



Report on 2004 Housing and Disabilities Forum

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Disabilities
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Minister's Message

As Manitoba's Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities, I highly value the opportunity to work with community organizations throughout the province on issues that affect Manitobans with disabilities. Housing is one such important issue and the provincial government is committed to improving housing opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Affordable, safe, accessible housing is a priority for Manitobans with disabilities and was discussed in detail at the 2004 Housing and Disabilities Forum. Representatives from the disability community worked with Manitoba's Disabilities Issues Office to address the pressing concerns of appropriate housing for persons with disabilities. The following report highlights recommendations that resulted from the forum. These recommendations have already been shared with other provincial government departments and the cross-departmental Working Group on Housing for Individuals with a Disability.

As Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities, I am pleased to note that there is a growing consciousness in the minds of builders, developers, community groups and the general public about the benefits of accessible, affordable housing for persons with disabilities. Public forums help us build and expand that consciousness and remind all Manitobans about the improved quality of life we all enjoy in an inclusive society.

I thank everyone who participated in the forum discussions and assure you that the provincial government will use your recommendations to enhance housing programs and policies for persons with disabilities. Your recommendations will also be seriously considered as we move forward toward a Manitoba in which persons with disabilities live securely in dignity, participating fully in the communities of their choice.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "C. Melnick".

Christine Melnick
Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities

Introduction

In the spring of 2004, representatives from the disability community met to discuss how housing programs and policies could be improved to make housing more accessible, more affordable and safer for Manitobans with disabilities. The 2004 Housing and Disabilities Forum was held in Winnipeg on April 8, 2004.

The planning and facilitation of the forum was a collaborative effort of Manitoba's Disabilities Issues Office (DIO), a steering committee made up of community representatives, professional facilitators and expert advisors. Over 70 individuals with disabilities and representatives of community, non-profit and government agencies participated in the event.

The full report *2004 Housing and Disabilities Forum: A Government of Manitoba Community Consultation, April 8, 2004* is available through the Disabilities Issues Office (945-7613 in Winnipeg, toll-free 1-866-626-4862).

The following summary report presents recommendations from the forum participants. These recommendations will be used to help inform and improve current and future housing policies and programs.

The forum focused on three main topics:

- financial access to housing;
- availability and usability of overall housing stock;
- supportive housing.



Financial Access to Housing

On the topic of financial access to housing, the forum presented the provincial government with the following recommendations:

- Create a new shelter allowance program geared to income, with allowances paid directly to renters with disabilities instead of to the housing units.
- Work with the federal government to exempt from federal income tax the amount of any future shelter allowance program that is created.
- Increase the supply of accessible housing within two years by:
 - financing new housing developments like Ten Ten Sinclair Housing, Inc.;
 - developing culturally sensitive housing that includes groups such as First Nations persons with disabilities;
 - seeking the participation of landlords in creating a central registry which would match available housing units with a waiting list of potential tenants with disabilities;
 - ensuring that maintenance standards of provincial buildings are met;
 - creating incentives that promote rent-to-own situations;
 - developing alliances with financial institutions to enable home ownership by people with disabilities;
 - requiring visitable design* for all publicly funded housing.
- Work with the private sector to create a central housing resource centre that will provide housing program information, a public housing registry and a housing ombudsperson.
- Work with the disability community to extend the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) to social housing not owned and operated by government.
- Work with local and federal governments to create a new program to promote the construction of housing units for rent or ownership by Manitobans with disabilities.
- Introduce income or property tax concessions for middle income earners who have significant housing costs because of their disabilities.

* *Visitable design* — the design of all new housing with a few specific features that make the home easier to live in and visit for people who have a mobility impairment.

