



Engaging Your Social Housing Residents:

Report on the Implementation and Findings of the Resident Satisfaction Pilot Survey in Ontario

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About HSC

The Housing Services Corporation (HSC) is a non-profit organization that delivers province-wide programs that benefit Ontario's affordable housing sector. It assists service managers, including DSSABs, by:

- Helping to protect the housing asset through programs and services that support better capital asset and energy management
- Delivering business value through economies of scale with competitively procured province-wide programs in bulk purchasing, insurance and investments
- Building and spreading knowledge that supports effective decision-making with relevant research, training and by facilitating collaborative best practice sharing
- Enabling greater resident engagement and self-sufficiency by developing partnerships for social innovation with other organizations and networks.

HSC was created in January 2012 under the *Housing Services Act*. HSC, as successor to the Social Housing Services Corporation (SHSC), builds on that organization's 9 years of experience in delivering programs to social housing and working with different levels of government, the public and the private sector.

www.hscorp.ca

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1.

Introduction

A central goal of the Province's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy (LTAHS) is "Putting People First." One way LTAHS proposes to get better results for those who live in social housing is through the Province and Service Managers¹ regularly reporting on their progress, including through resident satisfaction surveys. The rationale for garnering resident feedback is to capture the view of residents about their homes and services they receive. Service Managers (SMs) would be required to report on these views and other local performance measures. ***What does the Province of Ontario, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) want from a resident satisfaction survey in terms of monitoring the performance of service managers and housing providers?*** There is no clear answer, as the province has yet to decide on an approach to resident satisfaction surveys.

Housing Services Corporation (HSC), in its capacity as the agency responsible for performance measurement for Service Managers, undertook a Resident Satisfaction Survey (RSS) Pilot exercise.² The pilot outcomes are intended to inform MMAH and the sector about the feasibility of implementing a standard resident satisfaction survey in Ontario. **Noteworthy, is that the RSS pilot is specific for the purposes set out in the LTAHS.** Historically there has been no mandatory requirement in Ontario for social housing providers to undertake RSSs. Some social housing providers however, do undertake RSSs as part of their operational and business practices. A good example of this is co-op housing providers that embed resident feedback and satisfaction surveys as part of effective business management. In fact, it is being used as part of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada's 2020 program.

A Stakeholder Survey Working Group was established to provide guidance and design a common survey instrument for social housing residents in Ontario, and to address issues such as the role of service managers, housing providers and residents, resolving issues related to data confidentiality, testing the processes, conducting fieldwork and providing feedback on the analysis and final reporting. The working group relied on the expertise of HouseMark, a United Kingdom (UK)-based housing sector non-profit with expertise in performance measurement and resident satisfaction surveys.

¹ In this report the term Service Managers (SMs) is used to reflect the classification of a Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) and includes District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs).

² HSC worked in consultation with Euan Ramsay, an Associate of HouseMark UK, who has extensive experience of resident satisfaction surveys, both at the policy level and as a Director of a market research company that specializes in running resident satisfaction surveys for social landlords in the UK.

Building on the 2011 consultation on the barriers and opportunities³ in having a common Ontario survey system, HSC ran a pilot throughout 2012 into 2013 with input from the Stakeholder Survey Working Group. The overarching objectives of the pilot were to:

- ◆ pilot a standard approach to obtaining resident feedback about the services they receive; surveying a sample of residents across the social housing sector in Ontario.
- ◆ test the efficiency and effectiveness of the mechanisms related to surveying residents across the social housing sector across Ontario.
- ◆ assess whether the results from the pilot can inform outcome-based performance indicators that can be used in support of Housing and Homelessness Plans by Services Managers within the context of LTAHS.

1.1 Background

From 2011 to June 2013 a phased pilot was undertaken in select communities and housing projects across Ontario to test the feasibility of developing and undertaking a standard approach to Resident Satisfaction Surveys across the social housing sector. Particular emphasis was placed on implementation mechanisms and designing a survey instrument that would enable landlords to:

- 1) identify the core strengths to maintain and improvements to services that residents would like to see;
- 2) use the information to tailor services to meet the expectations of residents; and
- 3) seek resident feedback about housing service provision as a best practice to shape operational efficiencies.

Noteworthy the pilot was not intended to produce survey results for generalizing about the wider population of residents living in each of the sites that participated in the survey process. For example, the survey results for Ottawa Community Housing (OCH) are not to be interpreted as representing the views of all residents living at OCH. At this pilot site only a small sample of residents were surveyed with the objective of testing the phone interview mechanism for administering the survey.

The pilot, steered by a Stakeholder Survey Working Group⁴, consisted of key sector representatives comprised of the following: HSC (co-chair), MMAH (co-chair), three Service Managers (City of Peterborough, Thunder Bay DSSAB, City of Hamilton), one Local Housing Corporation (Ottawa Community Housing), Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services, Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, and the United Way of Toronto.

³ The report of the consultation process “Resident Satisfaction Surveys in Ontario- Report on Survey Consultation in March 2011” is available at the link: <http://www.hscorp.ca/hsc-resident-satisfaction-survey-piloting-an-approach/>

The pilot program comprised two phases:

- Phase 1 included a consultation process with stakeholders (i.e., social housing providers and other key stakeholders). The report of Phase 1 results is available at the following link: <http://www.hscorp.ca/hsc-resident-satisfaction-survey-piloting-an-approach/>
- Phase 2 focused on the implementation of the pilot with 5 types of social housing delivery agents: 1 co-operative housing organization, 1 housing provider serving the aboriginal community, 1 local housing corporation, and two Service Managers. The implementation process included postal questionnaires to a random sample of residents in four of the five pilot sites, and telephone interviews with a random sample of residents in the fifth site. There were 1,115 households in the sample, with the aim of achieving 474 responses (100 from each of the 4 sites, 74 from the co-op). The response rate was 367 completed responses.

1.2 Structure of the Report

This document is a report back on Phase 2 of the pilot which is primarily the implementation of the Resident Satisfaction Survey, involving the participation of 5 types of housing providers. The report is divided into five sections. The context and background for the pilot initiative is described in Section 1. Section 2 of this report provides a summary of the survey methodology and approach undertaken by the participating pilot housing organizations. This is followed by overall lessons learned relating specifically to the implementation process and highlighting both operational and design specific issues. Key survey results and findings are outlined in Section 3. A business case for Resident Satisfaction Surveys in Ontario is framed in Section 4. The last section of the report provides framing recommendations to be considered by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ontario, Service Managers, Housing Providers and the Stakeholder Survey Working Group.

2.

Survey Methodology

As noted earlier, the pilot survey covered five separate social housing providers, of whom four – Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services, Ottawa Community Housing, Thunder Bay DSSAB and 15 Thorncliffe Park Co-operative Homes – focused only on their own residents; the City of Peterborough extended the pilot survey to the residents of the local housing corporation and to 5 other providers in their area, in order to test out how easy it would be for the Service Managers to manage a survey of its local housing providers. This section outlines the survey methodology adopted for the implementation of the pilot.

2.1 Accuracy of Survey Results

The aim of this pilot survey was to achieve around 100 completed responses in each pilot site. **The pilot was not intended to produce results that were representative of the wider population of residents in each pilot site.** Table 1 below shows the accuracy levels of the results in each pilot site, expressed as sampling error at the 95% confidence level.

Table 1: Pilot Survey Responses and Accuracy Levels (population proportion = 50%)

Housing Provider	Survey Replies	Total Units	Responses as % of total population	Accuracy of results (p=50)
ALL PROVIDERS	367	21050	1.7%	± 5.1%
Ontario Aboriginal HS	74	1570	4.7%	± 11.1%
Ottawa Community Housing	32	14829	0.2%	± 17.3%
Thunder Bay DSSAB	89	3377	2.6%	± 10.3%
15 Thorncliffe Park Co-op Homes	19	75	25.7%	± 19.4%
City of Peterborough	153	1200	12.8%	± 7.4%
- AOTS Community Homes	11	39	28.2%	± 25.0%
- Kawartha Participation Projects	24	71	33.8%	± 16.3%
- Marycrest at Inglewood	23	60	38.3%	± 16.0%
- Peterborough Housing Corp	30	818	3.7%	± 17.6%

Housing Provider	Survey Replies	Total Units	Responses as % of total population	Accuracy of results (p=50)
- St John's Retirement Homes	42	102	41.2%	± 11.6%
- Sunshine Homes	23	110	20.9%	± 18.2%

A key constraint in extending a resident satisfaction survey more widely to housing providers in Ontario is that of ensuring sufficiently robust and accurate results from sites with 100 homes or fewer in management (who make up the majority of providers in the province). The response rate to the survey (from the 1,115 residents in the pilot sample) was 33%, which is a very reasonable response rate and a rate that would be acceptable if the survey were rolled out more widely.

The accuracy levels in Table 2 are based on a 'population proportion' of 50%, that is, assuming that the proportion of the population under study is split evenly, with 50% likely to be satisfied with their housing provider, for example, and 50% likely not to be satisfied. However, as Table 2 shows, if we set the population proportion at 85% - on the basis that overall satisfaction with the housing provider in the pilot was 89% - the results are more accurate for each given sample size. Table 2 indicates that, if the survey were rolled out across the province, and the population proportions were set accordingly higher, the accuracy of the survey results for even small housing providers would be within acceptable limits.

