

**An Analysis of the Social Housing Waiting List in the
Region of Ottawa-Carleton**

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Introduction and Context:

This report is an examination of the results of a quantitative analysis of the waiting list for those individuals who are awaiting subsidized housing in the Ottawa region. An independent contractor was commissioned conjointly by The Social Housing Registry of Ottawa-Carleton (The Registry) and the Region

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of Ottawa-Carleton to perform an analysis of the waiting list. The data that was utilized for this analysis was obtained from The Registry and is inclusive until the end of December 1999. The data from this quantitative analysis is the second of its kind, utilizing a combined centralized waiting, following the Toronto report on homelessness.

The research was done in two phases for this analysis. The first of which was the definition of data that should be examined and the creation of methods (electronic views) by technical support staff to do so. This phase of the project was completed just prior to the advent of the millennium. The second phase of the project involved the quantitative analysis of these data fields and accompanying interpretations.

Background:

The Registry is the organization that maintains the waiting list for subsidized housing within the region. It is a co-ordinated access system for all applicants who are applying for social housing throughout the area. The Registry opened its doors as a pilot project in November of 1996 with the combined waiting lists of five social housing providers in the region. They included City Living, Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corporation, Nepean Housing, Gloucester Non-Profit Housing and Serson-Clarke Non-Profit Housing Corporation.

The Registry was incorporated in December of 1997 and became a stand alone operation in February of 1998 with a full staff complement. It was at this point that Ottawa-Carleton Housing joined The Registry. The fact that The Registry is a staffed, stand-alone organization is significant for the context of this study as it provides a unique position to complete a review of the need for social housing within the Ottawa-Carleton area. While at this time, it is not possible to provide anything other than a current frame of reference for the housing situation in the region, the structures are in place for longitudinal data examination with room for enhancements which will be discussed in the conclusion and recommendation section of this report.

The Registry has developed over the last two years and is presently providing services to 44 social housing providers. This includes the local housing authority, municipal non-profits, private non-profits, rural

non-profits and provincially funded co-ops in the region. While there are housing providers in the Ottawa region that are not mandated to join the centralized waiting list (most notably among these are federal housing co-ops), the picture is representative of the housing situation in the area. The Registry is responsible for the management of the waiting list. This includes the acceptance of applications for housing and maintaining the waiting list. These duties involve responding to inquiries from applicants, housing providers and community organizations such as Housing Help and Action Logement.

The Social Housing Waiting List, An Overview:

It is important to note that the waiting list experiences fluctuations on a daily basis. These fluctuations are caused by new applications received, housed applications and those files which have been archived. The waiting list may fluctuate by as many as 500 files per day.

There are now over 15,000 active applications on The Registry's waiting list. Active statuses include Active files, On Offer files, Priority files and Pending files. Inactive statuses include files that have been Archived, Housed and Cancelled. Archived files have been designated as inactive and are not counted in the active views. They are unique however, in that these files may be reactivated within one year if the applicant should contact The Registry. The archived file then returns to active status with the original date of application. Files are archived by The Registry when contact with the applicant has been unsuccessful for a variety of reasons such as a move by the applicant with no forwarding address, the applicant has left the residence (ie. a shelter) where they have been staying or the applicant fails to respond to a Registry initiated update.

When each individual housing provider joins The Registry, they transfer their waiting list to The Registry. This is why application dates may stretch back as far as 1984 through to and including 2000. This explains why an applicant may have a current Registry file number and an earlier application date.

With many providers joining The Registry in a limited time frame, one of the major undertakings of the organization was to ensure an accurate and current waiting list. The Registry undertook a major project, eradicating duplicate files, in order to obtain a true number of individuals awaiting social housing.

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With The Registry's inception in late 1996, almost seven hundred applications were accepted within the first two months of operation.

In 1998, The Social Housing Registry accepted over 5,000 new applications for subsidized housing in the region. The total number of applications again increased in 1999 with over 6,000 new applications being accepted.

Of the total number of applications, over 7,800 include children. This means that there are, at the very minimum, 7,800 children within the region, who along with their parents, are awaiting safe and affordable housing. Single person applications account for approximately one third of total applications.

