



Special Priority Policy Guide for Rent-Geared-to-Income Assistance

A guide for Service Managers who administer local housing services and service providers who support people in Ontario who have experienced abuse or trafficking

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1. Purpose

This guide provides general information on the province’s Special Priority Policy (SPP). The SPP is set out in *Ontario Regulation 367/11* (referred to as “the regulation”) under the *Housing Services Act, 2011* (HSA). This guide aims to support [Service Managers](#) who administer the SPP and service providers who work with people who have experienced abuse and/or trafficking (referred to as “survivors of abuse and trafficking”). It includes information on the SPP rules, the lived experiences of survivors, supports and services for survivors, and training opportunities for Service Managers and service providers.

The SPP guide was developed by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in partnership with:

- Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
- Ministry of Indigenous Affairs
- Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility
- Ministry of the Attorney General

The ministry also consulted with municipal and Indigenous partners, housing sector stakeholders, organizations serving various populations, such as violence against women and anti-human trafficking service providers, and people with lived experience of being trafficked.

This guide is not a legal document and is intended for educational purposes only. It is intended to be read with the HSA and its regulations, and is not an official interpretation of the Act or its regulations. In the event of a conflict between this guide and the legislation, the legislation will prevail. The examples provided in this guide should not be construed as direction from the ministry.

2. Context

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is responsible for the HSA and its regulations, which provide the legislative framework for social housing in Ontario.

Social housing is a type of community housing that specifically refers to dedicated housing units where tenants receive rent-geared-to-income (RGI) assistance or pay low-end of market rent (priced at or below average market rent). Households receiving RGI assistance typically pay 30% of their income in rent.

Under the HSA, **Service Managers** are local municipal and regional governments and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) that are responsible for funding and administering social housing within their respective service areas, including managing waiting lists for RGI assistance.

The HSA requires Service Managers to determine a household's priority for RGI assistance based on provincial priority rules set in regulation and any local priority rules set by the Service Manager. Throughout this guide, the term "**household**" includes a person living alone or living with dependents, family members or other people, and it can refer to people who are housed or unhoused.

Under the provincial priority rules, SPP households have priority over all other households seeking RGI assistance. The policy is intended to ensure that housing is not a barrier for a household to leave a situation of abuse or trafficking.

The HSA provides Service Managers with **flexibility and authority to consider the individual circumstances** of households when applying certain RGI eligibility and SPP rules in order to reduce barriers for applicants¹.

This guide includes examples of situations and extenuating circumstances for Service Managers to understand and consider when reviewing applications and making decisions about RGI and SPP eligibility.

¹ Throughout this guide, the term "applicant" may refer to either a survivor applying for RGI assistance and/or the SPP, or a person in the household who is applying on their behalf. [Part 5.1](#) of the guide includes more information on who can apply.

The extenuating circumstances are not limited to the examples provided in this guide, and these examples may not apply to all situations. Service Managers have the flexibility and authority to consider the unique circumstances of each application on a case-by-case basis.

3. Who the Special Priority Policy applies to

The Special Priority Policy (SPP) category applies to survivors of **abuse** and survivors of **trafficking**.

3.1 Abuse

Section 1, Ontario Regulation 367/11 defines abuse as any of the following done against a member of a household by an abuser²:

- physical or sexual violence
- controlling behaviour
- intentional destruction of property or intentional injury to property
- words, actions or gestures that threaten a person or lead them to fear for their safety
- trafficking of a person by any individual

Who is considered an abuser

The regulation also states that for a household to qualify for the SPP, an abuser must be any of the following:

- an individual who is related to any person in the household
- an individual who is, or has been, in an intimate partner relationship with any person in the household
- an individual who any person in the household is emotionally, physically or financially dependent on
- an individual who is emotionally, physically or financially dependent on any person in the household
- an individual sponsoring any person in the household as an immigrant

² Throughout this guide, the term “abuser” will be used to refer to abusing individuals, and the term “trafficker” will be used to refer to individuals engaged in trafficking of a person.

Examples of abuse

Households applying for the SPP may have experienced many types of abuse and survivors may be of any age. For a situation to be considered abuse, it **must meet the definition of abuse set in regulation and included above**, and the **abuser must be one of the individuals set in regulation and listed above**. Examples of abuse may include:

- intimate partner violence or abuse³
- forcible confinement
- child abuse
- financial abuse⁴
- elder abuse⁵
- threat or use of force
- coercive control and manipulation, including spiritual and cultural abuse⁶
- sexual exploitation
- forced labour or marriage
- emotional or psychological abuse⁷

³ This includes all forms of intimate partners, including 2SLGBTQIA+ partners.

⁴ [Financial abuse](#) may include improper conduct, done with or without the informed consent of a person, that results in a monetary or personal gain to the abuser and/or monetary or personal loss for the person.

⁵ [Elder abuse](#) is defined by the World Health Organization as “a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person.” This can include financial, psychological, physical, sexual, or systemic abuse and neglect.

⁶ Spiritual or cultural abuse can prevent a person from honouring and practicing their spirituality or culture. For example, within Indigenous communities, spiritual or cultural abuse could include misrepresenting or manipulating spiritual beliefs to coerce a partner into doing something that they do not want to do; preventing a partner from attending ceremonies, powwows, or feasts; and criticizing or mocking a partners’ beliefs.

⁷ [Emotional abuse](#) happens when a person uses words or actions to control, frighten or isolate someone or take away their self-respect. Emotional abuse is sometimes called psychological abuse. It can include threats, insults, constant yelling or criticism, destroying belongings, hurting or threatening to hurt pets, bullying, and gaslighting.

- neglect⁸
- gender-based violence⁹
- cyberviolence¹⁰ or technology-facilitated abuse¹¹
- stalking

The following websites include more information and examples of the types of abuse that may be experienced by SPP applicants:

- [Types of abuse – Canada.ca](#)
- [Intimate partner violence – Ontario.ca](#)
- [About family violence – Government of Canada](#)
- [Types of violence against women and girls – United Nations Women](#)
- [Learn the facts – Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario](#)

⁸ [Neglect](#) includes situations where a family member who has a duty to care for a person fails to provide that person with basic needs (for example, not providing food, shelter or proper clothing, not providing adequate health care or medication, failing to prevent physical harm, any other omission that results in a risk of serious harm, leaving an injured or sick person on their own for too long when that person is injured or unwell).

⁹ [Gender-based violence](#) includes violence based on gender norms and unequal power dynamics perpetrated against someone based on their gender, gender expression, gender identity, or perceived gender. It takes many forms, including physical, economic, sexual, emotional (psychological) abuse and technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

¹⁰ [Cyberviolence](#) is any online behavior that constitutes, or leads to, harm against the psychological, emotional, financial, and/or physical state of an individual or group. Examples of cyberviolence can include malicious text messages or emails, rumors sent by email or posted on social networking sites, sharing of another's intimate pictures/videos/texts without consent, online bullying, harassment, cyberstalking, blackmail, expressions of racism, homophobia, and misogyny.

¹¹ [Technology-facilitated abuse](#) is abuse that takes place through Internet of Things (IoT) devices. IoT refers to 'smart', internet-connected devices that can share data with each other. An abuser can potentially misuse IoT device features to monitor and control a person, which can result in privacy, security and safety risks (for example, coercion or intimidation through remote control of heating or lighting).

