



## Housing Services Notice

**Date: August 19, 2020**

**HSN#: 2020-16**

This applicable legislation/policy is to be implemented effective this date by the housing provider(s) under the following programs:

Please note, if your program is **not checked**, this change does not apply to your project.

- Federal Non-Profit Housing Program
  - Federal Section 26/27 Housing Program
  - Federal Urban Native Non-Profit Housing Program
  - Private Non-Profit Housing Program
  - Municipal Non-Profit Housing Program (Pre-1986)
  - Local Housing Corporation
  - Rent Supplement Programs
  - Affordable Housing Programs (AHP, IAH, SIF, OPHI)
  - Housing Access (Centralized Waiting List Services)
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**Subject: Revised Pay Direct Policy for Ontario Works (OW) Shelter Benefits**

**Reference:**

- *Ontario Works Policy #14 - Pay Directs to Landlords*

**Background:**

Over the years there have been notable challenges related to establishing a balance between the needs of landlords and Ontario Works recipients with respect to the stabilization of housing. While there are some guiding principles included in the Ontario Works (OW) legislation, there are gaps requiring a local policy for the payment of shelter benefits directly to landlords.

Prior to the pandemic, a review of DNSSAB's Ontario Works local processes on pay direct payments to landlords was underway. The pandemic interrupted this review. In April, after operations stabilized, this work resumed and a new local policy was drafted.

The draft policy was forwarded to the President of the Near North Landlord's Association (NNLA) who is also a member of the Affordable Housing Providers of Ontario (AHPO) Steering Committee, along with the co-chairs of the Community Advisory Board (CAB) to obtain

feedback. The feedback received from this targeted engagement of community partners has been very positive.

### **Revised Policy:**

The purpose of this policy is to define the difference between mandatory and voluntary pay directs, increase communication with landlords, increase accountability, expedite the intervention required when a person falls into rent arrears and mitigate other risks associated with the destabilization of housing. The most significant changes included in the policy that are anticipated to improve the overall housing stability of Ontario Works recipients, and better meet the needs of Landlords, are highlighted below:

- Notice Period

Previous Process: a voluntary pay direct to landlord as defined in the policy attached as Appendix A, could be removed from a recipients file immediately upon their request.

New Policy: Landlords will now be granted one month's advance notice that the Ontario Works pay direct payment will be terminated. This notice period will provide landlords more time to contact their tenants to discuss new payment arrangements. Please note that this change only applies in situations where the recipient remains living at the same address.

- Landlord/Tenant Disputes

Previous Process: In voluntary pay direct situations where a recipient advises their Case Manager that they are having problems with their landlord and want to remove the pay direct on their file, the voluntary pay direct would be removed.

New Policy: In situations where it is clear to the Case Manager that the recipient does not intend to pay their rent, shelter costs will be removed from the file until the recipient and the landlord resolve their issues together or through a Hearing at the Landlord Tenant Board.

- Communication

Previous Process: Landlords have always had the ability to contact Ontario Works directly when a tenant who they knew was in receipt of Ontario Works assistance failed to pay their rent. Landlords could also utilize the Provincial Fraud Hotline process.

New Policy: Landlords continue to be able to contact the Provincial Fraud Hotline when a tenant they know is in receipt of Ontario Works assistance falls into rent arrears. However, direct communication with the Ontario Works office is encouraged and the process has been streamlined to expedite an appropriate response. The NNLA has now been provided with one Ontario Works phone extension along with an email address that goes directly to members of the Ontario Works management team. A member of the Ontario Works management team will then connect with the Case Manager involved to review the case to determine what steps need to take place to remedy the situation.

The draft policy was also forwarded to the local Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) for review. This step was taken in an effort to increase the impact of this local policy throughout the social assistance population. Once again, the feedback was positive and it has been confirmed that the ODSP program in Nipissing will also be adopting DNSSAB's approach.

**Action:**

Please see the DNSSAB's revised Ontario Works Pay Direct to Landlords policy attached. Housing providers are directed to follow the revised policy when dealing with tenants who are OW recipients and have pay direct arrangements in place.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this or any other Housing Services Notice, please contact the Housing Programs Administrator assigned to your portfolio:

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