How the List is Maintained:

The waiting list is maintained following provincial government directives on a first come, first served chronological basis. In essence this means that the applicants who applied in 1994 should receive an offer of housing prior to an applicant who applied in 1998.

There are certain exceptions to the chronological system. They are as follows:

1. Victims of Abuse (Special Priority):

Victims of familial abuse who intend to separate from the abuser permanently are accorded special priority status and their application "jumps the list". Applicants with special priority are entitled to two offers of housing from any provider after which, if they refuse both, their file is placed on the chronological waiting list.

1. Disadvantaged by Chronology:

This group of applicants is comprised of youth aged 16-17, homeless, and newcomers to Canada within the first year of their residency. At the present time, applicants are accorded homeless status if they are living in an emergency shelter, living with friends or relatives with no room of their own and not paying rent, living on the street, or have an eviction notice from the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal. Applicants may be asked to provide supporting documents. All providers may access this grouping to fill vacancies and OCH routinely fills one in every ten vacancies from this group of applicants.

1. Optional Urgent:

Serious, life-threatening medical conditions or serious threat to personal safety (ie. stalking) may qualify an applicant for an optional urgent status with OCH. In this instance, the medical condition must be exacerbated by their current living conditions.

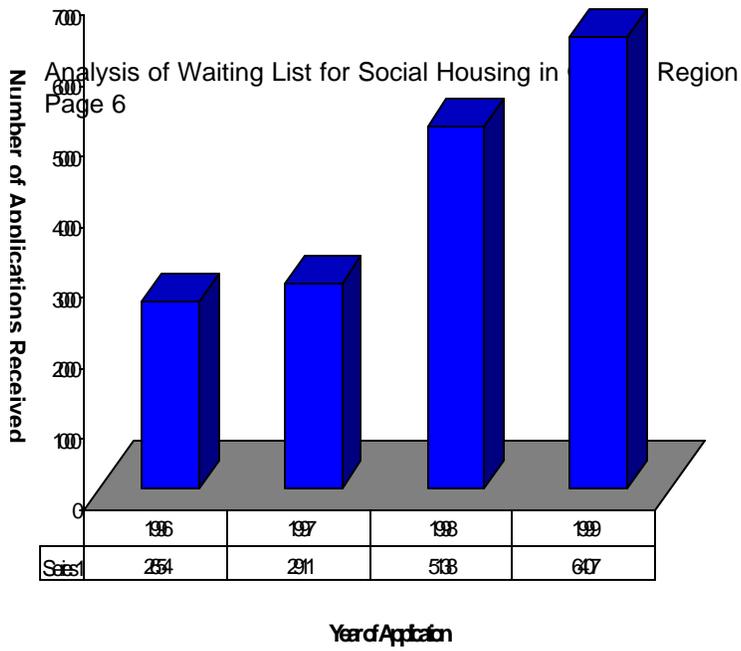
4. Seniors:

Seniors are applicants who are generally 60 years or older and who have applied for seniors only accommodation. If a senior applicant wishes to reside in an age-mixed community, their application is treated as a regular chronological application.

Current View of the List:

The following graph highlights the total number of active files by year of application. The majority of applications were received throughout The Registry's years of operation, dating from 1996 - 1999 which is illustrated in the graph. The Registry's last full year of operation in 1999, illustrated an all-time high with a total of 6,407 applications received.

