

CMHA Ottawa's Condominium Program: Building Success in Housing First

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BACKGROUND



Compared with the other major Canadian cities, the cost of housing in Ottawa is relatively affordable



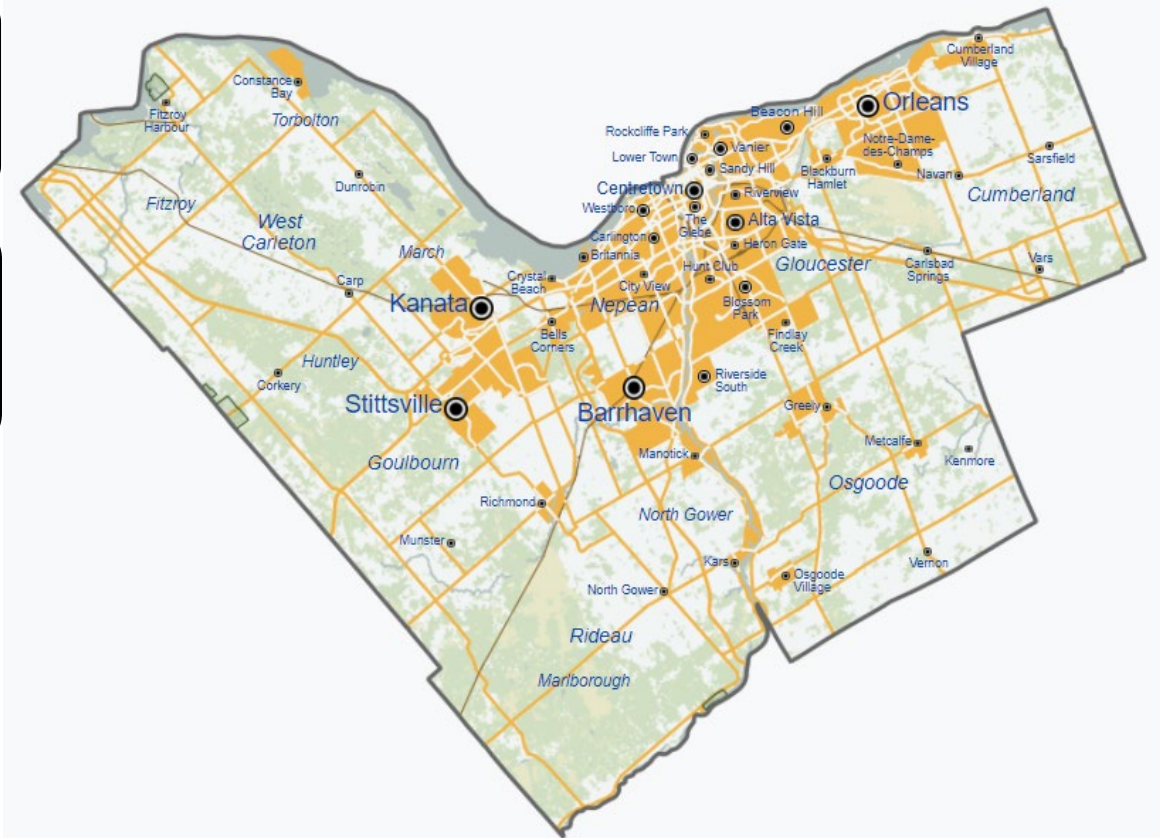
Approximately one in three (34 per cent) Ottawa households are renting their homes.



