

**THE HOUSING FACTOR PROJECT  
HOUSING NEEDS OF MID-LIFE AND OLDER WOMEN**

**THE FINDINGS OF SIX ONTARIO COMMUNITIES**

**HAMILTON-WENTWORTH  
OLDER WOMEN'S NETWORK  
OTTAWA-CARLETON  
WEST PARRY SOUND DISTRICT  
SOUTH ASIANS-TORONTO  
MUNICIPALITY OF TWEED**

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**OLDER WOMEN'S NETWORK  
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of the Government of Canada.

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## Executive Summary

The Older Women's Network, formed in 1988, has as one of its purposes to overcome injustices and inequities at home, in the workplace and in society at large. As part of its ongoing program of research and publication of position papers and reports, the Older Women's Network initiated a project entitled the Housing Factor, to examine the well-being of mid-life and older women in terms of their current housing and future needs for housing.

The purpose of the Housing Factor project is to investigate the current availability of housing and the needs for affordable and accessible housing for mid-life and older women in a number of communities in Ontario. Connections between housing and other aspects of their lives are explored. The goal of the Housing Factor project is to influence the housing stakeholders, including all levels of government, financial institutions, the private housing sector, faith communities, local community organizations, and seniors' groups. The intention is to contribute to creative solutions in the public and private sectors for suitable housing for mid-life and older women.

As part of the principles of participatory action research, the Older Women's Network asked five other communities in addition to their own members to participate in the Housing Factor project. These include: Hamilton-Wentworth, Ottawa-Carleton, West Parry Sound District, South Asian community in Toronto, and the Municipality of Tweed. Representatives from these communities took on the position of community researchers and were part of the design of the project from the beginning. They in turn held focus groups with mid-life and older women in their communities, interviewed people interested in housing, and gathered information about the community in general and housing in particular.

In addition to holding focus groups and interviews with mid-life and older women as well as others who have knowledge of and interest in housing for seniors, a questionnaire was developed based on the information gathered from these sources. Approximately 1700 copies of the questionnaire were distributed among the six communities, including all members of the Older Women's Network. These had been translated into French and into five different languages for the South Asian community. A total of 1,242 questionnaires were completed and returned. These were tabulated at the Institute for Social

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Research at York University and then presented as part of the Report on the project

Those women who participated in the Housing Factor Project span ages from mid-forties to over ninety years of age. There are almost as many women under the age of sixty-five as over. They come from a number of linguistic, cultural and geographical groups, some living in cities, some in villages or town, and some on reserves and in rural areas. They live with diverse circumstances, privileges and needs. And they have a great deal in common.

The findings of the Housing Factor Project indicate a number of significant and disturbing factors about housing for mid-life and older women in these communities of Ontario. Overwhelmingly the women want the option of aging in place, not only in their own homes but also in their own communities. Financial concerns dominate all others in relation to availability of housing. In addition mid-life and older women fear increasing frailty and loss of health with very little evidence of services that will be available to them in order for them to stay in their own home.

Transportation and mobility are central to all other concerns for housing. The women want to be able to continue to walk to most of their activities, medical appointments, shopping and visiting friends and family. They insist on remaining close to all of the amenities that make up their community and enable them to be involved and active citizens. Yet they live with a number of fears and anxieties as they age, seeing little or no evidence from any government sources that provision of housing for them is a priority. In fact they indicate that all three levels of government are the most serious obstacles to the provision of housing for mid-life and older women.

The Report on the Housing Factor Project is produced as a total document for those interested in housing for mid-life and older women. In addition, the section on each community is produced separately for that community to use for specific application to its housing debates and activities. The Executive Summary is also available separately for those who want an indication of what is in the total Report, and includes the recommendations drawn from this

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### Recommendations

1. That the Federal Government, through its Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation and/or other agencies, return to the “business of housing” and restore full funding for social housing.
2. That the Government of Ontario take cognizance of the inadequacy of affordable housing for the elderly and put in place measures and funding for social housing.
3. That municipalities continue to support and expand their social housing.
4. That all three levels of government, federal, provincial and municipal agree to retain and maintain the existing affordable housing stock.
5. That the Tenant Protection Act of Ontario be revised and that rent controls and maintenance standards be reinstated.
6. That provincial legislation be put in place allowing seniors-only housing and fast-tracking seniors into existing housing.
7. That provincial regulations of retirement homes be put in place.
8. That the Ontario Municipal Board establish clear criteria so that both developers and municipalities know and can meet the conditions of housing development for mid-life and older women.
9. That the Ontario Building Code be amended to pressure builders to build adapted housing with universal designs, housing that is barrier-free.
10. That mid-life and older women be consulted in the design of housing so that aspects of a universal design, built to accommodate older people but appropriate for all age groups, and adapted housing for those with

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disabilities, be integrated into housing that is available for mid-life and older women.

11. That housing construction be conducive to creating communities, with gardens, outdoor spaces, verandahs and communal spaces, encouraging people to be neighbours, and that services such as banks, shops, hairdressers and pharmacies be part of the community accessible to all residents.
12. That mid-life and older women have input as to which communities are amenable to them in terms of their needs to be close to transportation, friends and family, and organizations and agencies that are part of their daily lives.
13. That support services, including transportation, homecare, contribution to maintenance, and financial assistance, be put in place so that mid-life and older women can stay in their current housing.
14. That all service providers keep statistics by gender and age so that appropriate government department can address service gaps.
15. That an integrated housing services network be provided so that when housing vacancies become available, the information can be transferred to those in need of that particular type of housing, in particular communities.
16. That help lines be put in place in local communities so that mid-life and older women can access information about available housing, about where to go to obtain housing, and about how to access barrier-free housing for the disabled.
17. That housing be provided for other vulnerable groups in Ontario so that they are not competing with mid-life and older women for scarce housing resources.
18. That subsidies for housing be attached to the person, not to the housing unit.
19. That subsidies be provided for homeowners who are able to share homes with mid-life and older women.

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20. That local municipal councils reflect the needs of residents living year round in their communities.
21. That the Older Women's Network continue to support the communities that participated in the Housing Factor Project in their efforts to obtain housing for mid-life and older women.
22. That the six communities that participated in the Housing Factor Project continue to have an ongoing relationship with one another, contributing support and information.