Applications Received by The Registry

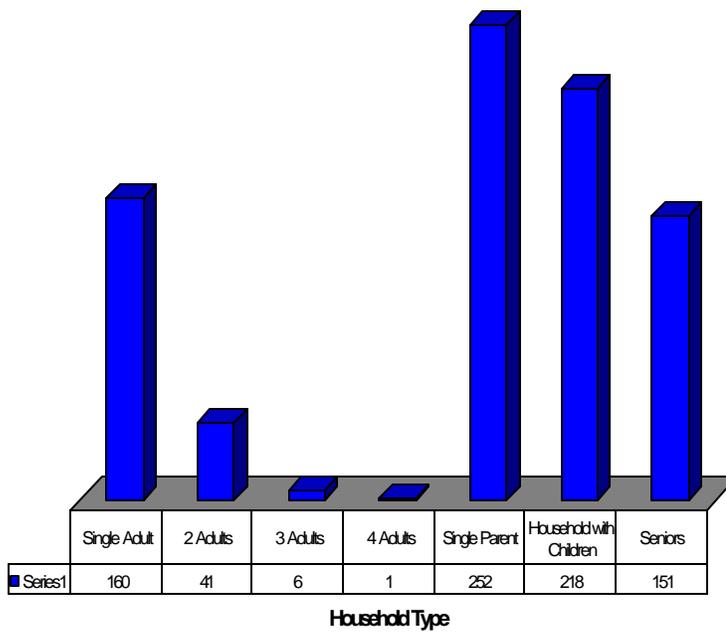


There are currently 15,303 files with active statuses on the waiting list for subsidized housing in the region. In addition there are over 5,000 files that have been archived. These archived files have the potential to become reactivated by the applicant within one year.

The Registry also manages the transfer list for Ottawa Carleton Housing (OCH). These numbers are included in the overall count as part of the chronological list. Transfers in which the applicant is underhoused by two bedrooms or more, or are

overhoused, are managed by the OCH staff at their site offices. Transfers requiring one additional bedroom or other requests are treated as new applications to The Registry and placed on the regular chronological waiting list. These OCH transfers number at just over eight hundred. Reasons for the transfer are not

Transfer Applications by Household Type



required to be provided by the applicant.

When examining the OCH transfer list by household type, single parents and households with children comprise over half of the total list. This could suggest that transfer reasons are related to the number of children in the household. Other housing providers manage their own internal transfer lists.

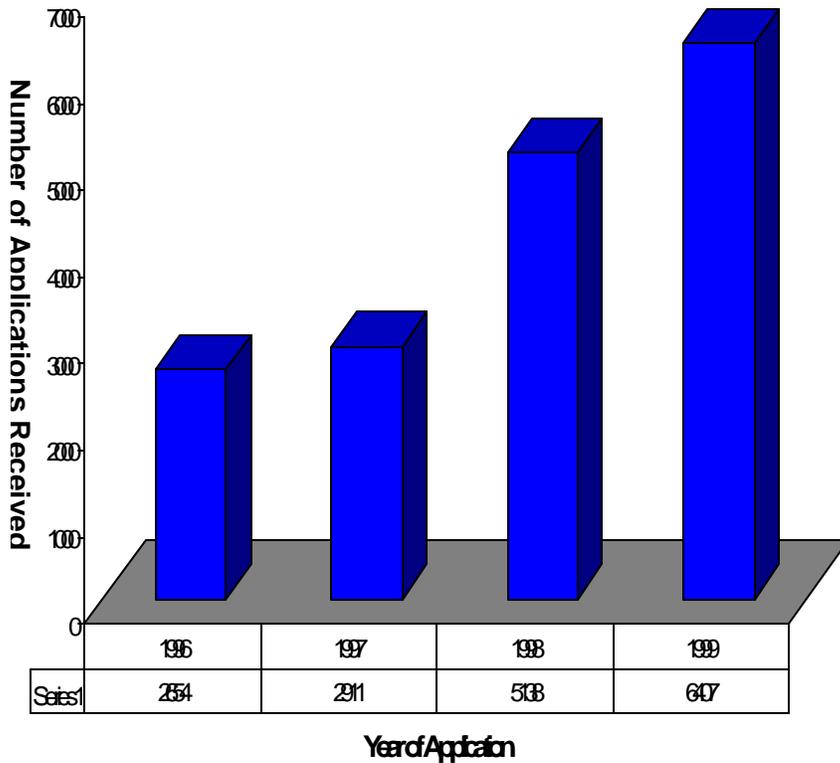
Housed and Cancelled files number 6,800 at the current time. Of those files, 5,003 have been housed by various housing providers since The Registry's inception. Once an applicant is housed, they are removed from the active waiting list. When a file has been archived for one year without applicant contact, it is cancelled. The Registry does not reactivate cancelled files. If an applicant's file has been cancelled they must submit a new application and begin the process again if they want to be on the waiting list.

