just a small sample size, but 10 per cent weren't occupied. Why isn't it occupied?

I drive past a unit in Dartmouth across the bridge, and this corner unit has not been occupied in years. We have to find out why they're not occupied. The first thing before we start worrying about building new units is, are we effectively using the units we have? Again, this is governments upon governments, going back in time have all had . . .

THE CHAIR: Order, please. The time for the NDP caucus has expired. We'll move now to the PC caucus. MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: My question is for Mr. Crooks. We're very happy to hear that Phoenix House received \$3.4 million in 2021-2022 from our government. Can you give us a bit of an update on how that money is being used and the impact that it's having on your organization?

TIM CROOKS: I'm happy to give an account. That money has been applied across a diversity of programs. When I said earlier that we're known regionally, nationally, and internationally for the innovation of services that we provide, that ranges from front line clinical supports that are of an early intervention nature through to residential programs. For instance we run a 20-bed facility. A portion of that money goes towards that emergency shelter, and right through to a learning and employment centre that again launches folks either for their first time being labour-market involved or in pursuit of post-secondary education.

It's a good amount of money, but here's what's really important to know that goes with that. Through the money that we fundraise, we match almost to the dollar the amount of money that we receive from government. We take that responsibility very seriously, and that commitment has not waned through the course of the pandemic.

Think about the size of that challenge. I've read your bios and I know how engaged many of you are in the community, and I'm sure at different points you've had your fingers involved in fundraising processes. If you haven't had that background, let me just share with you how much of a challenge that is.

It's generally known in the fundraising world that percentage growth year over year - all things being equal with a robust economy, a good environment, a stable organization with good name recognition and a long time of good performance - it's probably reasonable to expect a five-per-cent fundraising growth in your target year over year. In the last two years at Phoenix, we've increased our fundraising goal by 38 per cent. That's in order to keep pace with the level of demand that is out there.

To go back to the other question from earlier that I ran out of time on, no matter where you fall on the political spectrum, we would ask that people understand the enormity of what's coming at us. It's a formula that's started to build itself 10-plus years out. We haven't yet seen the worst of it, and the magnitude of how we need to respond is going to be huge. Our present network and ability to do that is stretched to the breaking point. When we're having to fundraise 38 per cent in the last two years over previous-year goals - which were exceptionally ambitious to begin with - it's an indication of the size of that demand.

When you realize that over the last 20 years in Canada, somewhere between 95 to 97 per cent of housing in Canada is for-profit housing, then you understand just how small the not-for-profit housing part of that pie is. Yet, most of what we need to respond with in your communities - rural and urban - and with the challenges that we've seen that we've already touched on about people living rough and being chronically unhoused - the

mandate for that is held, yes, within departments, but by community service providers. Unless we make the investments in growing that sector and fortifying that sector, in working in really new and dynamic ways, like other regions across Canada have, this problem is guaranteed to get significantly worse before it gets better.

TOM TAGGART: I absolutely agree with you. If you read our bios, I think you'll know that I've done a lot of work with the Canadian Mental Health Association and a lot of fundraising there. I absolutely agree with the need for fundraising and totally understand the challenges we have coming forward. I appreciate the work you do, absolutely.

In April, we announced an investment of \$2.5 million to create a Community Housing Growth Fund. Can you kind of update us on that a little bit? I think it went through - what the impact it's had, anyway, at least on the housing growth fund with Phoenix House? Mr. Crooks.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Crooks, there isn't enough time. (Laughter) (Inaudible) Three seconds.

That wraps up our questioning period. Witnesses, I would invite you to give us a very brief closing, if you want, but we do have committee business to take care of when you leave. I'd ask if you have something you're burning to say, please take advantage of it and give us a few remarks. Otherwise, I thank you for coming in today.

JIM GRAHAM: Quickly, one thing. Deputy Minister Taweel referred to this as a complex problem, and that is absolutely true. It is very complex and there is no simple answer.

One of the things that I think might start to make a difference: if funders talked to each other about what funders wanted to do. We have HRM funding initiatives that are working with the homeless. We have DCS funding initiatives that work with the homeless. We have Reaching Home making decisions about funding work with the homeless. At a level above all of that work, I do think we would be better placed if there were conversation among the funders about who's doing what and why, so that we didn't trip over each other trying to get this work done.

THE CHAIR: I'd like to thank you guys for coming in. Excellent information. I appreciate it, I'm sure. You saw that you had our attention. I invite you to leave the premises. (Laughs) Thank you.

BEN JESSOME: Before we dive too quickly into committee business, I'd like to make a motion that, through the Chair, we reach out to the Department of Health and Wellness to provide a written overview briefing of the Assertive Community Treatment program that was mentioned by Mr. Graham in today's line of questioning.



THE CHAIR: Any conversation on the motion?

Sorry, MLA Jessome. We're back in order.

BEN JESSOME: Sorry, my intention was not to catch anybody off guard there. I did want to get it on the record.

Just for the purposes of fact finding, Mr. Graham had referenced the Assertive Community Treatment program that the Department of Health and Wellness administers. It sounds to me as though it's an important asset from a wraparound perspective. Simply from a fact-finding perspective, my motion is requesting the Chair to reach out to the Department of Health and Wellness specifically around the Assertive Community Treatment program to request a written briefing or submission that the committee can review.

[11:45 a.m.]

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Just to be clear, you're not asking to add them as a witness. You're asking to see if they can get you a report, but you're not setting any tight timeline, like have it next week, just to be clear? MLA Jessome, you know where I'm coming from. We're not asking them, obviously - everybody in all of government is working on things. You're just asking for it in a reasonable time. Okay.

THE CHAIR: We don't need a motion on that?

JOHN MACDONALD: He did move it.

