



November 23, 2022

Standing Committee on Public Accounts
c/o Currie Dixon, Chair

Re: Comments on Auditor General's Report

To whom it may concern,

We are very pleased to be invited to provide comments on the Office of the Auditor General's recent report regarding access to social housing in Yukon. Likewise, we were pleased to be to provide feedback on some of the recommendations made by the office of the Auditor General by the Yukon Housing Corporation last week. As an organization with a strong belief in the importance of collaboration, the sincere and frank words we heard at the summit on the housing needs in the Yukon – and that no organization or government alone can address them – rang true.

From our beginnings at SHARP, to the development of customized residential support programs and the assumption of operations at the Housing First Residence, and now, with our latest chapter at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter – we have and continue to learn a great deal about delivering services in the territory. This learning, together with our extensive experience providing person-centered supports, and the valuable contributions of our partners, leaves us well primed to continue meeting the unique needs of those in the Yukon.

Below are some initial thoughts and reflections on the specific feedback requested. Beneath that, I have included some additional comments on the importance of this work to improve community engagement & understanding and would be happy to expand on this if it is of interest to YHC.

Recommendation #31

The Yukon Housing Corporation should conduct a review of rent assessment for those on social assistance, housing eligibility requirements, and its prioritization system to ensure that there is access for those in most need of housing and benefits.

Actions

31.1
The YHC/HSS ADM Steering Committee on Housing to review YHC's rent assessment and eligibility, including those on social assistance.

31.2

Amend the prioritization system and eligibility requirements with the Community Housing Operational Policies.

31.3

Work with partners to determine how to evaluate Community Housing programs for those most in need and include the application of performance indicators.

31.4

Complete the next 5-year Social Housing Program Evaluation starting in 2024, including a new evaluation framework and performance indicators.

1. An opportunity is....

To reduce the confusion in, or replication of, housing application pathways to ensure that all lists of housing need are aligned.

2. A next step would be...

Automate updates to all lists of housing need simultaneously, to continually maintain updated lists reflective of current needs. See below for further comments on performance indicator development.

3. Wise actions: What useful and constructive actions would help us on our way forward with the OAG findings?

Having observed significant turnover in key leadership positions in government departments responsible for housing strategy and support, and in light of the OAG's critical report, a sustainable and consistent body responsible for housing strategy could be established, ensuring that it remains a priority, regardless of transition within leadership positions.

Recommendation #62

The Department of Health and Social Services should, in consultation with housing partners, undertake regular and comprehensive needs analysis, including a review of the use of hotels as temporary accommodation, and take appropriate action to meet client needs.

Actions

62.1

Develop a Social Supports Branch Quarterly Housing Report to support analysis and decision-making pertaining to housing needs.

62.2

Collaborate with housing partners to integrate data from the Coordinated Access By Name List, Yukon Housing Corporation's waitlist, and Point in Time Count, etc., to establish common understandings of housing needs.

62.3

Complete a needs analysis for housing with services – particularly supportive housing – using population level data and integrating real-time program data as possible.

62.4

Explore possibility to expand the Point in Time count to allow more in-depth needs analysis.

62.5

Finalize a Framework for Forecasting Housing with Services needs.

1. An opportunity is....

To develop a comprehensive system of gathering data on housing need from the various community partners who currently hold this information (62.3). For Connective, we have been challenged to navigate multiple lists of priority need when tenanting a program. Furthermore, we are currently using anecdotal information and organization experience to inform applications to meet the needs of Yukoners and fill gaps in the housing continuum in the territory, as opposed to being able to rely on validated data.

2. A next step would be...

Adequately fund and endorse a single entity to host and steward the by-name list so that tenanting decisions can be made swiftly, equitably, and efficiently with all relevant parties' support.

Task an experienced agency to develop a full understanding of the current and future housing needs in the territory to inform a comprehensive and effective strategy. We have a strong relationship with such an agency and would be willing to bridge introductions and connections to further this opportunity.

3. Wise actions: What useful and constructive actions would help us on our way forward with the OAG findings?

Establish means and develop accountability for collaboration throughout all housing responses & services. As an organization new to providing services in Yukon over the last 2 years, it was very evident when we launched our programs how disbursed and separated efforts to support people facing housing insecurities are. There is an absence of clarity in responsibilities, and direction which further hinders individual efforts to make change. By embedding collaboration into the process, and ensuring the means and accountability to do so, would benefit the ability for all to make meaningful strides towards change.

Recommendation #90

The Yukon Housing Corporation should establish appropriate performance indicators—including short-term and long-term targets and outcome measures at the program level—as well as develop and implement a program evaluation framework to assess the achievement of desired results.

Actions

90.1

Review all YHC programs to ensure they include an evaluation framework with associated reporting timelines.

90.2

Hire a Data and Program Evaluation Analyst position.

90.3

Develop the next 5-year strategic plan that is informed by recommendations and findings of the 2022 OAG report.

1. An opportunity is....

To understand how performance indicators are measured in other provinces and territories, and adapt for the Yukon.

2. A next step would be...

Consult with agencies that operate in other provinces and territories to share their experiences around performance measurement for housing programs.

3. Wise actions: What useful and constructive actions would help us on our way forward with the OAG findings?

Consider hiring the analyst position outside the territory with experience in other provincial and territorial performance measurement processes for housing.

In addition to our feedback on above, we further wanted to draw your attention to the matter of public opinion about the types of housing need in the territory. We transitioned the operations of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter to Connective on October 1, 2022. It was brought to our attention well in advance of this transition that there is a significant division of opinion around the purpose and value of the emergency shelter in Whitehorse. We believe that the lack of coordination between community services and government departments involved in housing response serve to fuel this division of opinion and community unease, a perspective that has been echoed by the OAG report.

In advance of the transition, we heard various reports of concern about the conduct of people who use the shelter, as well as questions of the validity of their need, and concern for those clearly facing multiple barriers. With a community aware of the lack of coordination between responsible agencies, and aware that inefficient systems are at risk of simultaneously failing those most in need and at highest risk of being exploited by others, there is little faith that current services can make real impact.

You can view the WES info sessions we held recently and see our FAQs which were developed in direct response to expressed community views [here](#). Leadership and conviction are required to rebuild faith in the housing and social supports in the territory, and Connective is willing and capable of supporting that mission.

Furthermore, as an operator of several programs aimed at reducing homelessness, we are aware that they are funded via different government departments. This means that the various government departments involved (YHC, HPW, Health & Social Services) have differing relationships with one another and with other government bodies, and different expectations of residents. This frustrates opportunities to create flow in the housing continuum, not support. Our recommendation would be to establish a cohesive funding strategy & body that had overall accountability for social housing in the territory.

We are a collaborative organization, having built fruitful and long-last relationships with government agencies across BC & Yukon, as well as with other community-serving agencies. We intend to be an active part of the solutions to bring positive and sustainable change to the Yukon and in working towards safe, healthy, and inclusive communities for all. We are honoured to work alongside you in achieving mutual and impactful goals, and would love to gather together again to discuss further opportunities to do so.

Kind regards,

Mark Miller



Chief Executive Officer