

Northern Ontario Service Deliverers weigh in on National Housing Strategy

By Tom Sasvari – The Manitoulin West Recorder

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NORTHERN ONTARIO—The Northern Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA), which includes the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board (MSDSB), is making a variety of valuable contributions to the federal government on its proposed National Housing Strategy.

“The National Housing Strategy needs to be for all Canadians including Northern Ontarians – not just for cities,” notes NOSDA chairman Iain Angus in a release. “The proposed vision of National Housing Strategy is that “all Canadians have access to housing that meets their needs and they can afford. Housing is the cornerstone of building sustainable, inclusive communities and a strong Canadian economy where we can prosper and thrive.”

MSDSB CAO Fern Dominelli told the Recorder, “the bottom line is we need a long term federal and provincial funding commitment of five, 10 and preferably 20 years. We receive between \$300,000-400,000 per year for funding, but with this amount we cannot provide for construction of accommodations for clients. If we knew we were going to get x amount for say 10 years we would be able to put together better options. The money we do receive is for each year not on a long term basis, which makes it very difficult to provide the type of housing that is needed for our clients.”

“We want long term stable funding (from both governments) and recognition that there is an additional cost to living in the North—for instance construction fees are higher,” said Mr. Dominelli.

Bill Bradica, NOSDA's CAO housing lead states, "each NOSDA member, and all service managers across Ontario, have developed 10-year housing and homelessness plans that address specific local issues. Supporting these local plans through the new National Housing Strategy would be an effective way to build success."

Chair Angus provided more specifics. "We offer a ten-point plan. We call on the federal government to provide: increased and sustained funding for new and existing housing units; increased and sustained program funding to support housing providers; more flexibility in the provision of affordable housing options, including portable housing benefits that are linked to the individual and not the housing unit; the establishment of a distinct indigenous housing plan, including culturally appropriate housing and supports, focusing on the unique needs and challenges faced by Canada's indigenous population; inclusion of housing support funding to enable seniors with needs to age in place and individuals with mental health and addictions issues to receive the care and assistance they require; a system of eligibility for affordable and financial supports based on annual income tax reporting; establish a national approach to a consistent rent-gear-to income program; insurance reform to protect those homeowners at risk of losing insurance coverage, leading to greater potential for homelessness; support for a Canadian Housing Bank to provide housing capital needs through private capital markets; recognize the higher cost of building and renovation in Northern and rural communities—particularly in Northern Ontario.

"Throughout the NOSDA membership there are many positive examples of programs and services that reflect these recommendations in housing programs and projects underway from Kenora to the Quebec border," said Mr. Angus. "We look forward to working with the federal government as it proceeds with rolling out its housing strategy."