Table 2: Pilot Survey Responses and Accuracy Levels- Varying Population Proportions

Housing Provider	Survey Replies	Total Population	Responses as % of total population	Accuracy of results (p=85)
ALL PROVIDERS	367	21050	1.7%	± 3.1%
Ontario Aboriginal HS	74	1570	4.7%	± 6.8%
Ottawa Community Housing	32	14829	0.2%	± 10.6%
Thunder Bay DSSAB	89	3377	2.6%	± 6.3%
Thornccliffe Park Co-op	19	75	25.7%	± 11.9%
City of Peterborough	153	1200	12.8%	± 4.5%
- AOTS Community Homes	11	39	28.2%	± 15.3%
- Kawartha Participation Projects	24	71	33.8%	± 10.0%
- Marycrest at Inglewood	23	60	38.3%	± 9.8%
- Peterborough Housing Corp	30	818	3.7%	± 10.7%
- St John's Retirement Homes	42	102	41.2%	± 7.1%
- Sunshine Homes	23	110	20.9%	± 11.1%

2.2 Survey Method

The pilot survey involved postal self-completion surveys sent to all residents except for Ottawa Community Housing that administered telephone interviews. Reminder mailings were also sent to the postal self-completion samples who had not responded within three weeks of the first mailing.

2.2.1 Questionnaire Design Process

The questionnaire instrument was developed with input from the Stakeholder Survey Working Group both in terms of content and design. The draft questionnaire was tested for initial feedback with a group of residents from Halam Park Co-operative Inc. in Hamilton, Ontario. The final questionnaire was developed as a 'long form' or 'basic plus' instrument with 50-59 questions (4 pages double-sided). The survey included a base questionnaire instrument and was customized by site. Based on the pilot, it is recommended that future surveys have an optional shorter version with core items from the long form. On average, 91 percent of the questions were completed. Respondents were asked questions in the following key areas:

- ◆ **Overall satisfaction with your home**
- ◆ **Repairs and maintenance**
 - *Repairs requested and repairs carried out in last 12 months*
 - *Satisfaction with the overall repairs and maintenance service*
- ◆ **Community**
 - *Satisfaction with the overall safety and security*
 - *Satisfaction with how well the area is kept clean and maintained*
 - *Satisfaction with repairs to community facilities*
 - *Levels of community support- e.g. how many people you know, levels of contact, help and support offered, levels of trust*
- ◆ **Involvement and communication- various questions**
- ◆ **Overall satisfaction with the landlord**
- ◆ **Demographic and Household attributes** (*i.e., numbers of people, ages, etc.*)

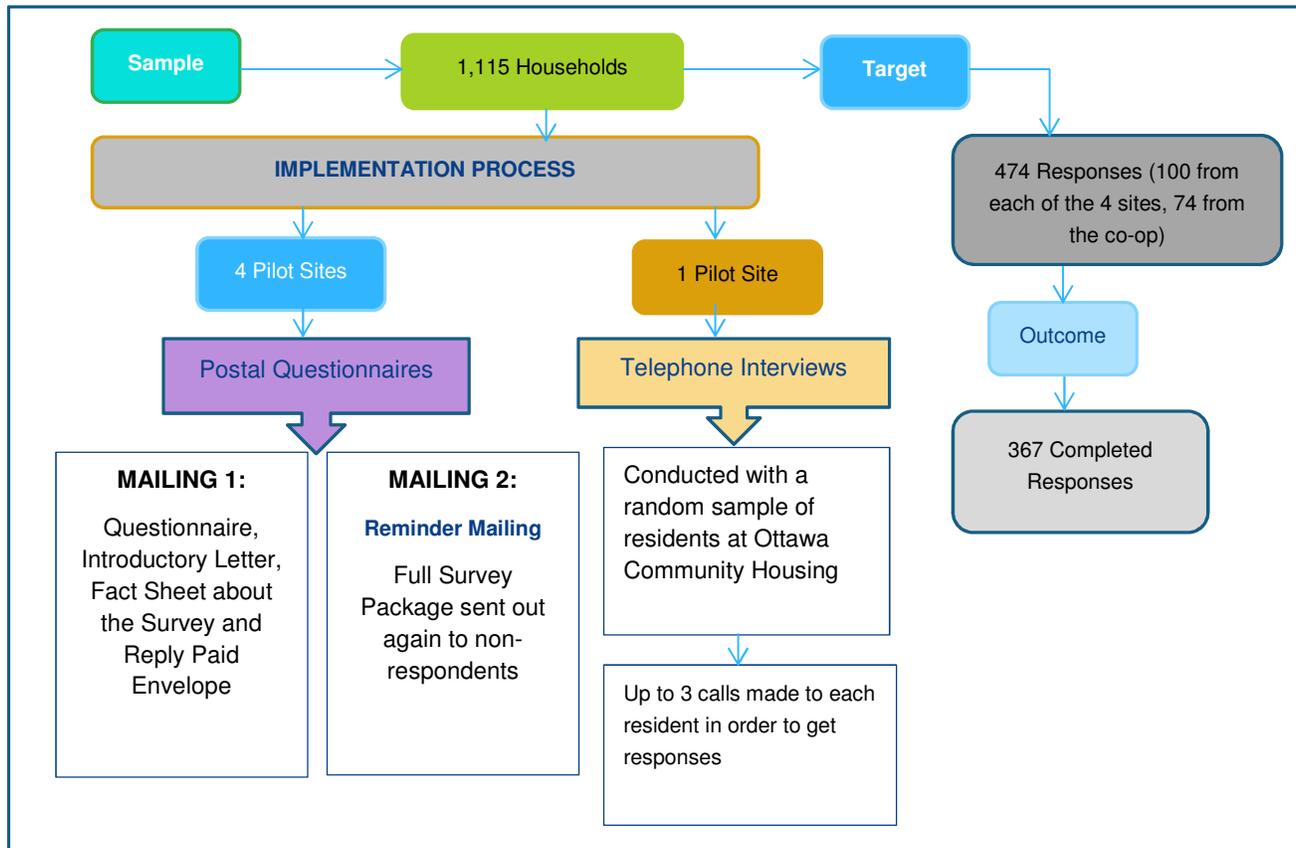
2.2.2 Implementation

The survey implementation process included:

- developing a sampling frame and sample selection
- administering a two-stage postal mail out of questionnaires to four of the five pilot sites, and
- telephone interviews with a random sample of residents in the fifth site- Ottawa Community Housing.

Figure 1 is a visual summary that demonstrates the implementation process.

Figure 1: Pilot Survey Implementation Process



The decision to use an addressed- based mail survey for most sites was for the following reasons:

- ◆ **Topic:** self-administered questionnaire is preferred to ensure privacy of households, in terms of sampling (for two-step sampling cases) and mail return
- ◆ **Costs:** mail survey is a less expensive mode than a telephone survey (one site tested the telephone approach)
- ◆ **Timing:** mail back survey is quicker to implement into field production
- ◆ **Target:** a rough target was set for about 100 completes per site for a sample size of about 300; two waves of mailing were recommended where possible to anticipate for non-response.

2.2.3 Sample Design Process

Each site was consulted with and guidance provided on a recommended sampling approach. Three approaches were used:

1. **HSC and Provider Postal:** Two sites provided Housing Services Corporation with a delivery sequence file (unit addresses and ancillary information) to conduct an address based sampling: two-step process involving 'gatekeeper'. HSC randomly selected unit numbers to survey, the site mailed survey to residents. This yielded an overall response rate of 52% (range 34-61%).
2. **Provider Postal:** Two other sites conducted their own sampling using unit addresses. The sites randomly selected residents and mailed out surveys. The overall response rate using the provider postal method was 43% (range 26-59%).
3. **Provider Telephone:** One site conducted their own sampling using addresses with telephone numbers and segmented by English and French. The site randomly selected and called residents (both in English and French). The provider telephone approach garnered an overall response rate of 36%.

With all three approaches the following methods were adopted:

End-to-end mailing fulfilment	Partial mailing fulfilment	End-to-end Telephone Interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Site determines sample ◆ Revises/Prints questionnaire ◆ Distributes waves one mailing, follow-up with optional wave two reminder mailing ◆ Collects completes and mails single package to HSC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Site determines sample or generates address sequence list for HSC to sample ◆ Revises/Prints questionnaire or HSC prints questionnaire ◆ Site distributes wave one mailing, follow-up with optional wave two mailing ◆ Households complete surveys and mails back to HSC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Site determines sample ◆ Revises/Prints questionnaire ◆ Distributes cover letter ◆ Conducts telephone interviews using in-house staff ◆ Inputs responses to paper surveys ◆ Collects completes and mails single package to HSC

The replies per day based on the data collection window ranged from 0.5 to 1.9 days for the postal approach, and 1.5 days for the telephone process. With the exception of one site, all sites exceeded the original plan of 28 days in the field. This suggests increased flexibility in date cut-offs during data collection windows is necessary, especially for rural postal collection⁵.

⁵ The new proposed changes in Ontario to the postal service delivery may further impact the delivery and return rate of mail out surveys. This is an important factor that should be taken into consideration if a postal survey is implemented.

We asked respondents in the questionnaire about the pilot process, including which survey method they would prefer. Table 3 summarises the results of these responses by the three main household types, defined as follows:

- ◆ 'adults only' - containing only adults aged 16 to 59 years
- ◆ 'seniors' – containing at least one person aged 60 years or more and no children
- ◆ 'families' - containing both adults and children aged under 16 years.