3.2 Trafficking

Section 1, Ontario Regulation 367/11 defines trafficking as one or more incidents of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person by **improper means** for an illegal purpose, including sexual exploitation or forced labour.

The regulation states that “improper means” includes:

- force
- abduction
- coercion
- deception
- repeatedly providing a controlled substance¹²

Examples of trafficking

Households applying for the SPP may have experienced various types of trafficking. For a situation to be considered trafficking, it **must meet the definition of trafficking set in regulation** and included above. Examples of trafficking may include:

- sex trafficking¹³ (for example, forced exchange of sex for money, food, drugs, alcohol, transportation, shelter)
- labour trafficking (for example, forced labour, debt bondage¹⁴)
- forced marriage
- forced organ removal

¹² A [controlled substance](#) is any type of drug that the federal government has categorized as having a higher-than-average potential for abuse or addiction. Controlled substances range from illegal street drugs to prescription medications.

¹³ The term “escorting” may be used to refer to trafficking (for example, sex trafficking). However, there are also cases where escorting is not trafficking and may refer to consensual work.

¹⁴ [Debt bondage](#) is the promise of a person's services to repay a debt or other obligation, where the terms are not clearly or reasonably set out, and the person holding the debt has some control over the labourer. Freedom is assumed on debt repayment. The services required to repay the debt and the duration of services may not be defined, allowing the person who is supposedly owed the debt to demand services indefinitely.

The following websites include more information on trafficking and examples of the types of trafficking that may be experienced by SPP applicants:

- [Recognizing human trafficking – Ontario.ca](#)
- [Human Trafficking – Canada.ca](#)
- [Defining Human Trafficking – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#)

4. Rent-geared-to-income assistance eligibility and application

4.1 Eligibility for RGI assistance

Applicants that meet the eligibility requirements for both rent-geared-to-income (RGI) assistance and the Special Priority Policy (SPP) are prioritized on RGI waiting lists by Service Managers ahead of all non-SPP applicants.

Provincial RGI eligibility rules

To qualify for RGI assistance, applicants must meet the following **eligibility rules under [Section 23](#) and [Section 24](#), Ontario Regulation 367/11**:

1. At least one person in the household must be 16 years or older and able to live independently (meaning they can carry out normal essential activities of day-to-day living, either on their own or with the aid of support services); and
2. Each person in the household must meet one of the following criteria:
 - be a Canadian citizen
 - have made an application for permanent resident status¹⁵
 - have made a claim for refugee protection under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (Canada)

Service Managers **do not have flexibility** in the application of any of the above provincial RGI eligibility rules.

¹⁵ Where a person has a [temporary resident permit](#) (TRP) but has not made an application for permanent resident status in Canada, the person does not meet the provincial eligibility requirements for RGI assistance.

Local RGI eligibility rules

Optional rules

Service Managers may also establish optional local eligibility rules in the following areas set out in [Section 33](#) and [Sections 36 to 38](#), *Ontario Regulation 367/11*:

- maximum absence from a unit
- ceasing to meet occupancy standards
- certain convictions related to RGI assistance

Mandatory rules

Service Managers are required to set local eligibility rules for **maximum household income and assets** to determine eligibility for RGI assistance. These rules may include different asset limits based on household size and type (for example, a Service Manager may choose to set different asset limits for senior households).

Service Managers may, in **extenuating circumstances**, determine that an applicant is eligible even if they do not meet the local income and/or asset limits. This is intended to provide Service Managers with flexibility to address the unique circumstances of applicants who may be negatively impacted by the rules.

Extenuating circumstances for income and asset limits

Examples of extenuating circumstances where a Service Manager may determine that an applicant is eligible, even if they do not meet local income and/or asset limits, include situations where applicants:

- are reporting an income that is not accessible to them or directly controlled by their abuser
- have experienced or will experience a decrease in income due to leaving a situation of abuse or trafficking
- have assets under their name (for example, cars, bank accounts) but do not have access to the assets due to a situation of abuse or trafficking (for example, assets are withheld by abuser or trafficker, abuser or trafficker has coerced applicant to acquire

assets, survivor is not aware that assets have fraudulently been acquired in their name, assets may be frozen due to court proceedings or delayed settlement payout)

Eligibility rules for special needs housing

Learn more under [Sections 68 to 71, Ontario Regulation 367/11](#).

There are separate eligibility rules for households that require units with accessibility modifications or provincially-funded support services. Households that require these types of units, and who also want to receive RGI assistance, must meet both sets of eligibility rules (special needs housing and RGI assistance) and should discuss this with their Service Manager.

Households who are eligible for special needs housing may also be eligible for priority status under the SPP.

4.2 Ineligibility for RGI assistance

Learn more under [Section 25 and Section 26, Ontario Regulation 367/11](#).

Generally, applicants are **ineligible** for RGI assistance if any one of the following applies:

1. any person of the household has a removal order under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (Canada) enforceable against them
2. any person in the household owes certain amounts related to a previous tenancy with a social housing provider, including:
 - arrears of rent
 - an amount owed to a Service Manager as repayment for assistance improperly received
 - an amount owed for damage caused by a current person in the household

Exceptions for arrears and amounts owed

If a household has arrears or amounts owed, the household would be eligible for RGI assistance if **either** of the following applies:

1. the Service Manager determines that there are **extenuating circumstances**
2. a person in the household has entered into, or made reasonable efforts to enter into, an agreement with the person that they owe arrears or amounts to, and the Service Manager is satisfied that the person is making, or intends to make, all reasonable efforts to repay the arrears or amounts owed
 - in this situation (exception 2 above), if the household qualifies for the SPP, a person in the household is responsible for making arrangements to repay **only half** of the arrears or amounts owed if the arrears or amounts owed is related to a unit where the survivor of abuse and the abuser were joint tenants

These exceptions apply only for the purpose of determining RGI eligibility. Regardless of the RGI eligibility decision, a household may still be held legally responsible for repaying arrears or amounts owed by the person that they owe arrears or amounts to.

Extenuating circumstances for arrears or amounts owed

Service Managers may determine an applicant is eligible for RGI assistance despite arrears or amounts owed in extenuating circumstances. This may include circumstances where:

- arrears of rent or amounts owed (for example, damages to unit) were incurred while in a situation of abuse or trafficking
- arrears are a result of financial control within an abusive relationship or exploitation
- a household was not able to make rent payments due to being trafficked or abused or attempting to leave a trafficking/abusive situation

4.3 Information and documents for RGI applications and continued eligibility

Learn more under [Section 29](#), [Section 43](#) and [Section 60](#), *Ontario Regulation 367/11*.

When determining whether an applicant is eligible for RGI assistance or reviewing continued eligibility for households receiving RGI assistance, Service Managers may request information and documents to support decision-making.

Service Managers are prohibited from requiring a person to provide information or documents to determine RGI eligibility if any of the following apply:

- they determine that the person is unable to provide the information or documents
- the person is also applying for the SPP and believes that any person in the household will be at risk of abuse or trafficking if they try to get the information or documents
- the Service Manager is reviewing continued eligibility of a household that was in the SPP category when they began to receive RGI assistance, and any person in the household believes they will be at risk of abuse or trafficking if they try to get the information or documents

What to consider when requesting information or documents

When Service Managers are requesting information or documents for RGI applications and the review of continued RGI eligibility, they should consider the specific circumstances of the household, such as:

- the safety of all members of the household
- whether information or documents, such as identification, may have been destroyed or may be withheld or in the control of the abuser or trafficker or another person engaged in trafficking
- whether there may be delays in accessing information or documents (for example, documentation to verify citizenship or immigration status)

To respect the privacy of applicants and to limit re-traumatization, and emotional and administrative burden, requests for information and documents should be limited to what is needed to determine eligibility. Intrusive details about applicants' experiences or exploitation are not required.

