

04.02.2020

Dear Colleagues,

We hope that each of you is safe and taking good care of your physical and emotional health during this time. Over the last few weeks, we have been speaking with our networks and colleagues about the current challenges to delivering services and identifying ways to support the VAW sector.

One area of impact is the increased time that it takes for a VAW applicant to gather documents and submit their Rent Geared to Income Housing, and Special Priority ("SPP") application. Workers and survivors have raised concerns about the three-month time frame. We have reached out to Access to Housing (previously known as Housing Connections) and they have provided the below information and guidance in regards to the SPP application deadline.

The 3-month time-frame is legislated by the Province of Ontario and is not something the City of Toronto can officially extend. However, Access to Housing staff will continue reviewing each file on a case by case basis and consider extenuating circumstances which have impacted the application.

The referral source should continue to document, within the record of abuse referral letter, any circumstances which impact the ability of either the client or their support to meet the three-month timeframe or any other criteria, this can include impacts of COVID-19.

Another area of impact is the difficulty in obtaining written consent from clients. Many VAW organizations are now providing their services remotely, through telephone and email communication and many clients do not have access to a printer or a digital signature. We have asked Access to Housing if consent can be provided verbally to workers. Access to Housing have provided the following guidelines:

Applicants are required to review and give informed consent when applying for rent geared to income. They should have been given an opportunity to review and understand this consent and the Notice of Collection, which is found on all applications. If the client has verbally confirmed consent with an Agency this should be noted if written consent is not able to be collected. The reason for it not being collected should also be explained in the record of abuse referral letter.

In regards to the double signature, any manager, or individual binding, the agency can complete the secondary sign off required in the Special Priority Application.

We are dealing with a novel challenge, and we recognize that solutions will come from mutual communication and collaboration with various organizations in the community. In this spirit, we are sharing this guidance and welcome feedback so we can continue to increase the safety of women living with and fleeing violence.

If your feedback is referring to a specific experience it would be helpful if you include the decision (or incident) date, details of what happened, your name and agency, the name of the Access to Housing worker. We will continue to communicate with Access to Housing.

Please provide this feedback directly to our Networks Coordinator, Priya Shastri at pshastri@womanact.ca or call 416-944-9242 Ext.230.

Thank you for the amazing work you are doing. We will continue to provide you with information as it becomes available to us. Please feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns.

Best,

Carla Neto & Julia Steinecke (THSP Co-Chairs) & WomanACT