Table 3 shows a very positive response to all aspects of the survey process, with 96% of respondents respectively agreeing that the questionnaires were easy to understand, that the survey length was reasonable and that the appearance of the survey is easy to read.

Slightly fewer respondents (85%) felt that the survey reflected what is important to residents (although only 3% disagreed with this, with the remaining 12% neither agreeing nor disagreeing), with families the least likely to agree.

Table 3: Pilot Survey Responses to Survey Method Questions by Household Type

Responses	All Residents	Adults Only	Seniors	Families
Agree that questions reflect what is important as resident	85%	87%	85%	80%
Agree that questions are easy to understand	96%	97%	95%	98%
Agree that survey length is reasonable	96%	95%	97%	100%
Agree that appearance of survey is easy to read	96%	95%	96%	96%
<i>Preferred Survey Method</i>				
Postal self-completion	78%	70%	82%	77%
Telephone	13%	22%	10%	6%
Online survey	5%	5%	2%	13%
Other	5%	3%	6%	4%

As for the preferred survey method, more than three-quarters of respondents (78%) opted for postal self-completion surveys - seniors in particular preferred this method – with 13% of families preferring online surveys and 13% of all respondents happy with a telephone interview. This is an encouraging endorsement of the postal self-completion survey as the main survey method for future surveys.

2.3 Lessons Learned- Implementation Process

The pilot aimed to test the efficiency and effectiveness of the approaches used during the implementation process. Overall the pilot survey initiative demonstrated the following:

- ◆ Developing a standard comparable resident satisfaction survey across Ontario is achievable

- ◆ Resonating issues were specific to resources and capacity of small housing providers to carry-out resident satisfaction surveys
- ◆ Protection of resident privacy in terms of household details and confidentiality of responses were ensured and maintained without issues
- ◆ Postal surveys appear to be the most cost effective method but to consider is the new proposed changes to postal service delivery in Ontario
- ◆ The use of telephone contact may be necessary for households with language difficulties and for understanding non-response
- ◆ Ensuring a reasonable response rate with good population coverage is challenging
- ◆ Further development of the questionnaire needs to be undertaken to ensure terminology and appropriate indicators are used to support organizational objectives

There were lessons learned specific to the operational and design process which are articulated below:

2.3.1 Operational Issues

1) *Postal*

- ◆ Communicating the benefits of the pilot directly with providers in advance may be necessary to help increase buy-in
- ◆ Generating a list for sampling is a challenge and can delay the process, especially when it is a two-step process:
 - Compiling the initial address sequence file for an address based sample (ABS) required time to validate data and filtering of undeliverable addresses
 - The time required for a gatekeeper to generate such files can create bottlenecks in the overall operational process, so this must be incorporated into future project timelines when considering this method
 - No reported issues with sites that performed their own sampling.
- ◆ A systematic method needs to be introduced to ensure consistent filtering. Households were routinely excluded from the sampling by survey providers for various reasons, such as anticipated eviction, move-out, death, units contracted out to another management
- ◆ Sampling specific residents from an address block can create communication issues when information is shared from one resident to another in terms of invitation to participate
- ◆ The survey support hotline was used not just by residents, but also by building administrators. Inquiries ranged from protection of privacy (not mailing the completed survey back to host due to 'recognizable handwriting'), to general questions about the cut-off date
- ◆ While generating a pre-survey notification is good practice and was performed at all sites, the gap between the date of notification and actual interview must be minimized to boost participation
- ◆ There was about two weeks between mailing; the delay in delivery may require extending it to about 4 weeks apart

- ◆ Mail-based paper surveys perform best when mailings are made by a gatekeeper and completes are mailed back to a third party; in this case HSC acted as the gatekeeper
- ◆ Delivery costs for each paper-based survey respondent was about \$2.20 (includes prepaid reply but excludes cost of envelope and resources for fulfilment).

2) Telephone Interviews

- ◆ Most residents had no issues completing the survey over the telephone
- ◆ Obstacle to telephone interviews is getting the resident to the phone and obtaining participation; once these issues were resolved, there were no reported issues
- ◆ Telephone interviews were human resource intensive given that several phone calls had to be made to households that did not answer the phone during the first try
- ◆ Telephone interviews typically averaged about 18.6 minutes; this translates to about 32 seconds per question.

2.3.2 Design Issues

- ◆ There may be a disconnect between overall satisfaction and satisfaction with certain sections of the survey- this suggests the possibility of drivers of satisfaction that needs to be considered in future iterations of the survey
- ◆ About 29% of suggestions on improving the survey were focused on landlord/provider issues- this suggests that more opportunities for resident feedback are needed
- ◆ Much time and effort went towards revising the source questionnaire; this is viewed as a positive sign as asking the right question can help us get the right answers to measure the business
- ◆ More transitional statements may be necessary to introduce or explain questions and should be included in the next reiteration and implementation of the survey
- ◆ Multiple language questionnaire needs to be considered in a future release
- ◆ Different understanding of terms remain an issue, such as 'community'
- ◆ Telephone interviews: 1) language and literacy issues were observed which led to some refusals in participation; and 2) no follow-up telephone calls were made to determine whether there were language issues with the postal survey respondents
- ◆ A cognitive testing of the future questionnaire is required. It may be better to exclude the 'neither/nor' option or use a numeric scale (e.g., on a scale of 1 to 10, etc.). Further the five point evaluation scale- 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied' needs to be tested
- ◆ No incentives such as prize draws were used to encourage responses, but these may help in the future.

3.

Key Survey Results

Subject to the general qualification that the survey results from the pilot are not intended to be representative of the wider populations under study, in view of the small sample sizes, the pilot generated some interesting trends discussed in this section. The trends are categorized based on themes: satisfaction/key performance indicators, repairs, the community, internet access, rent and households characteristics and service improvements.

Figure 2 is a summary of the overall results of the survey, broken down by household type, defined as follows:

- ◆ Adults only- households containing one or more people aged 16 to 59 only, with no children under 16
- ◆ Seniors- households containing at least one person aged 60 years or more, with no children under 16
- ◆ Families- households containing adults and at least one person aged under 16

3.1 Satisfaction Levels/ Key Performance Indicators

- ◆ Overall satisfaction at the housing provider level was 89% - although this varied from 64% for one small provider to 100% for another; nevertheless, this is perhaps a slightly unexpectedly high level of satisfaction that compares very well with the average satisfaction with social housing landlord found in the UK, where 90% is the average top quartile score
- ◆ Perhaps predictably, seniors gave the highest scores for overall satisfaction with housing providers; and households intending to move in the next three years gave the lowest scores
- ◆ Other key indicators – satisfaction with their home (86%), staff listening to tenant views (76%), satisfaction with repairs (81%) and so on – are all very comparable with the UK scores and indicate that, in general, the scores for key services would reflect a true picture of residents' views. Contrary to the initial assumption that the survey results from the pilot would demonstrate relatively low scores, the results demonstrated high scores on various indicators.

3.2 Repairs

As in the UK, repairs appear to be a key driver of satisfaction and the pilot survey questionnaire went into detail about the kinds of repairs that the residents felt were needed and that had been completed.

The results show considerable differences between the housing providers in the extent to which their residents feel that repairs are needed, and in the extent to which those repairs are completed. There are also interesting differences in the extent to which residents feel that repairs are needed by other key resident characteristics – for example:

- ◆ Seniors are the least likely to feel that repairs are needed, and families with children the most likely to feel that repairs are needed. Seniors are also the most likely to agree that their housing provider carries out repairs in a reasonable time and they are the most satisfied with how their housing provider deals with repairs
- ◆ The longer a resident occupied their home, the more they feel the need for repairs to be done and the most likely they are to agree that their housing provider carries out repairs in a reasonable time; they are also the most satisfied with how their housing provider deals with repairs
- ◆ Residents in townhouses are the most likely to feel that plumbing repairs are needed to washrooms and kitchens, with those in semi-detached or detached houses more concerned with draughts from windows and doors
- ◆ French speakers appear more concerned with repairs needed to washrooms than other groups; these respondents are also least likely to agree that their housing provider carries out repairs in a reasonable time and the least satisfied with how their housing provider deals with repairs
- ◆ Those intending to move in the next three years are more likely to feel that repairs are needed than those staying put, and the least likely to agree that their housing provider carries out repairs in a reasonable time
- ◆ The percentage of repairs that are needed but not yet completed also varies considerably by type of provider, and this might also be a useful indicator of the extent to which repairs are a priority for housing providers.

3.3 The Community

The survey asked a range of questions relating to the community and the neighbourhood, including satisfaction with the cleanliness and maintenance of open areas and questions about the extent to which residents feel integrated and supported in their community. Some key results include:

- ◆ The affordability of the rent in the current home was the main reason for residents moving into the community (78% of residents stated this); the next most common reason was the size of the unit (32%), having family in the area (31%) and the attractiveness of the neighbourhood (27%)
- ◆ 91% of families gave the affordable rent as their main reason for moving to the community, as did 93% of those living in town houses

- ◆ Three-quarters of the residents (76%) know more than 5 people in their community, with families and seniors more likely than adults to know people in the community
- ◆ Residents intending to move within the next three years are the least likely to know people in their community
- ◆ Seniors are the most likely to feel that members of their community can be trusted; in contrast, those looking to move in the next three years and those in townhouses are least likely to feel that members of their community can be trusted.