[Part 5.4](#) of the guide includes more information on requesting information and documents to determine eligibility for the SPP.

4.4 Preferences for housing projects and refusal of offer

Learn more under [Section 32.2](#) and [Section 46.1](#), *Ontario Regulation 367/11*.

Preferences for housing projects

Service Managers must allow RGI applicants to add, change or remove their preference for housing projects in the service area.

Until an RGI applicant indicates their preference, a Service Manager must consider the applicant for any housing project in the service area or in any part of the service area.

Service Managers must make reasonable efforts to notify applicants about these rules.

Refusal of offer

A household is no longer eligible for RGI assistance if they refuse an offer made by the Service Manager for a unit in the service area that both:

- meets the Service Manager's occupancy standards
- is in a housing project for which the household has expressed a preference

Exceptions for refusal of offer

If a household refuses an offer of an RGI unit, they may still be eligible for RGI assistance if the Service Manager is satisfied there are **extenuating circumstances**. For SPP applicants, there may be a reasonable and relevant explanation for refusing an offer of RGI assistance related to their experience of abuse or trafficking.

Extenuating circumstances for refusal of offer

Examples of extenuating circumstances, where an applicant may still be eligible for RGI assistance despite refusing an offer of an RGI unit, may include situations where:

- the unit offered is in **close proximity (in the same building or community)** to their abuser or trafficker (or a family member or known associate of the abuser or trafficker), such as their residence, place of work, or places they frequent
- at the time of the offer, the applicant is **not ready to move** due to hospitalization, residential treatment for addiction, or proximity to specialized supportive or culturally responsive services
- the applicant's **accessibility needs have recently changed** (for example, the applicant or a family member now requires an elevator, ramp or accessible unit)

Service Managers must make reasonable efforts to notify applicants of the rule on refusal of offers.

4.5 Failure to divest property

Learn more under [Section 32, Ontario Regulation 367/11](#).

To maintain eligibility for RGI assistance, each member of a household who has a legal or beneficial interest in a residential property¹⁶ must divest their interest in the property and give written verification to the Service Manager. In most cases, the divestment and verification must happen within 180 days of receiving RGI assistance.

However, the Service Manager must extend this time period for as long as they consider appropriate if all of the following apply:

- the household applied for the SPP category and was deemed eligible
- the household was included in the SPP category when they began to receive RGI assistance
- the interest in the property is held by both a member of the household and the abuser or trafficker

¹⁶ “Residential property” refers to a freehold or leasehold estate in residential property located in or outside of Ontario that is suitable for year-round occupancy.

- the member of the household notifies the Service Manager that they believe that divestment would place any member of the household at risk of abuse or trafficking

5. Special Priority Policy eligibility and application

5.1 Who can apply

A person applying for the SPP must be:

- a survivor of abuse or trafficking or a person living in the same household as the survivor
- 16 years or older

A service provider may support a person with their application but cannot apply on their behalf.

Where possible, Service Managers are encouraged to provide applicants with information on service providers (for example, violence against women organizations, anti-human trafficking organizations, victim services organizations) who can:

- help them with the application process
- provide other supports and services, such as counselling, legal aid, or crisis lines (Appendix A includes a list of suggested resources)

5.2 General eligibility and application rules

Learn more under [Section 44, HSA](#), and [Section 54](#), [Section 54.1](#) and [Section 56, Ontario Regulation 367/11](#).

An application for the SPP must meet the following requirements:

1. Be in writing.
2. Be made by a person in the household who is 16 years or older.
3. Include written consent from the survivor (or a person authorized to consent on their behalf) to disclose information and documents required by the Service Manager to verify the abuse or trafficking.

4. Be made either:
 - a) While a survivor of **abuse** is living with their abuser or within three months after they stopped living together (three-month limit). This requirement does not apply if the abusing person is sponsoring them as an immigrant. The household must intend to live permanently apart from the abuser.
 - b) While a survivor is being **trafficked** or within three months after the trafficking has stopped (three-month limit). A survivor of trafficking is not required to have lived with their trafficker.

5. Include a **record to verify the abuse or trafficking**, as detailed in [Part 5.3](#) of the guide.

Where a written SPP application is made within the three-month limit but does not meet requirements 2 or 3 at the time it was made, the application is still considered to meet the three-month limit.

Addressing barriers to apply

If a person has a need or barrier on Human Rights Code-protected grounds (for example, disability, ethnic origin) that prevents or impacts their ability to apply in writing, they should identify this to the Service Manager. Service Managers must make efforts to accommodate these needs up to the point of undue hardship.

Where applications are available online, it is important to consider ways to remove potential barriers from the application process.

Applicants can apply for rent geared-to-income (RGI) assistance and the SPP in more than one [Service Manager](#) area. Wait times for RGI assistance vary across the province and are influenced by several factors, including the required size of the unit, the number of buildings to which a person applies, the turnover rate of those buildings, and the local economic and rental conditions.

Exceptions to three-month limit

In cases where it has been more than three months since a survivor has lived with their abuser or has been trafficked, the household would still be eligible for the SPP if one of the following applies:

- the Service Manager determines that abuse is ongoing at the time the application is made (this is specific to survivors of abuse)
- the Service Manager determines that it is appropriate

There are situations set in regulation that a Service Manager must consider:

- if any person in the household knew they could apply for the SPP
- if any person in the household knew about the three-month limit to apply for the SPP
- if the survivor of **abuse** is at risk of further abuse from the abuser
- if the survivor of **abuse** is at risk of resuming living with the abuser due to financial hardship which could be alleviated by RGI assistance
- if the survivor of **trafficking** is at risk from the trafficker, including risk due to financial hardship which could be alleviated by RGI assistance
- if the survivor of **abuse** or **trafficking** needs RGI assistance to alleviate financial hardship from legal proceedings related to the previous abuse
- if the survivor of **abuse** or **trafficking** is attempting to use RGI assistance as part of an overall program of recovery and re-establishment of a safe and normal life
- if the survivor of **abuse** or **trafficking** is living in an emergency shelter or is living in temporary housing and receiving treatment or counselling¹⁷
- if there are any other extenuating circumstances

These situations, and any other extenuating circumstances, do not necessarily determine that a person will be eligible outside the three-month limit. When considering these situations to determine an applicant's eligibility outside of the three-month limit, Service Managers may request information or documents to support decision-making. [Part 5.4](#) of the guide includes more information on requesting information and documents for SPP applications.

¹⁷ Examples of **temporary housing** could include second-stage/transitional housing, a rehabilitation centre, or scenarios where a survivor is living with family, if the individual is also receiving treatment or counselling services. This includes formal support services through the Violence Against Women service system or a similar system.

Extenuating circumstances for three-month limit

In addition to the specific situations outlined above, Service Managers must consider if there are any other extenuating circumstances.