In 1999, 2006 applications were housed, of which 552 of these were victims of abuse (special priority) files, and 720 of these files were of a disadvantaged status (newcomer, youth, homeless) or optional urgent. The remaining 734 files were from the chronological list.

Application by Age of Primary Applicant:

The age data was pulled from the system in decade interval ranges, which arrested in 1990 because youth are ineligible to apply for subsidized housing independently unless they are sixteen years of age or

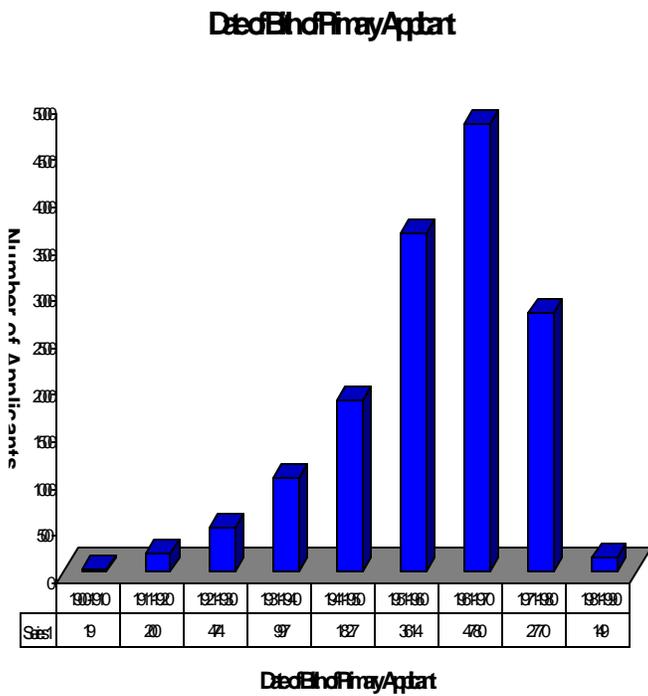
Applications Received by the Registry

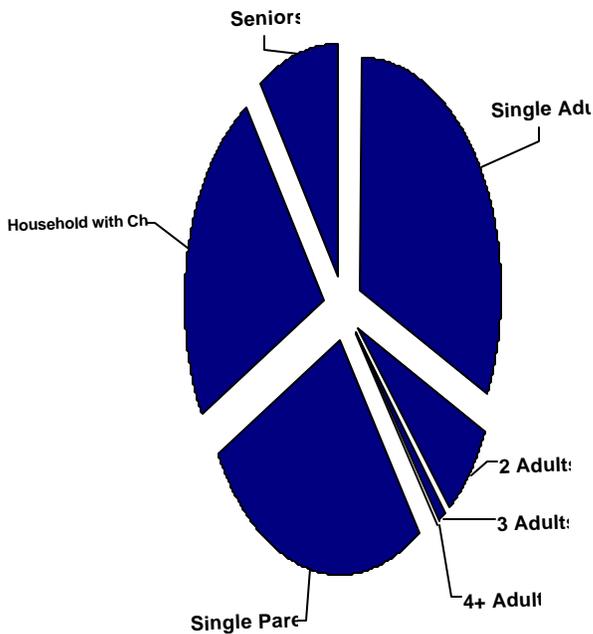


older. The age of applicant data was taken from the primary applicant listed on the application. In addition, there were approximately five hundred cases from The Registry data that gave no age of birth on the application which accounts for approximately three percent of the total waiting list. In January 2000, The Registry began an update of these 500 applications.

As demonstrated in the graph, the predominant age group that applied for social housing in the region is comprised of adults who are 30 - 39 years of age. They account for almost one third of the total number of applications. The second largest representation is adults who are 40 - 49 years of age, followed by those who are 20 -29 years of age. These three groups comprise approximately sixty-five percent of the total waiting list.