3.4 Internet Access

- ◆ Almost three residents in every five (57%) have access to the internet at home, roughly on a par with the situation in the social housing sector in the UK
- ◆ Only 39% of seniors have internet access, compared to 75% of adult only households and 79% of families
- ◆ French speaking residents are the most likely to have internet access (90%) and residents in apartments are the least likely (43%).

3.5 Rent

- ◆ More than four residents in every five (81%) have their rent geared to their income (RGI), although seniors are the least likely to have RGI terms
- ◆ 86% of residents said that they understood how their rent was calculated and this was consistent across all groups of residents
- ◆ 80% of residents said that they knew the market rent for their current unit, with adult-only households and residents living in houses the least likely to know this.

3.6 Household Characteristics

- ◆ The average household size is 1.7 persons, with families having an average of 3.6 people per household and seniors only 1.1 person per household
- ◆ The average age of respondents was 59 years (again, similar to the profile of social residents in the UK), with seniors having an average respondent age of 73.9 years, families 40.8 years and adults 45.3 years.

3.7 Suggested Service Improvements

We asked residents in the survey an open-ended question, “If your landlord or housing administrator could only improve three areas of service in this community, what three things do you think should be improved?” A total of 407 improvements were suggested by the 367 residents that responded to the survey, an average of just over one suggestion per resident, as Table 4 show.

Table 4: Suggested Service Improvements

Suggested Service Improvements	Number of Suggestions	As % of Total Respondents
Improve communal facilities	49	13.4%
Improve security/safety of homes	37	10.1%
Improve maintenance of homes	28	7.6%
Improve community facilities	26	7.1%
Improve maintenance/appearance of external areas	27	7.4%
Impose stricter/enforce rules on residents	25	6.8%
Improve cleaning/maintenance of common areas	22	6.0%
Improve parking	16	4.4%
Improve staff/contractors	14	3.8%
Improve heating system/ventilation	14	3.8%
Improve care and support services to residents	14	3.8%
Screen incoming tenants more carefully	13	3.5%
Communicate better	13	3.5%
Speedier response to service request	11	3.0%
Improve amenities	11	3.0%
Replace worn out elements	11	3.0%
Rental costs/income issues	9	2.5%
Improve repairs service	8	2.2%
Enable/support tenant associations	7	1.9%
Adaptations to home	7	1.9%
All good	6	1.6%
Be straight with/fair/listen to residents	6	1.6%

Suggested Service Improvements	Number of Suggestions	As % of Total Respondents
Improve elevator	6	1.6%
Improve laundry facilities	4	1.1%
Improve energy efficiency	4	1.1%
Other General Comments	19	5.2%
TOTAL RESPONSES	407	-
TOTAL RESPONDENTS	367	100.0%
<i>Average number of responses per respondent</i>	<i>1.1</i>	

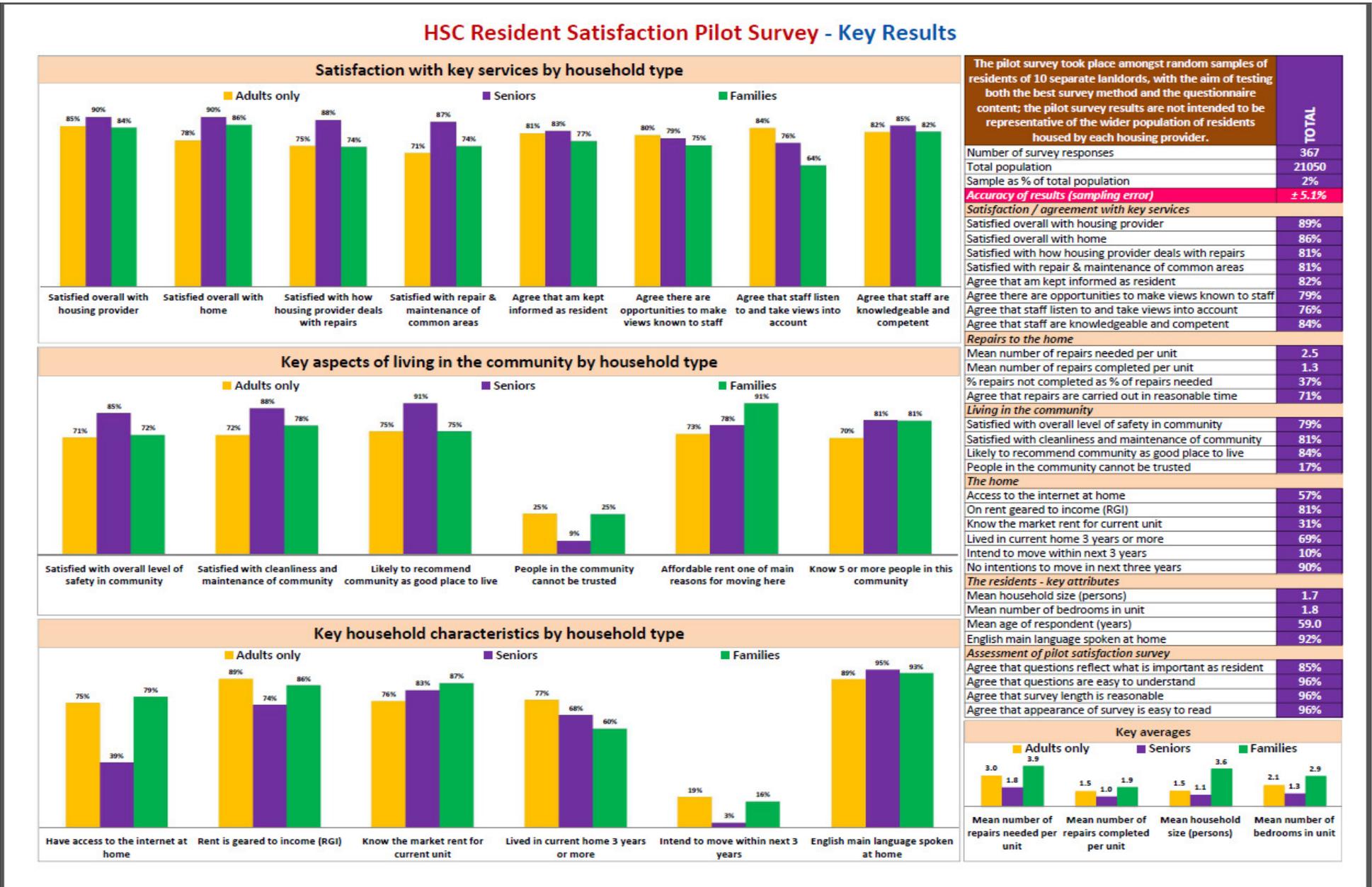
Table 4 shows that the most commonly stated suggestions for improvement related to improving the communal facilities in and around the homes (stated by 13% of residents)- for example,

- ◆ Installing buzzers for units
- ◆ Providing high speed internet
- ◆ Creating more storage space
- ◆ Installing clothes lines
- ◆ Making the laundry room more accessible for disabled residents
- ◆ Installing a snack machine etc.

Table 4 also shows that one resident in every ten (10%) suggested improvements to security and safety arrangements, and that 15% of residents in total wanted to see better maintenance of their homes and of the external areas around their homes issues. The fourth most commonly stated suggestions related to improved community facilities- such as bus shelters, additional housing, grocery stores, street lighting, etc.,- which may not always be within the responsibility of the landlord themselves.

The overall key results of the pilot illustrated a relatively high satisfaction with social housing services. This is not unusual given that resident surveys undertaken by some housing providers in Ontario and in the UK also demonstrate similar trends. A commonly articulated rationale for the high satisfaction is that it is driven by the fact that in some cases residents' expectations are low. Nevertheless, social housing delivery agents can use the satisfaction data to track their direction of progress and to ascertain what is important to residents. The 'key' focus should be on getting services, in particular, repairs and maintenance, right.

Figure 2: Resident Satisfaction Pilot Survey Results- Snapshot of Overall Results



4.

Business Case for Resident Satisfaction Surveys (RSS) in Ontario

This section of the report frames a business case for the application of Resident Satisfaction Surveys and lays out a foundation to help SMs and housing providers decide on practices specific to resident engagement activities that can be undertaken and formalized in shaping, influencing and monitoring various aspects of their housing services. It is informed by the results of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Resident Satisfaction Pilot Survey Initiative undertaken in Ontario.

4.1 The Issue:

Given the reference in Ontario's Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy (LTAHS) to the use of "Social Housing Resident Satisfaction Surveys" as a mechanism for SMs to measure and report on progress; the direction from the Province of Ontario (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing) with regards to the obligation and requirement for resident satisfaction surveys in social housing is still forthcoming.