Examples of extenuating circumstances where an applicant may be found eligible for the SPP outside of the three-month limit may include situations where:

- the survivor is experiencing homelessness or a precarious housing situation, including staying temporarily in another person's home
- the survivor has caregiving responsibilities for a family member or other individual(s)
- the abuser or trafficker is starting trial and the survivor is at risk of harm
- the survivor's living situation is impacting the custody of their children
- the abuser or trafficker became aware of where the survivor is living and they are at risk of harm
- the survivor was not aware that they were being abused or trafficked (in some situations, survivors may not be familiar with these terms or their meaning, or that what they have experienced is a form of abuse or trafficking)
- the survivor did not seek help or support services for various reasons, such as:
 - distrust of institutions
 - risk of reprisal from an abuser or trafficker (for example, senior who is dependent on caregiver and is afraid abuse will escalate or they will lose care)
 - risk of being prosecuted for criminal activity (for example, possession or use of an illegal substance, recruitment of peers in a trafficking situation)
 - risk of child welfare services involvement
 - barriers faced when accessing services (for example, accessibility barriers, systemic discrimination faced by Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities).
- the survivor's ability to apply has been impacted for reasons such as:
 - being incarcerated, institutionalized, or hospitalized
 - having acquired a brain injury
 - experiencing cognitive decline (for example, onset of dementia)
 - having a developmental disability
 - being in crisis and experiencing mental health or addiction challenges

Alternate contact

Learn more under [Section 56.1](#), [Section 73](#) and [Section 82](#), *Ontario Regulation 367/11*.

Service Managers must ask a SPP applicant if they want to identify an alternate person to be contacted if the Service Manager cannot reach the applicant after making reasonable efforts. The applicant is not required to provide an alternate contact.

If provided, the Service Manager is required to contact the alternate person only to ask them to tell the applicant to contact the Service Manager. The Service Manager **cannot provide any additional information** to the alternate contact.

This recognizes that applicants may have precarious living situations and helps Service Managers to safely and quickly reach them.

The rules for contacting an alternate person apply when notifying a SPP applicant of certain decisions or an incomplete application, and when managing applications for special needs housing.

Incomplete applications

Learn more under [Section 44](#), [Section 52](#) and [Section 56.1](#), *Ontario Regulation 367/11*.

Service Managers must accept a written application for the SPP even in situations where the application does not meet all requirements or is not complete, such as where an applicant does not have identification immediately on hand to verify age or citizenship/residency in Canada.

Acceptance of the application **does not make the household eligible** for the SPP. Instead, it ensures that the household's place on the waiting list is based on the earliest date possible – the date the household applied for the SPP.

When an application is incomplete, a Service Manager must contact the applicant as soon as possible and tell them what is needed to complete their application. Service Managers should be clear that the applicant has not been deemed ineligible due to the incomplete application.

If the applicant cannot be reached, the Service Manager must follow the rules for contacting an alternate person outlined in the “Alternate contact” section above.

[Part 6.1](#) of the guide includes more information on the placement of households with incomplete applications on RGI waiting lists.

5.3 Verifying abuse or trafficking

Learn more under [Section 58](#) and [Section 58.1](#), *Ontario Regulation 367/11*.

An application for the SPP is required to include a record to verify the abuse or trafficking.

Approved verifiers

The following individuals are authorized to verify the abuse or trafficking and shall be viewed equitably.

Individuals serving in their professional capacity

- doctor
- registered nurse or a registered practical nurse
- lawyer
- law enforcement officer
- minister of religion authorized under provincial law to perform marriages
- registered early childhood educator
- teacher
- guidance counsellor
- individual in a managerial or administrative position with a housing provider
- Indigenous Elder, Indigenous Traditional Person or Indigenous Knowledge Keeper
- member of the College of Midwives of Ontario
- Indigenous¹⁸ person who provides traditional midwifery service
- registered social worker or social service worker
- psychotherapist, registered psychotherapist or registered mental health therapist

Other professionals

Individuals serving in their professional capacity as a person employed by an agency or organization that provides social support services in the community (for example, a staff

¹⁸ Ontario Regulation 367/11 uses the term “Aboriginal” to ensure that Aboriginal midwives who may not be covered under the College of Midwives of Ontario but are recognized in other Ontario statutes (for example, the *Midwifery Act, 1991* and the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991*) as practicing midwives, are recognized as acceptable verifiers of abuse for the purpose of the SPP.

member facilitating connection to or providing supportive services to the survivor) may also verify abuse or trafficking.

The record must be signed by the verifier and a person who has the authority to bind the agency or organization.

A person familiar with the abuse or trafficking

This may be a neighbour, co-worker, Band Council member, Métis Community Council member, or other person familiar with the abuse or trafficking.

Service Managers may require the record to be accompanied by a declaration of truth of the record administered by a commissioner for taking affidavits.

Information to verify abuse or trafficking

A record for verifying abuse or trafficking must include all of the following:

- statement that the verifier has reasonable grounds to believe that the person is/was abused or trafficked
- a description of the circumstances which indicate that the person is/was abused or trafficked
- the name of the survivor
- the verifier's name, occupation and any professional designations
- the date the record was prepared

To respect the privacy of applicants, **no additional information is required** to be provided by the verifier.

A verifier's description of the circumstances which indicate that the person is or was abused or trafficked is not required to include intrusive details about their experiences or exploitation. The record should include enough information to indicate that the survivor's experience is within the defined scope of abuse or trafficking.

Where an application form includes a list of types of abuse or trafficking, the list should allow additional types of abuse or trafficking to be identified. This acknowledges that there are many ways that abuse or trafficking may be experienced.

There is **no requirement to report or have previously reported** the abuse or trafficking, and applicants/verifiers should not be asked to provide proof of reporting (for example, police or court involvement, report made to a children's aid society, healthcare professional, or service provider).

Requirements for providing written records

All records of abuse or trafficking must be prepared by the verifier in writing unless the Service Manager is satisfied that one of the following applies:

- there is a risk of abuse by the abuser, or a risk from a trafficker, to any person in the household or to the person preparing the record
- there are extenuating circumstances

Where a Service Manager has determined that a **record is not required in writing**, the record is required in another format (for example, verbal, audio or video recording) by an approved verifier and must include the same information that would be required in a written record.

Extenuating circumstances for a written record of abuse or trafficking

Examples of extenuating circumstances where Service Managers may accept a record of abuse or trafficking that is not in writing, include situations where:

- The abuser or trafficker is set to go on trial, where there is a possibility that a written record could be used against the abuser or trafficker.
- A paper trail connecting the applicant to the abuser or trafficker could impact the safety of the applicant's children.

5.4 Information and documents for SPP applications

Learn more under [Section 57, Ontario Regulation 367/11](#).

When determining whether an applicant is eligible for the SPP, Service Managers may request information and documents to support decision-making.

Service Managers are prohibited from requiring a person to provide information or documents to determine SPP eligibility if any of the following apply:

- they determine that the person is unable to provide the information or documents
- the applicant or any person in the household believes they will be at risk of abuse or trafficking if they try to get the information or documents
- the information relates to whether the survivor has started legal proceedings, or information or documents related to the proceedings

What to consider when requesting information or documents

When Service Managers are requesting information or documents for SPP applications, they should consider the specific circumstances of the household, such as:

- the safety of the applicant and all members of the household
- the cycle/pattern of abuse or exploitation
- whether information or documents may have been destroyed, withheld or in the control of the abuser or trafficker
- whether the documents do not exist (for example, a survivor is not included in a lease agreement due to cultural or financial reasons, forceful takeover of a unit, or moving in with an abuser after a lease agreement was established)
- whether the household may experience barriers to accessing or providing information or documents due to location or homelessness (for example, rural/remote location, lack of internet access, lack of local access to Service Ontario)

To respect the privacy of applicants and to limit re-traumatization, and emotional and administrative burden, requests for information and documents should be limited to what is needed to determine eligibility. Intrusive details about applicants' experiences or exploitation are not required.