Applications by Household Type:





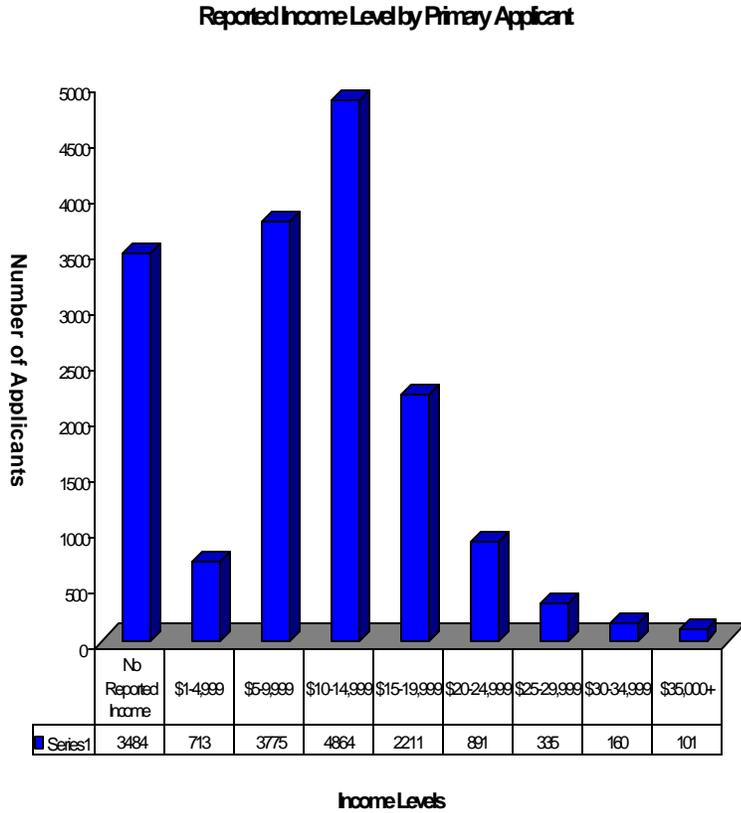
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Household type was divided into seven distinct categories for the purposes of this report. They are as follows: single adult, single parent, senior, household with children (with two or more adults present), two adults, three adults and four or more adults. The largest proportion of applications were made by single adults, followed closely by single parents, followed by households with children.

Over half of the applications that are currently held by The Registry involve children. Single parent households and households with children are overwhelmingly represented on the waiting list, accounting for over half - 7,800 applications of the 15,000 active applications.

Household Income Level:

For the purposes of this report income level was divided into nine levels:



- i) No reported income
- ii) \$1 - 4,999
- iii) \$5,000 - 9,999
- iv) \$10,000 - 14,999
- v) \$15,000 - 19,999
- vi) \$20,000 - 24,999
- vii) \$25,000 - 29,999
- viii) \$30,000 - 34,999
- ix) \$35,000 +

Issues were presented by the amount of uncategorized data in this view, especially within the first

level (no reported income), in which over two thousand cases were uncategorized by income source. Often applicants do not fill out this section of the application or indicate only an income source but not an amount. As a result of this, there are more cases than may be expected in the first income category.

In some instances, applicants report multiple income sources (i.e. Employment and Child Support). This leads to double counting of actual income source, but income level is not affected.

The majority of applicants to social housing in the Region report less than \$20,000 a year. While there are 3484 applicants who report no income, 2125 of these respondents identify an income source. When this is taken into account, 78% of applicants to The Registry report an income of less than twenty thousand dollars.

It would appear that the majority of applicants who make less than \$20,000 year are in receipt of either Ontario Works, ODSP, or federal government insurance programs. This includes the majority of senior households in receipt of CPP and/or OAS. Conversely, over half the applicants who report an annual income of greater than \$20,000, list employment as primary source on income.