It is reasonable to assume that the Ministry will evaluate a range of options. There are four possible options that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ontario may consider with regards to the implementation of Resident Satisfaction Surveys (RSS):

- 1) No requirement to undertake RSS
- 2) Support for ongoing voluntary RSS activity
- 3) Mandatory requirement to undertake RSS
- 4) Mandatory but with a soft approach to RSS- garner resident feedback with no requirement to adhere to sample size representation

Notwithstanding the potential direction from MMAH, SMs continue to have broad powers under various legislations that give them the opportunity to make local decisions related to the delivery of housing. SMs and housing providers however, are faced with the demand to deliver and demonstrate better outcomes with increasingly restricted resources and intense financial pressures. The requirement under the *Housing Services Act* (HSA) for SMs to develop 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plans lends itself to undertaking Resident Satisfaction Surveys, fitting well within the context and plan requirements to:

- reflect the active engagement of non-profit housing corporation and non-profit housing co-operatives in current and future needs planning

- include strategies to support non-profit housing corporations and non-profit housing co-operatives in the delivery of affordable housing

It has long been articulated in the sector that there is a need to increase the extent and effectiveness of resident engagement to drive organizational business practices along with establishing a culture of performance measures. Currently in Ontario, administrators and landlords of social housing are increasingly incorporating resident involvement in their 'social housing agenda' through a range of resident engagement strategies such as designation of security residents, customer service feedback surveys, resident satisfaction surveys, establishing resident leadership representatives, and resident driven decision-making processes such as participatory budgeting, to name a few. In fact, such practices are at the core of Ontario's housing co-op model. The very nature of housing co-ops and its legal framework is driven by engaging residents more fully in the business decisions and community.

While a culture of involving residents in decisions about service delivery and of putting their view at the heart of business improvement, is gaining momentum, much of it is informal and often goes unrecorded. Although credible, in most instances the activities may not always be related to any clearly defined business need of the social housing organization. In fact, critical to demonstrating an effective social housing landlord business model is to delve the resident experience of how services are being delivered through resident involvement. The common challenge is how to use the information in a way that aligns with organizational objectives or informs service standard improvements.

A well-tested resident engagement mechanism that has been used to garner effective customer and resident feedback and set performance indicators in the housing sphere, both private and public, has been Resident/Customer Satisfaction Surveys. In fact, private sector companies and housing co-ops have long recognized that resident satisfaction is the key driver for their business, and gearing their service delivery to meet the expectations of residents with continued feedback from them is central to their business model.

4.2 Strategic Context:

From a strategic lens, an investment in social housing RSS aligns with provincial interest and enables the Province to respond to its stewardship commitment from a people-centred perspective. More importantly however, as an administrator and landlord of social housing, a key element to maintaining a healthy housing portfolio is developing a strategic action plan to manage, oversee, and maintain residents; a vital component of the plan being harnessing resident feedback. In fact, resident feedback and developing an attentive relationship with residents is a significant driver for change. Involving residents in running their homes and communities should be an accepted principle in social housing.

For Ontario social housing providers, RSS can be an effective formal resident feedback tool that serves three purposes:

- 1) establishes a process for housing administrators to develop a standard and consistent way to assess performance and service delivery as it relates to organizational objectives,

- 2) demonstrates to residents, boards and councillors that housing providers are providing housing services that are of benefit and value for the money paid for them, and
- 3) provides a communication platform to gauge housing service provision delivery from the lens of residents

Explicit is that residents consistently want social housing landlords to deliver a range of services, with good repairs and maintenance service being particularly important. The significance of garnering resident feedback from the lens of organizational objectives includes the following:

- Treating residents as customers-involve residents in determining the priorities for service delivery
- Keeping residents happy, so that they continue to rent property, since low turnover = less cost
- Needing to ensure that basics are done right and that standard procedures are developed to deliver good quality service
- Using the information to tailor the services provided to meet the expectations of residents and to implement improvements.
- Demonstrating the impact that a social housing delivery agent has on the overall quality of life of residents

RSS has accrued benefits for SMs, housing providers and residents as specified below:

Service Managers	Housing Provider	Residents
Increase understanding of the local resident needs	Improvements to services and performance (i.e., reduction in arrears and bad debts, lower turnover rates, residents taking better care of their property)	Improved communication-keeping them informed and involved
Areas to support and service gaps identified that can be better supported or improved (are the services or programs required of housing providers by service managers meeting the needs of residents)	Prioritizing resources aligned with needs and gaps as informed by residents	Delivering good property management service-providing good quality housing
Preparing programmatic reports for funders, councillors, boards, and other stakeholders to demonstrate accountability and value for money being spent	Service performance indicators established to enable reporting to Senior Management and Boards etc. A process of accountability.	Defining what is important and express preferences about the shape of services, including setting of standards
Report on outcomes as part of the housing and homelessness plans requirements- establishment of performance indicators	An improved reputation for the organization-good public relations	Community capacity-building
Managing Risk	Improved staff/resident	Participation in the decision making process of the

Service Managers	Housing Provider	Residents
	relationship	organization. Feeling confident that input is valued and acted upon

4.3 Business Need: Why Conduct Resident Satisfaction Surveys (RSS)?

The business case for Resident Satisfaction Surveys (RSS) is twofold:

- 1) Meeting Regulatory Requirements
- 2) Effective Business Management

1) Meeting Regulatory Requirements

Although the regulatory requirements for RSS have not been established as yet; it is worth emphasizing that social housing delivery agents may be expected to adopt an approach to resident feedback using some form of resident engagement activity. Some SMs and housing providers are demonstrating proactive approaches by developing their own pragmatic 'self-regulation' initiatives that embed resident involvement in the delivery of social housing. In fact, several SMs 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan include social housing Resident Satisfaction Surveys as an activity to be implemented. Many SMs and housing providers have yet to adopt similar arrangements. As noted earlier, a good example of proactive use of resident surveys is Ontario's housing co-ops. The requirement of the housing co-op sector under the 2020 program to garner resident feedback in order to be considered a 2020 co-op reiterates the importance of resident input in their business model.

2) Effective Business Management

RSS serves as an effective business management strategy as it involves residents in the provision and management of their homes, while informing operation and managerial priorities.

Fundamentally, social housing ownership and management is a business. If housing administrators are to sustain their business, they need to understand what residents think and how they view the services they are providing. For social housing delivery agents, their residents can be considered more as 'captive', to the extent that they may have fewer choices about where they live and are less able to switch housing providers available on the open market. Nevertheless, there is a strong case for social housing delivery agents to treat their residents as if they had choice, since this is best business practice and would ensure that the services they provide are geared to the end user. An understanding of resident satisfaction in conjunction with cost and performance data provides organizations with an effective business and service planning tool.

RSS is the essential starting point to developing effective approaches to working with residents in the design and delivery of services to meet their needs. It promotes resident participation and responsibility in social housing administration. In considering, whether or not value for money is being delivered, if there is

no clear indication whether the social housing delivery agent has achieved its business objectives, then it begs the questions “*how does a social housing provider know operational deficiencies and/or successes?*”, “*where to spend additional resources?*”, and “*what areas of the portfolio need immediate attention vs. long-term considerations?*”.

However, when involving residents, many social housing providers appear to lack clearly defined objectives linked to their business objectives. Some providers still seem to focus on resident feedback as an end in itself, rather than a means to improve service and performance.

In order for RSS to be effective, social housing delivery agents need to set clear business-related objectives for resident engagement in order to evaluate value for money and to measure what is being achieved. This is an essential first step for any social housing provider that has not yet set such objectives. Some more general overarching business objectives in the sector are:

- Having a resident-focused organization
- Providing services to meet the needs of all its residents, including people who are more vulnerable
- Continually improving performance
- Increasing resident satisfaction

These objectives could be used to help establish initiatives such as a Resident Experience Program, and/or a Resident Service Network, through which RSS can be embedded into organizational practices. These types of programs can help to understand the residents’ experiences, goals and needs.

4.4 Business Outcomes: Linking RSS with Organizational Objectives

There is increasing awareness of the importance of using residents’ views to shape services and achieve organizational objectives aimed at delivering better, more responsive, services. The usefulness of RSS is that it treats residents as an integrated important element of the service delivery, designed for the convenience of the resident, and not the organization. Notwithstanding the importance of regulatory compliance, the key aspect of RSS is that it can produce meaningful outcomes and results, for which action can be taken, as demonstrated through the pilot survey initiative. In other words, hearing from residents about service provision can assist in making the housing deliverers’ business and operations improve. Social housing providers can use impact assessments to streamline their services in line with residents’ needs. Benchmarking resident satisfaction can assist social housing providers monitor trends over time and determine shifts in priorities for services.

Investing in RSSs can yield significant benefits and outcomes for social housing administrators, landlords, residents and the wider community. The following are examples of ways in which resident satisfaction surveys can be linked to social housing delivery agent’s business objectives:

Objective: Improve Housing Services	Can provide significant evidence that resident services are delivered to a high standard including a high level of resident satisfaction
Focus Area: Access and Customer Care	<p>Monitor resident satisfaction with complaints and gauge resident satisfaction with the way complaints are made</p> <p>Assess satisfaction with opportunities to inform management and affect decisions making and service delivery</p> <p>Feedback can inform less valuable services that could be priorities for cutting without a significant impact</p>
Objective: Increased Housing Satisfaction	Provide evidence of resident satisfaction with the complaints service including outcomes
Focus Area: Tenancy and Property Management	<p>Service user satisfaction for tenancy and property management services and use resident feedback to improve services, processes and policies</p> <p>Report on satisfaction with the ability of service users to contact and use the service, and pay their rent or other charges for services</p>
Objective: Efficient Management of Public Money	Assess satisfaction with the quality of a resident's unit and building condition can inform organization actions required to improve vacant unit issues, turnover of vacancies and rent arrears
Focus Area: Quality of Housing	Feedback on repair jobs can provide an indication of the capacity of contractor as well as metrics to quickly assess the quality of work being carried out (i.e., emergency repairs, urgent repairs, routine repairs completed)

Implementation of RSS can also lead to improved links between neighbours and required community supports, which can translate into more sustainable places and better community cohesion. More broadly, RSS can strengthen the links between the organization and residents, through which residents may help to identify issues that are not solely in the control of social housing providers and there may be opportunities to 'lever in' other resources.