[Part 4.3](#) of the guide includes more information on requesting information and documents for RGI applications and the review of continued RGI eligibility.

5.5 Collection and use of personal information

Under [Sections 170 to 175, HSA and Section 147, Ontario Regulation 367/11](#)

Service Managers must comply with the rules in the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* for safeguarding the personal information of SPP applicants.

There are rules in the HSA that allow Service Managers to share personal information with other public authorities for certain reasons and under specific conditions. Under these rules, personal information that was collected for determining SPP eligibility can only be shared for the purpose of determining SPP eligibility. Due to the complex nature of privacy laws and the information sharing rules under the HSA, Service Manager staff should consult their legal counsel regarding specific situations.

5.6 Notice of eligibility decisions

Learn more under [Section 156, HSA, Section 44 and Section 61, Ontario Regulation 367/11](#).

When an application for RGI assistance and the SPP is complete, a Service Manager must:

- determine the household's RGI and SPP eligibility **within 14 days**
- notify the applicant of the decisions within 7 business days of the decision, or the time frame set by the Service Manager, and include the date the decision was made
- provide notices of SPP eligibility decisions only to the applicant and not to any other household member

Notices that a household is **ineligible** must also include:

- the reasons for the decision
- how to request a review of the decision
- the time frame for requesting a review

When sharing notices of eligibility decisions, Service Managers are encouraged to:

- use a trauma-informed approach¹⁹ and language that is sensitive to how it may be perceived by the applicant ([Part 8.2](#) of the guide provides more information on trauma-informed approaches)
- provide information to survivors on available supports and services, including crisis line information (Appendix A includes a list of suggested resources)

5.7 Review of decisions

Learn more under [Section 155](#) and [Section 156, HSA](#), and [Section 138, Ontario Regulation 367/11](#).

Service Managers are required to have a body to review certain Service Manager decisions, including a decision that a household is not, or is no longer, eligible for RGI assistance, the amount of rent payable, and the size and type of accommodation.

When a household member requests a review of a Service Manager decision that the household is not eligible for the SPP, the review body must:

- make a decision within **10 business days** of the request
- notify the household member of the decision and the reasons for the decision in writing within **5 business days** of the decision
- provide notices of decisions only to household members who requested the review

Service Managers must have both:

- procedural rules for how reviews will be completed
- rules about how review body members will be appointed and compensated

¹⁹ A trauma-informed approach to communication involves recognizing the potential impact of trauma and tailoring language and interactions to be sensitive and supportive. This approach creates a safe and non-triggering environment by using clear language and being empathetic and understanding. It aims to avoid retraumatization and helps individuals feel heard and respected in their interactions.

Review bodies must only include people who:

- are knowledgeable about the relevant rules under the HSA
- were not involved in making the original eligibility decision
- have not discussed the original eligibility decision with the decision-maker

Review body members cannot discuss the original eligibility decision with a person who made the decision except as part of the review.

5.8 Reconsideration of SPP eligibility

Learn more under [Section 55, Ontario Regulation 367/11](#).

After a Service Manager determines that a household is eligible for the SPP, the Service Manager can only reconsider this decision if any one of the following applies:

- the applicant notifies the Service Manager that they want to add the abuser or trafficker to their application for RGI assistance
- the applicant notifies the Service Manager that the abuser or trafficker (in cases where there is only one trafficker) is deceased
- the household accepts an offer of RGI assistance (in any service area)

6. Priority status for waiting lists and transfers

6.1 Placement on RGI waiting list

Learn more under [Section 48, HSA](#), and [Section 52, Ontario Regulation 367/11](#).

Households that are eligible for rent-gear-to-income (RGI) assistance are placed on Service Manager waiting lists in the following order of priority:

1. Applicants eligible for the Special Priority Policy (SPP)
2. Applicants eligible for local priority categories²⁰
3. All other applicants

Households within the SPP category are prioritized **chronologically by their date of application**.

A SPP household's placement on a waiting list is **determined by the date they originally applied** for the SPP, not the date their application was complete.

6.2 Temporary removal from RGI waiting list

Research shows that survivors of intimate partner abuse will often return to their abuser several times before separating from them permanently, and it takes several attempts to leave a situation of trafficking. Many survivors of abuse and trafficking are manipulated to believe that their abuser or trafficker is their sole source of care. This can lead to a powerful attachment between the survivor and the abuser or trafficker, known as trauma bonding. The abuse may cycle between perceived affection and anger or violence. Abusers and traffickers may exert control using emotional abuse, lies, threats and isolation, and may seize identification, documents or money.

²⁰ Under the HSA, Service Managers can choose to set local priority rules, but are not required to.

Survivors of abuse

Learn more under [Section 46, Ontario Regulation 367/11](#).

Subject to certain rules, SPP households can temporarily remove their application from an RGI waiting list (place their application “on hold”) if they continue to live with, or return to living with, the abuser.

If a household that is eligible as a survivor of abuse asks to place their application on hold, the Service Manager must remove their application from the RGI waiting list for up to one year, while maintaining their priority status. Under this rule, the Service Manager is only required to place the household’s application on hold once.

A household whose application has been temporarily placed on hold under these rules must be placed back on the waiting list on the earlier of:

- the date the household asks to be added back to the waiting list
- one year after the household was removed from the waiting list

The household is placed back on the waiting list as an SPP applicant based on their original SPP application date (in accordance with rules outlined in [Part 5.8](#) and [Part 6.1](#) of the guide).

The above rules apply only to survivors of abuse and **do not apply to survivors of trafficking**.

Survivors of trafficking

Learn more under [Section 46, Ontario Regulation 367/11](#).

Survivors of trafficking and RGI applicants without SPP status may request to temporarily remove their application from an RGI waiting list. In these situations, the Service Manager has the flexibility to temporarily remove the household from the RGI waiting list for a period of time agreed to by the Service Manager and household. A household whose application has been temporarily placed on hold under these rules must be placed back on the waiting list on either of the following:

- the date that is agreed to by the Service Manager and household
- the date the household asks to be added back to the waiting list

The household is placed back on the waiting list based on the date that they made the original application.

6.3 Tenant/co-op member transfers

Learn more under [Section 47 \(1\), paragraphs 5, 5.1, 6 and 7, Ontario Regulation 367/11](#).

Survivors may urgently need to relocate for various reasons (for example, access to supports and services, safety risk where an abuser or trafficker becomes aware of a survivor’s location).

The HSA sets out rules for how Service Managers and housing providers may manage transfers of tenants and co-op members receiving RGI assistance, as outlined in the following table:

Requirements for tenant/co-op member transfers		
	Transfer within same housing provider – internal transfer	Transfer to different housing provider – external transfer
Housing provider responsibility	May allow transfers – no Service Manager approval required. Internal transfers may not be possible where housing providers do not have multiple buildings/locations (this is often the case for co-operative housing providers).	May allow transfers – Service Manager approval required.
Service Manager responsibility	Not applicable.	Approve transfers. May determine their own processes and criteria for managing transfers but are not required to.
RGI waiting list	Housing providers may allow transfers without households being added to the RGI waiting list but are not required to.	Service Managers may allow transfers without households being added to the RGI waiting list but are not required to.
Special Priority Policy	If eligible for the SPP, households receive priority over other non-SPP transfer requests.	If eligible for the SPP, households receive priority over other non-SPP transfer requests.

7. Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit program

Survivors of abuse and trafficking can ask their Service Manager about applying for the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) as an alternative to rent-geared-to-income (RGI) assistance. The program provides income-tested portable housing benefits directly to households to help them afford their housing costs. Unlike RGI assistance, the benefit is tied to the household and not to the physical housing unit, allowing the benefit to move with the household to **any rental unit** in any Service Manager area in Ontario.

To be eligible for the COHB program, households must be on, or eligible to be on, an RGI waiting list. The COHB is primarily intended to support vulnerable people in housing need. Survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking are one of the priority groups for COHB support.

While the program is delivered by the province, Service Managers are responsible for identifying households to apply to the program and assisting with submitting applications to the Ministry of Finance. Service Managers may also use COHB funding to provide first and last months' rent support to approved COHB applicants.

8. Guidance for working with survivors

8.1 Impacts and risks of abuse and trafficking

Experiences of **abuse and trafficking** can have short- and long-term consequences on a survivor's physical, mental and emotional health, such as:

- mental and emotional health and addictions challenges (for example, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, emotional trauma and distress, eating disorders, substance use and addiction)
- traumatic brain injuries
- disturbances to sleep
- physical pain (for example, chronic stomach aches)
- unsafe living and/or working conditions
- financial challenges
- sexually transmitted infections
- other physical, sexual, psychological injury and challenges

While every survivor's experience is unique, certain groups of people are targeted more often and experience higher risk of abuse and trafficking, including:

- women and girls
- Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities
- youth with prior involvement with child welfare services
- 2SLGBTQQIA+ people
- people with disabilities, including developmental disabilities
- people experiencing mental health and addiction challenges
- immigrants, refugees and other newcomers
- people experiencing homelessness

There are many factors which may contribute to a person's risk of experiencing abuse or trafficking, including the intersection²¹ between a person's identities, socioeconomic factors and various forms of oppression (for example, racism, ableism²², colonialism, homophobia, transphobia).

Given the disproportionate impact of abuse and trafficking on the above populations, Service Manager and service provider staff should be trained in how to provide appropriate and culturally responsive supports and services to these groups.

8.2 Key principles for Service Managers

When managing applications for rent-geared-to-income (RGI) assistance and the Special Priority Policy (SPP), Service Managers are encouraged to consider the following key principles.

Client-centred

- Use **plain language** that is simple and easy to understand in all communication, such as webpages, application forms, emails, and notices of decisions – applicants may have varying literacy and education levels, and proficiency in English.
- Provide **transparent and timely information** – make information easy to access online and in-person on RGI assistance and the SPP²³, including a clear description of:
 - how to apply for RGI assistance and the SPP, and the information and documents that are required
 - the priority and eligibility rules, including how applicants are selected from waiting lists
 - what to expect after submitting an application (for example, timelines where possible, communication)
- Ensure **continuity of services** and warm handover in cases where staff are covering for others, on vacation, or leave the role or organization.

²¹ [Intersectionality](#) is a framework for understanding how a person's different social and political identities can combine and overlap to create different and increased levels of discrimination (for example, a Black woman faces both racism and sexism while a white woman faces sexism only).

²² [Ableism](#) is discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities.

²³ As per section 54 (1) of the HSA, and section 62 of Ontario Regulation 367/11.

- Inform applicants that they can apply for RGI assistance and the SPP **in more than one [Service Manager](#) area.**

Trauma-informed

- Apply a **trauma-informed approach**²⁴ to developing processes and forms, and interacting verbally and in writing with SPP applicants. This approach enables staff to address trauma-related challenges (for example, traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder) and ensures that staff and systems understand the impact of trauma and exploitation on applicants (for example, how and when survivors access support services).
- Ask survivors if they need any **accommodation or help** in the application process. For example, in some cases, survivors may find it helpful to have extra time for appointments where applicable, additional guidance on the application process, and reminders without judgement or frustration.
- Provide opportunities for **trauma-informed competency and awareness training** for staff who manage applications or interact with applicants.

Equitable

- Apply an **equity, diversity and inclusion lens** to developing processes and forms and interacting with SPP applicants. This approach ensures processes and interactions are equitable, accessible and accommodating to all, including people with diverse backgrounds, abilities and disabilities.
- Have a process for providing **housing services in other languages** where needed by applicants (for example, translation services, availability of forms in other languages).
- Provide opportunities for **training in equity, diversity and inclusion, and cultural competency** for staff who manage applications or interact with applicants.
- Ensure client-facing staff include **representation from the diverse members** of the communities they serve (for example, Indigenous staff).

²⁴ Trauma-informed systems and organizations have a basic understanding of the psychological, neurological, biological, social and spiritual impact that trauma and violence can have on individuals seeking support. A trauma-informed service provider realizes the impact of trauma, recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, and responds by integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices and settings. Appendix B includes training opportunities for Service Managers and service providers on trauma-informed care.

Respect for privacy

- Limit requests for information and documents to what is needed to determine eligibility in order to **respect privacy** and **limit traumatization, re-traumatization, and emotional and administrative burden**.
- Let applicants know how their application, including their information and documents, will be stored and accessed.

Connections to other services

- When communicating with applicants (for example, providing information about the SPP, sending notices of eligibility decisions to applicants), provide information on **service providers** who can:
 - help them with the application process
 - provide other **supports and services** that the applicant may need (for example, counselling, legal aid, crisis lines)
- Access to specialized supports and services following a situation of abuse or trafficking, including immediate and long-term wraparound services, is critical to foster stability and help survivors heal and rebuild their lives (Appendix A includes a list of suggested resources).

Appendix A: Supports and services for survivors

The following population-specific supports and services are intended to support Service Managers and service providers to meet the needs of survivors of abuse and trafficking, including access to safe and affordable housing and community supports.

If you are a service provider who wants to help survivors access housing assistance and other programs, contact a local [Service Manager](#).

Supports and services for seniors

Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario (EAPO)

[EAPO](#) is a provincial organization that provides education, training, resource development and information about elder abuse.

Resources are provided in English and French.

Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility

This website provides seniors and accessibility-related [information and resources](#), including information on [elder abuse](#). For seniors-related questions, call toll-free at 1-888-910-1999 or toll-free TTY at 1-800-387-5559. For accessibility-related questions, call toll-free at 1-866-515-2025 or toll-free TTY at 1-800-268-7095.

The Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility has developed a [guide to programs and services for seniors](#) that provides information (e.g., tax credit information, health information) that can help seniors stay safe, healthy, active and engaged. It helps seniors, their caregivers and the organizations that support them.

Services are provided in English and French.

Seniors Safety Line

The [Seniors Safety Line](#) provides a 24/7, confidential and free resource that provides information, referrals and support in over 200 languages for seniors experiencing abuse or neglect. Call toll-free at 1-866-299-1011 or toll-free TTY at 1-866-299-0008.

Supports and services for Indigenous people

Provincial Indigenous Program Administrators

Miziwe Biik Development Corporation (MBDC)

[MBDC](#) serves the Greater Toronto Area and provides funding opportunities for affordable rental development, down payment assistance, and rental supports and support services through community partnerships.