Availability and Usability of Overall Housing Stock

On the topic of availability and usability of overall housing stock, the forum presented the provincial government with the following recommendations:

- Create an institute or foundation for universal design.**
- Make a policy requiring visitable design of all new housing developments in which the province has a financial or land investment, including in the form of tax concessions to the developers.
- Add visitable design housing requirements to the *Manitoba Building Code*.
- Support visitable design through home owner tax incentives for the renovation or construction of visitable housing.
- Clarify provincially funded renovation programs by:
 - providing more complete information on funding application forms;
 - publishing a guidebook to provincial funding programs;
 - changing the names Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) and Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program–Disability (RRAP–D) to avoid confusion between them.
- Have the DIO develop a communications and education strategy to promote visitable design to all three levels of government, educational and financial institutions, realtors, landlords, contractors, developers, insurers, Manitoba Homebuilders Association and the public.
- Work with municipal governments to implement policies requiring visitable design through zoning bylaws.
- Consult with municipal and federal government associations on visitable housing policy changes and enforcement.
- Ensure access upgrade programs such as Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program–Disability (RRAP–D), Homeowner Emergency Loan Program (HELP) and Home Adaptations for Seniors' Independence (HASI) also fund the costs of project management, administration and technical assistance associated with upgrades.

** *Universal design* — the design of products and environments to make them accessible to everyone to the greatest extent possible regardless of age or ability.

Supportive Housing

On the topic of supportive housing, the forum recommended that the provincial government:

- Enable persons with disabilities to obtain appropriate, adequate, safe housing in the areas of their choice by:
 - increasing EIA shelter allowance beyond \$285 per month;
 - adjusting funding levels to meet the specific needs of the individual;
 - separating income supports and personal disability supports.
- Develop a strategy for de-institutionalizing persons with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities and younger adults with disabilities who are currently being inappropriately placed in personal care homes.
- Increase the provincial financial commitment in the next budget year to expand the number of housing units available to persons with disabilities. Money should go towards building new units, renovating units and providing more funding for support workers.
- Ensure accessible units are reserved for persons with disabilities who need them.
- Ensure that housing information is available to people with disabilities and service providers in the format of their choice. Simple information tools should be developed collaboratively by a working group that includes the provincial government, cross-disability service providers, medical services and third party funders.
- Work with various government departments, families and service providers and organizations to develop a central system that will prepare, educate and guide individuals with disabilities and their families through the young adult transition process.
- Work with various government departments, regional health authorities, Aboriginal leaders, allied health groups and advocacy agencies to launch a public education campaign about supportive housing issues.
- Implement different service models and options consistently across the province.

- Support de-institutionalization by developing two parallel, support-staff training systems — one to train staff to provide physical support, and the other to train staff in guiding individuals to meet decision-making and personal goals.
- Initiate a 200-person cross-disability demonstration project by:
 - providing a transportable rent subsidy of \$200 to \$500 per month, payable directly to the individual according to housing needs and choice of apartments;
 - working in co-operation with at least four community organizations;
 - funding the subsidy through the Affordable Housing Initiative.
- Ensure housing that is usable by persons with disabilities is dispersed throughout the community, with disability supports and services delivered according to individual need.
- Work with Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and the Manitoba Government & General Employees' Union (MGEU) and other community stakeholders to ensure wage parity among disability support workers.
- Have the DIO work with community groups and stakeholders to develop a funding program to meet individual needs for assistive devices, based on existing programs and models in other provinces.
- Ensure regional health authorities provide the services Manitobans with disabilities are entitled to: a) by educating health care providers about eligibility guidelines of home care services; and b) by monitoring access to home care service according to these program standards.



The Way Forward

The community's recommendations outlined in this report are already being used to help guide the province in future policy directions in the area of housing. We invite you to help us share this information with a wider audience.

This booklet was produced to ensure that the key messages of the forum are disseminated as broadly as possible, beginning with the organizations which participated in developing the recommendations, but also including other stakeholders, like landlords, housing developers and financial institutions.

Additional information about the policies and programs related to housing and persons with disabilities, and other details about the *2004 Housing and Disabilities Forum: A Government of Manitoba Community Consultation, April 8, 2004*, are available through the Disabilities Issues Office (945-7613 in Winnipeg or toll-free 1-866-626-4862).

We can also be reached online at dio@gov.mb.ca

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