41% of renters are paying above the affordability threshold (i.e. > 30 per cent of income) for housing



The low vacancy rates and the continued rising cost of rent contribute to long waiting lists for subsidized housing



EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

Researchers at CRECS, uOttawa, conducted an evaluation of the program to determine

1. To what extent is the program aligned with HF principles?
2. What are the implementation challenges?
3. To what extent does participation in this program improve housing stability and quality of life for the tenants

Tenant Interviews (n=13)
Case Manger Focus Group



Key Informant Interviews
Program Staff
Funders
Property Managers
Board Members



Literature Review
Document Review
Administrative
Data Analysis



THE PROGRAM

- CMHA launched their Housing First Condominium Program in 2003
 - In 2003: 22 Condominium units
 - Now: 40 Condominium units
 - Clients of CMHA with serious mental illness and experiences of homelessness or housing vulnerability
- The Program provides...
 - private-market units
 - case management
 - rent supplements to clients with histories of homelessness



ALIGNMENT WITH HOUSING FIRST PRINCIPLES

- Immediate, scattered site housing
- No sobriety or treatment requirements
- Access to housing and social support
- Landlord and support roles within same organization with clear separation
- Housing choice

“This is the best and I don't know how CMHA figured it out.

They didn't put everybody together in one building.

They didn't put one block and in that block everybody all together.

No, they said no. We buy a few here, a few there, a few and you mix it up in a community and it's unbelievable how you feel” (Tenant).

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Individual-level:

- Aging clientele
- Loneliness and isolation
- Adjustment to independent living
- Discrimination and exclusion
- Vulnerability to home takeovers
- Some eviction cases

Program-level:

- High prices of condos in accessible areas
- Managing repairs and maintenance
- Non-transferability of rent supplements
- Inability to leverage equity from some of the units due to funding mechanisms

LIVING IN THE CMHA CONDOS



Outcome Findings



HOUSING STABILITY

- Tenants knew they could stay in the condo even if case management ended.
- Tenants felt “at peace” knowing the condo wouldn’t be taken away.
- Units were held for individuals hospitalized or incarcerated.
- Some identified future plans (e.g., home ownership, future employment) as reasons to leave.

“And it's really nice like I was scared that because I was doing well that they would like take this place from me and I was told that like no, we're not going to like penalize you for being well. I'll have this place until like I choose to leave...”
(Tenant).

“... basically you have a mental peace that nobody will throw you out of the place and nobody will increase the rent [...] something like that, or nobody will come and to interfere with your peace” (Tenant).

HOUSING QUALITY

- Case managers and tenants reported that the quality of housing in the condo units was higher than private market units.
- Maintenance, repairs and renovations conducted by CMHA
- Newer units are renovated prior to tenant moving in.

*I can feel more like myself. That's the best part of it [...] I'm alive.
(Tenant)*

HOUSING SATISFACTION

- Tenants reported high levels of housing satisfaction.
- Majority were satisfied with property management, neighbors, and neighbourhoods.
- Some tenants wanted to be closer to downtown.

"This place has been paramount in my recovery" (Tenant).

QUALITY OF LIFE (QOL)

- Tenants indicated improvements in:
 - physical health, mental health, substance use,
 - school completion,
 - obtaining employment,
 - control, freedom, independence,
 - perception of future plans.
- They also reported loneliness.
- They linked their QOL to the condo itself.
- They compared current QOL to previous, in other housing.

*“Lonely, but it’s home”
(Tenant).*

*“The reality is I would not have the quality of life I have,
had I not this lovely roof over my head” (Tenant).*