Services are provided in English and French.

Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS)

[OAHS](#) is a non-profit housing provider with a mandate to provide safe and affordable housing to urban and rural First Nation, Inuit and Métis people living off-reserve in Ontario.

Services are provided in multiple languages.

Other Indigenous-led organizations

2-Spirited people of the 1st Nations

This [organization](#) provides prevention education and support for 2-Spirit people, including First Nations, Métis and Inuit, living with or at risk for HIV and related co-infections in the Greater Toronto Area.

Aboriginal Shelters of Ontario (ASOO)

[ASOO](#) provides a collective voice for Aboriginal shelters as they respond to family violence in Aboriginal communities. Their website includes information on shelter services and other resources for service providers and communities. For support during a crisis or when looking for a shelter, call toll-free at 1-855-554-4325.

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK)

[ITK](#) is a national Inuit organization that produces advice, knowledge, strategies, action plans, policy tools and learning resources to protect and advance the rights and interests of Inuit in Canada.

Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) Victim Services Program

This [program](#) offers culturally relevant victim services to address, deter and end violence against Métis women and children. It is currently available in the following Métis communities in Ontario: Bancroft, Thunder Bay, Barrie, Brantford, Sudbury and Kenora. To access the program's services or for more information, contact a One MNO Navigator toll-free at 1-800-263-4889 extension 7 or email contactus@metisnation.org.

Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC)

[OFIFC](#) represents the collective interests of 31 Friendship Centres in cities and towns across the province. [Friendship Centres](#) are places for community members and Indigenous people living in urban spaces to gather, connect with one another and receive culturally based services.

Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA)

[ONWA](#) is a not-for-profit organization that aims to empower and support all Indigenous women and their families in Ontario through research, advocacy, policy development and programs that focus on local, regional and provincial activities. ONWA delivers programs and services to Indigenous women and their families regardless of their status or locality.

Tungasuvvingat Inuit (TI) Housing Support Services

[TI](#) is an Inuit-specific registered not-for-profit Ontario service provider offering nearly 30 integrated front-line services.

TI offers [housing support services](#) through the following programs:

- the Housing First program serves long-term shelter clients who are chronically or episodically homeless and who are at different stages of housing stability
- the Housing Support Program assists Inuit in transitioning to an urban setting and helps to prevent homelessness in Ottawa's Inuit community

TI also offers the [Alluriarniq \(“stepping forward”\) program](#), which provides in-person and virtual support to Inuit living in Ontario ages 13 years and older who are at risk or are currently experiencing sexual exploitation, and victims of human trafficking or sexual violence. The program uses trauma-informed, harm reduction, and Inuit societal values to provide support to survivors. Access this service online or call 1-613-232-4477.

Anti-human trafficking and abuse

Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes (AOcVF)

[AOcVF](#) is a provincial feminist and Francophone group of organizations that are committed to the elimination of violence against women. AOcVF provides lists of [organizations](#) that offer support services to survivors of sexual violence and domestic violence.

Services are provided in English and French.

Ontario anti-human trafficking services and supports

A [list of organizations across Ontario](#) that provide supports to help survivors of human trafficking, including culturally responsive supports and services.

Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking (CCTEHT)

CCTEHT has a dedicated, confidential, 24/7 [human trafficking hotline](#) which provides services in multiple languages and can be reached toll-free at 1-833-900-1010 or by web [Chat](#).

It also has a [national services directory](#) to connect survivors of trafficking to emergency, transitional and long-term services in communities across Canada. Users can filter their search for services and specializations, including ethnic/cultural groups.

Family Court Support Worker Program (FCSW) (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services)

The [FCSW program](#) provides direct non-legal services and support to victims of domestic violence involved in the family court process. Services are available in all court districts across Ontario and help facilitate the victim's understanding of, and passage through, the family court system. The webpage includes a list of agencies across Ontario that have family court support workers available to help.

Services are provided in English and French.

Family Service Agencies

Family Service Ontario provides a directory of [family service agencies](#), which are integrated service hubs that deliver community mental health, trauma and wellness services.

Agencies offer [affordable and accessible counselling](#), therapy and other support programs to address a variety of issues, challenges and needs, including gender-based and family violence.

Services are provided in English and French.

Get help if you are experiencing violence (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services)

This website provides information on [resources](#) available to women and men experiencing violence, including helplines and shelters.

Interpreters for domestic violence, sexual violence and human trafficking victims

If you work in a community agency and have a newcomer or refugee client experiencing domestic violence, sexual violence or human trafficking, you can get help from [interpreters in over 70 languages](#), including sign language. To request a sign language interpreter, call toll-free 1-866-518-0000, toll-free TTY 1-877-215-9530 or email interpreting@chs.ca.

Mulberry Finder

The [Mulberry Finder](#) tool is an online database of gender-based violence services across Ontario. The search tool helps survivors of abuse find services that offer a safe place to stay for them and their children.

The Mulberry Finder tool is available in multiple languages.

Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH)

[OAITH](#) is a province-wide umbrella organization of first stage emergency women's shelters, second stage housing organizations and community-based women's organizations who work towards ending violence against all women.

OAITH has prepared a [resource for professionals](#) across sectors on understanding transitional and housing support programs in Ontario.

Resources are available in English and French.

Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC)

[OCRCC](#) is a network of 30+ English language [sexual assault centres across Ontario](#) offering counselling, information and support services to survivors of sexual violence, including sexual harassment, human trafficking, childhood sexual abuse and incest.

Provincial crisis and help lines – free and confidential 24-hour helplines

- [Assaulted women’s helpline](#): Get 24/7 crisis counselling and referrals to shelters, legal advice and other help. Support is available in over 200 languages, including 17 Indigenous languages, and can be reached toll-free at 1-866-863-0511 and toll-free TTY at 1-866-863-7868.
- [Fem’aide](#): Get 24/7 anonymous crisis counselling and referral services for Francophone and French speaking women. Call or text toll-free at 1-877-336-2433 or access [Live Chat](#).
- [Talk4Healing](#): Get 24/7 culturally sensitive crisis counselling, advice and support for Indigenous women and their families living in urban, rural and remote communities, both on and off reserve. Support is available in 14 languages, including English, Inuktitut, Oji-Cree and Cree. Call or text toll-free 1-855-554-HEAL or access [Live Chat](#).
- [Victim Support Line](#): The multilingual Victim Support Line (VSL) provides 24/7 services to victims of crime across Ontario in most languages spoken in the province. Victims of crime and their families have access to a wide range of services, including counselling, financial assistance, and other supports. Call toll-free at 1-888-579-2888 or [chat online](#) Monday to Friday from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.
- [Support Services for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse \(SSMSSA\) Line](#): The crisis and referral phonenumber provides counselling and referral services in multiple languages to male survivors of sexual abuse. The Support Services for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse Program provides direct services to those who identify as male or those with non-binary identity who are survivors of sexual abuse, including time-limited individual counselling, group counselling, telephone and e-counselling, peer support and referrals to other appropriate community support services to meet other long-term needs that survivors may have. Call toll-free at 1-866-887-0015.

SafePet Ontario

[SafePet Ontario](#) is a registered charity that provides free pet-safekeeping for survivors of family violence and sex trafficking. SafePet Ontario also educates frontline workers and the public about the link among animal abuse, elder abuse, child abuse, and intimate partner violence in families.