The key insights garnered from our pilot organizations are that, if resident satisfaction surveys are to be undertaken it must be:

- Linked to corporate and service objectives
- Embedded in the working culture of the organization
- Factored into business and service planning and budget setting
- Efficiently delivered- must dedicate financial and human resources

4.5 Survey Process Considerations

The RSS pilot demonstrated some issues with both the operational and design elements that need to be considered in order to successfully invest and embed resident-focused performance in the social

deliverers' approach to management. Some of these considerations have been detailed in Section 2 of this report under lessons learned. The following should be considered when exploring the usage of RSS:

4.5.1 Implementation:

- Consideration needs to be given to linking and embedding existing resident survey processes and engagement practices currently undertaken by housing providers with that which may be regulated by the sector. For example, recognizing that housing co-ops have an existing resident survey process outside of sector 'regulatory' compliance; how this fits in with sector regulations and tailored to tenure type must be an implementation consideration.
- Service Manager responsibility for and their ability to obtain resident survey results from housing providers and residents in their area, especially when they are not directly involved in the delivery of housing provision. While the Pilot demonstrated that it is feasible for SMs to implement RSS with housing providers; regional variations may have differing outcomes, including varying response rates, and delayed process.
- Housing provider's comparability, particularly where fewer units are managed (in relation to housing providers) or when their housing stock is older (in relation to providers with newer buildings in their portfolio).
- Promoting the services and identifying organizational standards may or may not be undertaken due to high workloads and lack of capacity or resources.
- A searchable database of resident information to identify, sample and collection of data may not be in place or easily accessible.
- Standardized communication methods may not exist- housing providers use phone, e-mail, and personal contacts and other methods.
- Social housing delivery agents may have resident information that may be outdated, which leads to resistance from front-line staff towards updating the information and/or staff time required to conduct follow up calls to verify the information they have received.
- Administered internally by a housing provider could lead to biases or fear on the part of residents that honest feedback could impact the services they receive. This is especially the case with small providers that have on-site offices in the buildings they are working in.
- Timelines for implementing RSS may not align with regulatory requirements for reporting, especially if a SM or housing provider has to deal with unintended or external factors.
- The sector is dominated by smaller providers (99% of providers manage fewer than 500 units and 74% manage fewer than 100 units); there is significant difficulty amongst these providers of achieving sufficient response to a survey for the results to be statistically robust.
- Possible low response rates and survey fatigue- for those organizations who have conducted some form of resident surveys to date, response rates have generally been low.

4.5.2 Technology:

- Social housing providers/delivery agents may have different technological capabilities, skills, and competence.
- Some social housing delivery agents are using customized reporting systems for their technology solutions- many are using Microsoft Office and Excel Programs as standalone data collection systems.
- Administering web-based surveys is dependent on the delivery agent having in place the infrastructure, staffing resources and residents being computer literate, proficient and having access to technology.
- Administering telephone surveys requires SMs and housing providers to have the in-house technology and dedicated staff resources to implement, collect and analyze surveys. This can be a costly expenditure for the infrastructure, technology and staffing time. In addition, a telephone survey method would require the availability of valid telephone numbers, and even if available, there are confidential issues that may prevent them from being provided.
- Postal deliveries are not 100% reliable, particularly in small rural communities.

4.5.3 Operational Capacity:

- SM and housing providers are operating at maximum capacity- for both financial and staffing resources.
- Social housing delivery agents have different operational processes including methods for searching for information, technology usage, serving residents and maintaining resident information. While most housing providers maintain internal records, and majority do it in a timely fashion, updating is an issue.
- Surveys may be organizationally and financially ineffective if a process of establishing corporate or business objectives does not exist or is not undertaken prior to implementing a survey process.

4.5.4 Human and Financial Resources:

- Funding and resources might restrict ability to conduct surveys.
- Most housing providers lack the capacity and resources to administer surveys.
- Larger housing providers and rural providers with dispersed stock, the implementation can be costly.
- There is a general lack of technical know-how amongst housing managers in social housing to undertake effective performance driven resident satisfaction surveys, including analysis and reporting and use of survey results.

Even with these considerations, the pilot illustrated that RSS can be undertaken province-wide, however both dedicated financial and human resource investment needs to be in place in order for it to be done right and for it to be effective; if using the results as performance reporting is required. Furthermore, an

important factor to consider is that SMs and housing providers need to demonstrate that they achieve value for money from their expenditure on resident satisfaction surveys, if this is a required process that must be repeated and reporting back on results is the necessary requirement of MMAH.

4.6 Viable Alternative Options

Outside of the regulatory framework to undertake RSS, there is no single easy answer on how to embed or how to ensure value for money is demonstrated through RSS. There is also no single 'best method' for reaching and engaging residents. A good starting point however is to involve residents themselves in defining objectives for service and performance improvement and in monitoring and reviewing what works and what doesn't- and what can deliver best value for money.

Depending on resources and capacity, Resident Satisfaction Surveys may not be the only viable mechanism for garnering resident feedback. Periodic RSS is only one of a range of methods for collecting resident feedback. There are however, alternative methods to measure resident satisfaction of equal and greater importance for which a social housing delivery agent can undertake that fit within the framework of an effective resident engagement strategy. Table 4 lists a menu of options of resident feedback activities that can be implemented internally, externally and/or outsourced. These suggested options can be embedded in the working culture of the organization, linked to service and planning objectives, and factored into business objectives and strategic priorities. The options go beyond the use of structured surveys and suggest a number of more in-depth qualitative approaches that can be useful in helping to understand resident perceptions and priorities in greater detail- useful in answering "why" rather than "what" questions.

The key is for social housing administrators and residents to determine and select the most effective option(s) based on the profile of the residents living in social housing. By offering a menu of resident feedback opportunities, housing administrators can:

- Access a greater volume and a variety of opinion
- Engage people with strategic budgeting decisions
- Design approaches that are more inclusive and representative

Table 4: Alternative Options- Resident Engagement Feedback Activities

Type of Activity	Description
Tracker Surveys	Routine or 'continuous' surveys targeting people having recently made use of specific services such as repairs and maintenance, complaints, contact centre, lease signing, planned maintenance, external and or internal painting. Although a costly process this is seen as a valuable method for tracking changing resident views and for providing an organization with the capacity to quickly identify and address any newly emerging problems.

Type of Activity	Description
Move-in Surveys	For households/residents moving into their units, feedback about the lease signing process, as well as unit conditions and other pertaining aspects, can indicate areas of improvement and also garner initial feedback about the state of the unit on initial move in.
Exit Surveys	Capturing the view of residents as they leave housing, can provide valuable information to measure why people are leaving and to determine if there are any trends that may expose a housing provider and allow the provider to make some positive changes. It will help identify ways to continually improve.
Impact Assessment Survey	Used as an evaluation tool to assess the outcomes of large scale organizational interventions with focus on collecting information to determine short-term, medium-term and long-term impact. An example- impact of regeneration/redevelopment on the well-being of residents.
Resident Mystery Shopping	Mystery shopping can be a useful means of gaining a resident-eye-view of service delivery- check service quality for landlord. Some landlords may be able to organize this themselves or have it undertaken as part of “mock inspection” activity.
Resident and Property Inspectors	Creating a group of residents that are involved in regular building and property inspections can identify areas of a housing provider portfolio that needs to be improved, and common issues that arise, monitor service standards, and assess the work of external contractors, and report on unit condition when work is completed. Resident inspector exercises may also include testing of key services to deliver better approaches to service delivery.
Resident Audit Committee or Residents’ Panel	Intended to enhance organizational delivery, the audit committee provides feedback on a wide range of policies (resident, operational, corporate, HR etc.) The resident panel can be used to consult about policies, procedures, services and initiatives. For example, using a resident panel to redesign a rent statement or annual review application, could lead to a significant reduction in the number of telephone queries.
Focus Groups	<p>An organized grouping of residents that come together to provide feedback on particular issues, initiatives, ideas and services in place or to be implemented by housing administrators and delivery agents.</p> <p>This is effective because it goes beyond the use of structured surveys and is more an in-depth qualitative approach that can be useful in helping to understand resident perceptions and priorities in greater detail. It is useful in answering “why” rather than “what” questions.</p>
Resident Service Network	Focus is on the components of resident service. Housing providers can work with residents to develop a structure for resident inspection such as a resident senate. The senate can be made up of residents representing both service specific and neighbourhood issues. The senate may conduct

Type of Activity	Description
	four pieces of investigation work per year, looking at, for example, the services provided by the landlord's client/resident contact centre.
Community Animator	Communication process that provides a means for two-way dialogue between housing provider and residents on areas that relate to management, service provision, and resident community issues.
Communication Forum	Web-based discussion forum for residents. A content analysis can be undertaken to extract themes, complaints and issues related to service provision.

Where a social housing landlord takes the time and trouble to engage with residents to conduct regular tests of resident satisfaction- both through quantitative surveys and more qualitative exercises- it is essential that they make use of the results to make the necessary improvements to service delivery and to communicate these back to residents. Further an essential component is developing an action and implementation plan informed by the results that align with business objectives and that are reported back to residents.