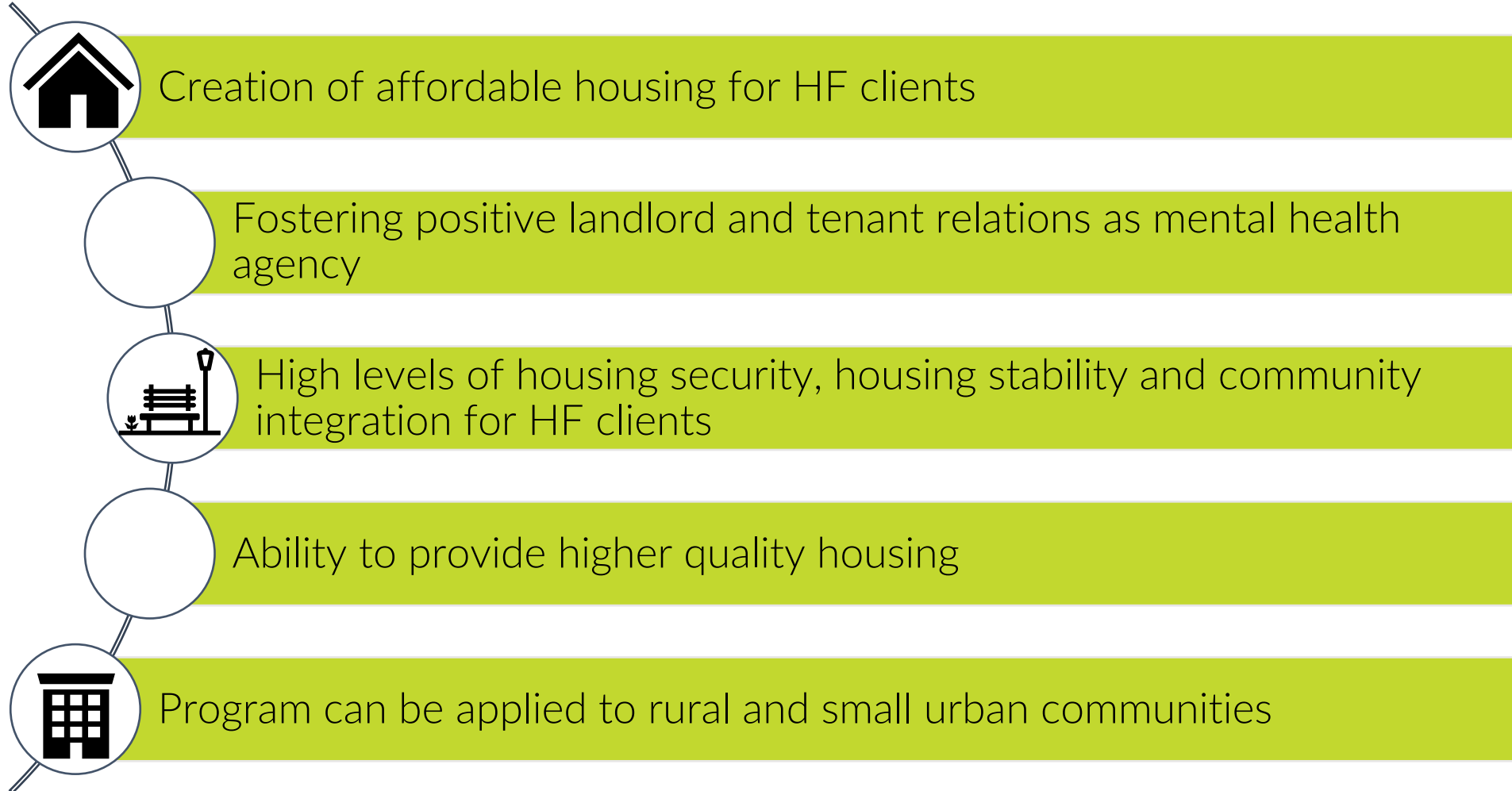
CMHA ACTING AS A HOUSING FIRST (HF) LANDLORD?

- CMHA as a landlord is unique.
- Tenants understood the difference between case management and housing team.
- Most tenants were not given choice of a condo but were fine with this.
- All tenants were satisfied with case management.
- Satisfaction with housing support varied, largely related to the repair process.

*“That it was owned by CMHA?
That made a huge difference knowing that that's
my landlord and not someone else”
(Tenant).*

*“It's why I think scattered units work and
warehousing people does not...Okay,
warehousing people does not because being
around sick doesn't make you sane” (Tenant).*

IMPLICATIONS





CMHA OTTAWA CONDO PROGRAM TOOLKIT

A guide to the condominium program of the Ottawa
branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association



SCAN ME