ShelterSafe.ca

[ShelterSafe.ca](https://sheltersafe.ca) is an online resource for women and their children seeking safety from violence and abuse. The [clickable map](#) serves as a quick resource to connect women with the nearest shelter that can offer safety, hope and support. Information is provided in English and French.

Temporary resident permit (TRP) for victims of family violence

This government of Canada website provides information on [immigration options for victims of family violence](#), including how to apply for a TRP.

Transitional and Housing Support Program (THSP) (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services)

The [THSP](#) (overseen by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services) helps survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking to obtain and maintain appropriate long-term housing.

THSP workers help women and their dependents experiencing violence and exploitation to regain their lives, facilitate access to housing supports, and help them navigate a range of wraparound services and supports. They serve as a link between community agencies and local housing providers and municipal Service Managers who administer and deliver affordable housing programs and benefits, such as rent-geared-to-income (RGI) assistance and the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB).

Services are provided in English and French.

Victim Crisis Assistance Ontario (VCAO) (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services)

Victim Crisis Assistance Ontario agencies provide victim-centred support and culturally relevant services, in collaboration with other community service providers, to individuals affected by crime and tragic circumstances. Use the Victim Services Directory [below](#) to find a Victim Crisis Assistance Ontario provider in your community.

Victim Services Directory (VSD) (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services)

The VSD is a [provincial database for victim services](#) across Ontario. It provides victims of crime with timely and relevant information about supports and services available in their community.

Services are provided in multiple languages.

Legal supports and services

Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic

The [Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic](#) provides free legal services and representation to women who have experienced violence and abuse.

Services are provided in multiple languages.

Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO)

[CLEO](#) provides information to people who face barriers to accessing the justice system, including income, disability, literacy and language. As a community legal clinic and part of Ontario's legal aid system, CLEO works in partnership with other legal clinics and community organizations across Ontario.

CLEO leads [Steps to Justice](#), which provides step-by-step information about legal problems that is easy to understand.

Resources are provided in multiple languages.

Family Law Education for Women

This organization provides [plain language legal information](#) on women's rights under Ontario family law.

Resources are provided in multiple languages.

Family Law Legal Advice Program – French Language Services Initiative

This program provides [family law summary legal advice](#) free of charge to Francophone victims/survivors who have experienced intimate partner violence. It can be reached toll-free at 1-833-632-0830 or by email at appuijuridique@aocvf.ca.

Services are provided in English and French.

Independent Legal Advice for Survivors of Sexual Assault Program

This program provides up to four hours of free, independent and confidential [legal advice](#) by phone or video chat to all eligible women, men, trans and gender-diverse survivors of sexual

assault, any time after an incident has occurred. To be eligible, the incident must have occurred in Ontario and the survivor must be at least 16 years old. Legal representation is not included.

Information on this program is provided in English and French.

Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB)

The [LTB](#) is an adjudicative tribunal with the authority to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants. In addition to its adjudicative role, the LTB provides information to landlords and tenants about their rights and responsibilities under the *Residential Tenancies Act, 2006*.

Contact the LTB:

- toll-free: 1-888-332-3234
- toll-free TTY: 1-800-855-0511
- website: [Contact the LTB](#)

Services are provided in English and French.

Legal Aid Ontario (LAO)

LAO provides [legal help](#) in over 300 languages for financially eligible low-income Ontarians. Services include a toll-free telephone line for family law matters, same-day courthouse services, staff lawyers who represent clients, representation by a private lawyer, and web-based information and referrals. Call toll-free 1-800-668-8258 Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. or access [Live Chat](#).

Legal Support Program for Human Trafficking Survivors (Ministry of the Attorney General)

Provides [free legal support for human trafficking survivors](#), those at risk of being trafficked, and their parents/guardians/Customary Caregivers. Support includes free, confidential legal advice, help completing a restraining order application, and representation at application hearings in any Ontario Court of Justice.

To access these services and be referred to a lawyer, speak to a trained advisor through the toll-free Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-833-900-1010. Assistance is available 24/7 in over 200 languages.

Rental Housing Enforcement Unit (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing)

The [RHEU](#) monitors compliance with [offences under the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006](#) (RTA), investigates cases of alleged failure to comply, and prosecutes alleged offenders where warranted. People who believe their landlord or tenant has broken any of these rules can contact the RHEU for help:

- email: MHO.RHEU.Info@ontario.ca
- toll-free: 1-888-772-9277 or 416-585-7214 (GTA)
- toll-free fax: 1-866-321-4127 or 416-585-6464

ReportON

Use the 24/7 [ReportON](#) telephone line, email address or TTY service to report actual abuse, suspected abuse and/or neglect of adults with a developmental disability:

- toll-free: 1-800-575-2222
- toll-free TTY: 1-844-309-1025
- email: reportONdisability@ontario.ca

ReportON looks into non-emergency reports related to adults who are receiving ministry-funded developmental services and makes referrals to appropriate supports for matters that are outside its jurisdiction. This may include referrals to the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee or police services.

Victim/Witness Assistance Program (VWAP) (Ministry of the Attorney General)

Provides [information, assistance and support to victims and witnesses of crime](#) in order to improve their understanding of, and participation in, the criminal court process. Services include information about victims' rights and the criminal court process, case specific information, court preparation, emotional support (including crisis intervention and debriefing), needs assessment, referrals to community agencies, and liaising with the Crown and police to advocate for clients.

To find a local VWAP office, check the [Victim Services Directory](#) or call the Victim Support Line toll-free at 1-888-579-2888.

Services are provided in multiple languages.

Appendix B: Training opportunities for Service Managers and service providers

The following training opportunities are available to Service Managers and service providers and can support them in meeting the needs of survivors of abuse and trafficking.

Association of Native Child and Family Service Agencies of Ontario (ANCFSAO) Training

ANCFSAO offers [training sessions](#) for human service providers to improve service provision and achieve positive outcomes for Indigenous children and families.

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) Training

CAMH offers free online [human trafficking training](#) for addiction and mental health workers. The introductory course helps service providers recognize and respond to the needs of survivors of human trafficking, and it includes an online community of practice.

CAMH also offers a free online [Immigrant and Refugee Mental Health Course](#) that helps service providers provide care and support to immigrants and refugees arriving in Canada. Participants can interact with experts in the field and connect with other service providers across Canada.

Greater Sudbury Anti-Human Trafficking Coalition

[Find informative videos](#) to help people understand Canada's human trafficking through expert insights and survivor stories.

Manitoba Trauma Information and Education Centre

This centre provides information on trauma and trauma-informed care. It has developed a [Trauma-Informed Toolkit](#) to help service organizations and providers deliver services that are trauma-informed.

Online Training Initiative to Address Human Trafficking

This free online training program includes resources, tips and tools to [help service providers working with survivors of human trafficking](#).

Online Training Initiative to Support Senior Victims of Crime

This free online training program includes resources, tips and tools to [help service providers working with senior victims of crime](#).

Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) Training Hub

OAITH offers [training courses](#) in English and French for people working with survivors of gender-based violence. Employees of violence against women shelters or transitional housing organizations have free access to the Training Hub.

Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) webinars

OMSSA offers a webinar on [human trafficking](#) and [online workshops](#) on a variety of topics, including “Working with Multi-Barriered Clients” and “Trauma-Informed Care”.

Western University Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children

This [Learning Network and Knowledge Hub](#) includes recorded webinars on topics such as violence against women and children, human trafficking and trauma-informed approaches.