4.7 Cost Considerations

Although beyond the scope of the pilot to examine the cost implications for undertaking Resident Satisfaction Surveys, there are some insights learnt through the process. The expenditures (fixed and variable) for conducting an RSS will vary based on the design of the survey approach (postal, telephone, online), size of SMS, region (urban vs. rural) number of housing providers surveyed, sample size, infrastructure and technology and whether the process is undertaken internally or outsourced.

Important to factor in is that it is not a one-time expenditure, the costs will be ongoing and will incur over the course of the investment's life-cycle and based on regulatory reporting cycles. If there is a commitment for one large survey process every two years then a periodic budgeting will have to be accounted for by the social housing delivery agent. On the other hand if a SM decides to establish a recurring survey process (i.e., tracker surveys) over a short term, and adopt other resident feedback activities, then there will be a more frequent expenditure.

There are general elements that need to be factored into budgeting for RSS:

- **Project Management** (management of project scope, human resources, procurement, management of data entry efforts, data cleaning, staff management)
- **Start-up fees** (questionnaire consultation, paper survey formatting, recruitment database, hiring recruiters and interviews or use of staff time, development of data collection protocols, training)
- **Infrastructure, equipment and supplies** (paper, envelopes, postage stamps, cost of mailing, photocopying, printing of surveys, data entry costs, language translation costs, infrastructure required- phone system with its supporting applications)

- **Recruitment and Data Collection Activities**
- **Data Analysis/Report Writing**

On-line surveys and emerging technologies such as texting, social media and smart phone apps are increasing in popularity. These may be new modes that can be incorporated in resident engagement activities and survey processes that lower costs. It will be dependent however, on the demographic involved being proficient and literate with the new technologies. In addition, the reach may be limited. While the Pilot did not use these mechanisms there is some value in testing how such modes may be cost-effective for social housing delivery agents in gauging resident feedback.

There are important methodological considerations to be made that can affect cost, time to complete data collection, response rates, and the quality of the data (i.e., biases). Table 5 compares postal and telephone interviews data collection methods with respect to cost, time to complete data collection and response rates.

Postal Surveys- The self-enumeration process where the respondent completes the questionnaire without the assistance of the interviewer is usually the cheapest form of data collection. The pilot demonstrated that while there was a higher-than-expected response rate, it takes time to conduct, particularly if the questionnaire is delivered and returned by mail. An important factor alerted to previously in the report is the new changes to the postal delivery service, where mail will no longer be delivered door to door, thus impacting survey reach; in particular this may have larger implications for rural communities of Ontario.

Telephone Interviews- This process usually has medium response rates, is less expensive and provides the quickest method of collection. This can be particularly advantageous when the population and sample are geographically dispersed. The main issue with telephone interviews is telephone sampling: lists of telephone numbers rapidly become out-of-date. In addition, social housing delivery agents require staff time investment and must have in place the infrastructure to carry out telephone interviews if an internal process is undertaken. Outsourcing can increase costs if language interpreters and translators are required.

Table 5: Postal and Telephone Data Collection Methods- Costs, Time and Response Rates

	Postal Surveys Self-Enumeration	Telephone Interviews
Cost	Low	Medium
Time	Longer	Shorter
Response Rate	Low	Medium-high

4.8 Potential Survey Costs

Given that a majority of the respondents in the pilot preferred a paper survey (self-administered) and that mail-based surveys outperformed telephone surveys by 3.9 percent in terms of response rate, we can estimate potential survey costs. The pilot demonstrated that postal surveys appear to be most cost-effective. We estimate that the delivery costs for each paper-based survey respondent is about CAD \$2.20- these costs include the printing and envelope costs and the costs of a prepaid reply, but excludes the costs of staff time and associated overheads and any applicable incentives.

Based on the assumption that social housing delivery agents will undertake a resident satisfaction survey process internally, and factoring the same costs for the postal delivery as experienced in the pilot, Table 6 shows the indicative survey costs for different housing provider sizes, on the basis of a number of recommendations and assumptions in relation to sample sizes, accuracy levels and response rates.

Table 6: Potential Postal Survey Costs for Housing Provider

Column 1	Column 2		Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6	Column 7
	Recommendations						
Provider size (# of housing units)	Survey Coverage	Accuracy level (p=75)	Minimum responses needed	As % of Population	Number of Survey packages to send out	Postal survey costs (@ CAD \$2.20 per unit)	Postal survey costs (@ CAD \$2.20 per unit) X2 Mailing 1 and 2 ⁶
50	Census	±6.0%	40	80%	50	CAD \$110	CAD \$220
75	Census	±6.0%	55	73%	75	CAD \$165	CAD \$330
100	Census	±6.0%	67	67%	100	CAD \$220	CAD \$440
125	Census	±6.0%	77	62%	125	CAD \$275	CAD \$550
150	Census	±6.0%	86	57%	150	CAD \$330	CAD \$660
175	Census	±6.0%	93	53%	175	CAD \$385	CAD \$770
200	Census	±6.0%	100	50%	200	CAD \$440	CAD \$880
250	Census	±6.0%	112	45%	250	CAD \$550	CAD \$1100
300	Census	±6.0%	120	40%	300	CAD \$660	CAD \$1,320

⁶Column 7 indicates the postal cost if a two-stage postal mail out is undertaken- Mailing 1 is the initial package sent out to households, and Mailing 2 is the reminder package. There may be some variance in the costs associated with Mailing 2 as some housing administrators may decide to re-send survey packages to all households that were included in Mailing 1 and/or only send the Mailing 2 to households where there has been no response.

Column 1	Column 2		Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6	Column 7
	Recommendations						
Provider size (# of housing units)	Survey Coverage	Accuracy level (p=75)	Minimum responses needed	As % of Population	Number of Survey packages to send out	Postal survey costs (@ CAD \$2.20 per unit)	Postal survey costs (@ CAD \$2.20 per unit) X2 Mailing 1 and 2 ⁵
400	Census	±6.0%	134	34%	400	CAD \$880	CAD \$1,760
500	Census	±5.0%	185	37%	500	CAD \$1,100	CAD \$2,200
750	Sample	±5.0%	210	28%	525	CAD \$1,155	CAD \$2,310
1,000	Sample	±4.0%	310	31%	775	CAD \$1,705	CAD \$3,410
1,500	Sample	±4.0%	350	23%	875	CAD \$1,925	CAD \$3,850
2,000	Sample	±4.0%	375	19%	938	CAD \$2,063	CAD \$4,127
3,000	Sample	±4.0%	400	13%	1,000	CAD \$2,200	CAD \$4,400
4,000	Sample	±4.0%	412	10%	1,030	CAD \$2,266	CAD \$4,532
5,000	Sample	±3.0%	675	14%	1,688	CAD \$3,713	CAD \$7,427
7,500	Sample	±3.0%	705	9%	1,763	CAD \$3,878	CAD \$7,757
10,000	Sample	±3.0%	760	8%	1,900	CAD \$4,180	CAD \$8,360
15,000	Sample	±3.0%	775	5%	1,938	CAD \$4,263	CAD \$8,527
58,000	Sample	±2.0%	1,750	3%	4,375	CAD \$9,625	CAD \$19,250
4,000	Sample	±4.0%	412	10%	1,030	CAD \$2,266	CAD \$4,532
5,000	Sample	±3.0%	675	14%	1,688	CAD \$3,713	CAD \$7,427
7,500	Sample	±3.0%	705	9%	1,763	CAD \$3,878	CAD \$7,757
10,000	Sample	±3.0%	760	8%	1,900	CAD \$4,180	CAD \$8,360
15,000	Sample	±3.0%	775	5%	1,938	CAD \$4,263	CAD \$8,527
58,000	Sample	±2.0%	1,750	3%	4,375	CAD \$9,625	CAD \$19,250

To take an example, for a housing provider with 400 housing units in management, we would recommend a census survey of all 400 households (columns 2 and 6)- as opposed to a sample survey- in order to achieve a minimum response of 134 replies (column 4), which would represent a 34% response rate (column 5). We are recommending that providers with 400 units or less should aim for results that are accurate to within a sampling error of at least ± 6% at the 95% confidence level (column 3), in order to ensure that the survey results are reasonably representative of the views of the wider population of residents. For this provider, we estimate that the printing and despatch of a postal survey would cost CAD \$880 in direct costs for one postal mailing process (Mailing 1), excluding staff time for administration or for

analysis and reporting of the survey results. The cost will double if a reminder package (Mailing 2) is sent out to all the households that were included in Mailing 1.

For a larger provider with 5,000 units in management, to take another example, we are recommending that survey results should be accurate to within a sampling error of $\pm 3\%$; this would mean that a total of 1,688 survey packages would need to be sent out in order to achieve a minimum of 675 responses, a 40% response rate to the survey (which would mean that 14% of the population would have responded to the survey, as column 5 shows, although this does not impact on the accuracy of the results). The direct survey costs for such a provider would be CAD \$3,713 for a one-step mailing process (Mailing 1).

For the largest provider (58,000 units), we are recommending accuracy levels of $\pm 2\%$.

Notes for Table 6:

When calculating sampling errors, we have set the 'population proportion (p)' at 75%, on the basis that 75% of the residents of a specific housing provider would be likely to have a similar view of their landlord and the services they provide- for example, that 75% of residents of any housing provider would be satisfied with the overall landlord service.

When calculating the number of survey packages to be sent out, we have assumed a standard response rate of 40%, that is, that 2.5 survey packages need to be sent out for every single reply received.