THE CHAIR: All in favour of the motion? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Committee business: time ran out last meeting and agenda setting was not completed. The NDP motion concerning their topic was left on the floor and was not able to be voted on. That will be dealt with in today's meeting.

The motion left on the floor was to bring the Nova Scotia Health Authority CEO; the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association executive director; Tajikeimik, the executive director; the Association of Nova Scotia Midwives, president or equivalent, to speak on the topics of access to midwifery and efforts towards reconciliation. That was moved by MLA Suzy Hansen.

Any questions on the motion? MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I just have a friendly suggestion. In the interest of hearing from individuals within an organization who are best positioned to speak on the topic, I would like to see the witness organizations have more control over who presents at committee meetings. Of course, if the CEO or executive director is best positioned to attend, then that's fine, but I think it is in our best interest to be hearing from those who are closest to the topic. With that in mind, we would suggest that the senior director of Women and Children's Health from Nova Scotia Health Authority would be a better person as a witness specifically on this topic than Karen Oldfield.

I would like to do a friendly amendment that the witness list include the following witnesses for the NDP topic on midwifery. For Nova Scotia Health Authority, we suggest Sally Loring, senior director of Women & Children's Health. For a representative from the Department of Health and Wellness, our suggestion would be Tanya Penney, senior executive director, Clinical. For the representative for Nova Scotia Native Women's Association, the executive director or the designate. For the representative from Tajikeyimik, the executive director or designate. For the Association of Nova Scotia Midwives, the president or equivalent.

This is a great topic, but it would be nice to have the people who are closely involved.

KENDRA COOMBES: I'm finding irony in this, very much, considering that every time we ask this does not happen.

I'm going to say this: We want to see CEO Karen Oldfield here. She can bring whomever she wants from her department to present as well, but we want to see the CEO here. Like I said, she's very much welcome to bring anyone she wants, but we want her here.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I'm just going to say it like this: Do you want to have a productive conversation, discussion, or do you want to play politics? The fact of the matter is, Karen Oldfield is appearing frequently in committees and is engaged in doing important work - especially now, particularly in the aftermath of Hurricane Fiona. We need to be respectful of her time in cases where we need more of an appropriate witness, if they're available.

SUZY HANSEN: I truly respect the thoughts behind additions and having a robust conversation. Like we said, the CEO can bring whomever they would like to have a conversation about this particular topic. But as it stands, these are the ones that we want to bring forward, and this is our only topic that we get to choose, so this is what we will be deciding on.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I understand that, but I have to go back to what I said before. Why not bring people to the table who can discuss your subject better than Ms. Oldfield? I'm going to stick to my amendment.

KENDRA COOMBES: Again, I'm going to say that Ms. Oldfield can bring whomever she likes to come here. If she wants to bring them, she's more than welcome.

As for playing politics, that's not us. That's not us that's been happening at this table lately. I think you can all go back to Hansard and see that we have been more than willing to participate and add other voices very well, and we have been shut down many times.

I am not going to fight this any further, but as I said before, Ms. Oldfield can bring whomever she likes, and we'd be happy to speak with them on this topic.

TOM TAGGART: I wonder if I could have a bit of a recess, please.

THE CHAIR: Five-minute recess? (Interruption) How long a recess do you need? You're not getting five minutes. No. Five minutes is not enough time. (Interruption) Three minutes? Three minutes.

[11:52 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[11:55 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: I call the meeting back to order. I think we should have a conversation about extending the meeting.

KENDRA COOMBES: Agreed.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: No, we can get done here.

KENDRA COOMBES: No (Inaudible).

THE CHAIR: Okay, no agreement? We have to deal with the motion on the floor first before we can cast another one.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Well, I'd like to make an amendment. I'd like to make a motion to make an amendment to add the witness for a representative of Nova Scotia Health Authority, Sally Loring, senior director of Women & Children's Health, and for a representative from the Department of Health and Wellness, Tanya Penney, senior executive director, Clinical, and remove Karen Oldfield.

THE CHAIR: Questions on the amendment?

KENDRA COOMBES: I'm sorry, no. You cannot - it's not removing. You can add, but we are not removing Karen Oldfield. Midwifery is important. The CEO of Nova Scotia Health should be here for this important conversation, so I am not going to agree to removing. I will agree to add, but I will not agree to removing from our presentation list as I'm sure none of you on the other side of the table would agree to remove somebody from your presentation list either. As much as I'd like to hear from them, the answer to removing one of our witnesses: no. Sorry.

THE CHAIR: The motion is to - we've heard the motion.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: To add . . .

THE CHAIR: All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

There's a tie in the committee so I'll vote with the caucus.

The motion is carried.

Now we have to vote on . . .

SUZY HANSEN: I have a question for legal counsel. Is that allowed, to remove what we have as presenters, when it's something that we're putting forward as a suggestion or as a topic? Is that allowed?

GORDON HEBB: Yes, the committee can do whatever it wants.

THE CHAIR: Now we have a motion on the floor for the NDP's - it's an amended motion, but it's a motion now, right? We're going to vote in favour. Any questions on it?

KENDRA COOMBES: Is it as amended?

THE CHAIR: As amended.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

BEN JESSOME: I move that we accept the Annual Report as presented.

KENDRA COOMBES: Motion to extend the meeting.

THE CHAIR: We have a motion on the floor first.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

KENDRA COOMBES: Motion to extend the meeting by five minutes.

THE CHAIR: Motion to extend the meeting.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is defeated.

Order, please. After today's meeting, the committee will likely not meet until after December. We're looking for the committee to meet on Tuesday, January 10, 2023.  
(Interruptions)

THE CHAIR: Meeting adjourned.

[The meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.]