Table 7 provides a profile of the social housing sector in Ontario, showing the numbers of providers by size in respect of the housing units they manage (we have excluded the 199 providers whose size is not known from this Table). Table 7 emphasizes the extent to which the majority of housing providers are only small, with almost three-quarters of providers (74%) managing fewer than 100 units and 97% managing fewer than 500 units.

Table 7: Size Profile of Social Housing Sector in Ontario and Post Survey Costs

Provider Size (# of housing units)	Number of Housing Providers	As % of Total Providers	Total Housing Units	As % of total Housing Units	Estimated Postal Survey Costs (@ CAD \$2.20 per unit)	Estimated Postal Survey Costs (@ CAD \$2.20 per unit) X2 Mailing 1 and 2 (Total)
Under 50	757	44.6%	18,824	7.2%	CAD \$41,413	CAD \$91,109
50 to 99	500	29.4%	38,419	14.7%	CAD \$84,522	CAD \$185,948
100 to 499	395	23.2%	66,809	25.6%	CAD \$146,980	CAD \$323,356
500 to 999	27	1.6%	19,484	7.5%	CAD \$34,292	CAD \$75,442
1,000 to 4,999	16	0.9%	30,977	11.9%	CAD \$40,890	CAD \$89,958

Provider Size (# of housing units)	Number of Housing Providers	As % of Total Providers	Total Housing Units	As % of total Housing Units	Estimated Postal Survey Costs (@ CAD \$2.20 per unit)	Estimated Postal Survey Costs (@ CAD \$2.20 per unit) X2 Mailing 1 and 2 (Total)
5,000 or more	4	0.2%	86,190	33.1%	CAD \$75,847	CAD \$166,863
TOTAL	1,699	100.0%	260,703	100.0%	CAD \$423,943	CAD \$932,675

Table 7 also shows the estimated costs for the sector if all the social housing providers were to undertake a postal satisfaction survey of their residents. If social housing providers implemented only one postal mailing of the survey package (Mailing 1) the total cost would be CAD \$423,943, a second mail out of the survey package to the same set of households receiving Mailing 1 would cost a total CAD \$932,675.

Notes for Table 7:

We have assumed a unit cost of CAD \$2.20 per survey package sent out in a 1 postal mailing process (as in Table 6).

We have assumed that all housing providers with 500 units or less would conduct census surveys, that providers with between 500 and 999 units would send out survey packages to a sample of 80% residents, that providers with between 1,000 and 4,999 units would send out survey packages to a sample of 60% of residents and that providers with 5,000 units or more would send out survey packs to 40% of their residents.

5.

Recommendations

The new emphasis by the Province on “people first” offers opportunities for social housing delivery agents to embed resident engagement activities in the way social housing landlords prioritise investments, shape services and make decisions. With the new financial pressures on social housing delivery agents, tough choices will need to be made on where and how to reduce costs and areas to improve. RSS is one of several tools that can inform resource allocation and service delivery. This will help ensure that services provided are actually services resident want. Involving residents in developing and monitoring local performance measures enables residents to define what is important and express preferences about the shape of services, including setting standards. However, commitment from SMs, Boards and Senior Management need to back the endeavour with resources and genuine support. If not championed from the top, it will likely miss its purpose.

This section provides recommendations based on the Resident Satisfaction Pilot Survey in Ontario. Although the recommendations are interlinked there are considerations for Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (Ontario), Service Managers, Housing Providers, and the Stakeholder Survey Working Group.

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), Ontario

- The report outlining the findings, lessons learned and business case to be submitted to the MMAH for consideration and for informing their decision and approach to regulating resident satisfaction across the province. This recommendation fulfills the spirit of the Resident Satisfaction Pilot Survey Initiative.
- MMAH should consider regulating a soft and flexible approach to resident feedback by requiring Service Managers to develop a resident engagement strategy as part of the 5 year update of SMs 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plans. This may be both time-and cost-effective process, enabling SMs to consult, test, refine current practices and implement best suited resident engagement activities for their local needs.
- MMAH should consider encouraging social housing delivery agents to adopt more robust methods if that best meets their own needs.
- MMAH should invest in a short-term resource hub for building resident engagement capacity and to support the needs of individual SM and their housing providers to undertake effective resident engagement activities, in particular resident satisfaction surveys. Building on the work undertaken through the pilot, the resource hub could provide a resource tool kit to support resident engagement activities, and provide on an as needed basis, customized tools, training and other resources necessary to undertake the full range of planning, implementation, analysis and

reporting activities to successfully enable SMs to strategically establish resident engagement as part of their operations. The resource hub would ensure that capacity is built across Ontario regardless of size and municipal structure.

Service Managers

- If MMAH regulated a soft approach (i.e., resident engagement strategy), Service Managers need to develop a resident engagement strategy to support a strategic approach for resident satisfaction surveys and feedback which aligns with overarching social housing delivery agents aims, objectives, performance indicators and service priorities. The resident engagement strategy can be built into SM's Housing and Homelessness Plan updates.
- Within the regulation context and standard considerations, allow Service Managers to develop their own local standards for resident feedback. Any resident engagement activity or program needs to recognize size, scale, geography and governance structure of Service Managers and housing providers and assess which resident approach or aspect of resident activities meets the needs.
- Within the framework of a resident engagement strategy, SMs need to set clear business-related objectives and to consider resident feedback from the outset in setting organization objectives, in order to evaluate resident satisfaction and to measure what is being achieved. If Resident Satisfaction surveys are the recommended resident engagement process then the following are sub-recommendations:
 - Standardised surveys should be carried out at least every two years
 - Use a set of core standard overarching questions as a baseline that can also be used as indicators for comparability over time
 - As a minimum social housing delivery agents should use a self-completion postal survey to gather information from their residents and service users. The pilot demonstrated that postal surveys were the most cost and operationally effective implementation process.
- Collaborative work is required between Service Managers and their social housing delivery agents to define and implement their local standards related to resident involvement, either through RSS or use of alternative options of resident engagement activities. They may find the options set out in Table 4 helpful as they weigh appropriate approaches. Offering a menu of resident feedback opportunities allows residents to participate in ways and at levels which suit them on issues that interest them.

Housing Providers

- If SMs are required to develop a resident engagement strategy, it is recommended that housing providers select the type of resident engagement activities that is the most appropriate and best suited for the needs of their organization to inform the SMs resident engagement strategy; taking into account equality and diversity and residents with care or support needs.

- Housing providers develop a resident involvement strategy that aligns with business objectives. Table 4 provides types of options for providers to consider.
- If RSS is the regulated approach, a survey working group should be established by social housing providers within SMs areas to work collectively to decide on questions, processes, and practices. This may be a resource and cost-effective approach that may assist smaller housing providers with resource capacity issues to ensure their resident engagement activities are effective. It would also provide a collective platform to discuss action plans, analysis, results and ways of reporting back in a manner that meets the reporting requirements of SMs.
- Despite the size of the social housing delivery agent and regional locations (rural or urban), embed resident engagement as a core activity in the working culture of the organization. In light of this offer a wide range of opportunities for residents to be involved in the management of their housing, including the ability to influence strategic priorities, the formulation of housing-related policies and the delivery of housing-related services.
- It is in the best business interest of larger housing providers to incorporate resident satisfaction surveys as an important strategic and business planning tool. The results of the data should be requirement as part of their annual report to SMs, with a report back also for residents.
- Housing Providers establish clear organizational objectives and determine how resident feedback can be garnered to assess the objectives. Two key questions to take into account: What are the changes and improvements that housing providers want to achieve? and What can be measured and counted?

Stakeholder Survey Working Group

- The Stakeholder Survey Working Group actively participates in upcoming sector conferences and forums (i.e., ONPHA, OMSSA) to share their expertise and involvement in the Resident Satisfaction Pilot Survey Initiative. The collective insightful knowledge from the working group will be of much value to the sector and relevant stakeholders in learning first-hand the successes, lessons learned and outcomes from undertaking a RSS with their residents. With this recommendation there are several options to consider:
 - Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA) Conference- Session on **Resident Engagement Activities**. A panel that includes members of the Stakeholder Survey Working Group, and additional sector representatives undertaking other forms of resident engagement activities. A key objective of the session would be to demonstrate and engage in a dialogue about the types of strategies used, operational elements undertaken, and the outcomes of the process for residents and the organization when implementing resident engagement activities.
 - Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) Conference- Session on **Assessing Resident Satisfaction**. Given that the pilot survey included questions about

the community and neighbourhood, it would be of value to engage in a dialogue about ways in which resident satisfaction in social housing extends beyond the physical asset and boundaries of social housing and is linked to aspects of human services integration. There is an opportunity to link the objectives of resident satisfaction in housing services into wider community development.

- Canadian Housing Renewal Association (CHRA) Conference- Session on **Canadian Practices of Measuring Resident Satisfaction**. There are tremendous dissemination opportunities for Ontario's Pilot Initiative to be shared at the CHRA by the Stakeholder Survey Working Group, in a session that presents resident satisfaction work undertaken in other provinces across Canada.
- **National Housing Research Committee (NHRC)**- The process and results of the RSS Initiative fits well within the NHRC thematic research focus- Housing Data Working Group. Sharing the important work from the pilot would be of value to the broader working group and may open a dialogue about national and provincial practices and/or a framework for establishing satisfaction indicators for housing.



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For further information about this initiative, report or you need support to develop a resident satisfaction survey, customer feedback survey, or a tenant engagement strategy for your organization, contact the following:

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