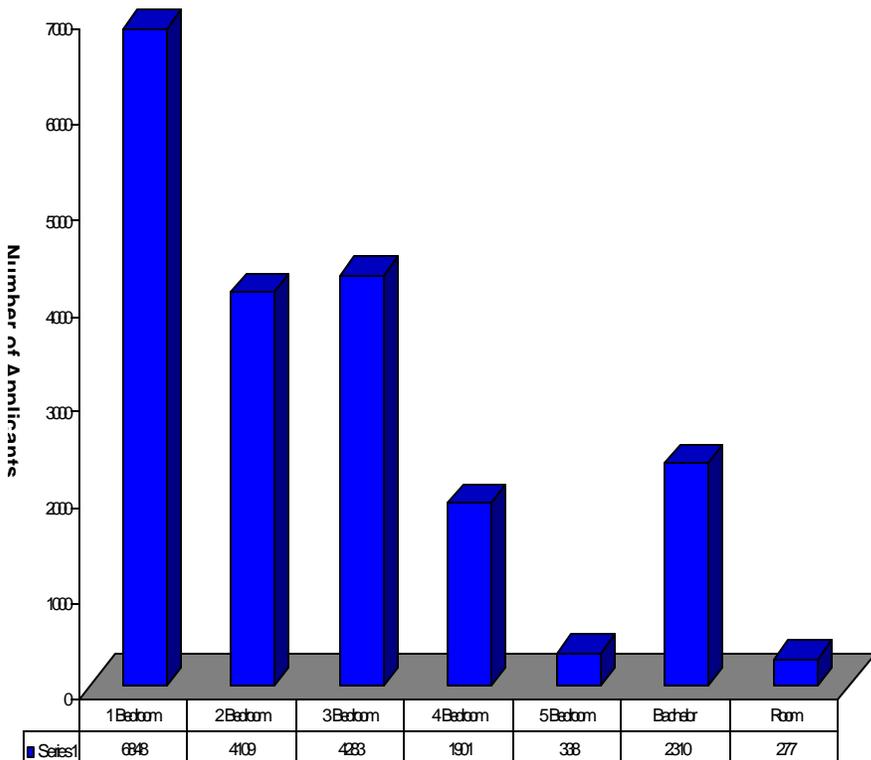
Unit Size:

There is a greater need for one, two and three bedroom units, rather than four or five bedroom units. The largest available unit is a five bedroom. Those families who require a five bedroom unit tend to wait longer than the average length of time on the chronological waiting list. While the demand for these units is not great in comparison to the smaller units, availability is an issue because of the low turnover rate of these units.

There is a greater demand for the smaller unit sizes, primarily the one bedroom units followed by the three and two bedroom units respectively.

Double counting is an issue to be regarded in all of these categories as the independent housing providers each set different criteria for housing applicants and their children. As directed by the Ontario Housing Corporation, OCH designates one bedroom for two children of the same sex, unless medical documentation is provided to indicate otherwise, where other providers will provide each child a bedroom of

Demand Report for Unit Size

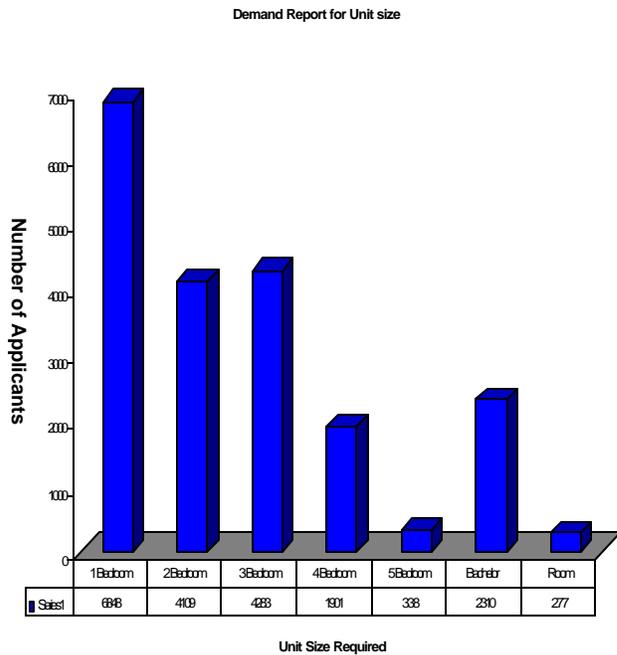


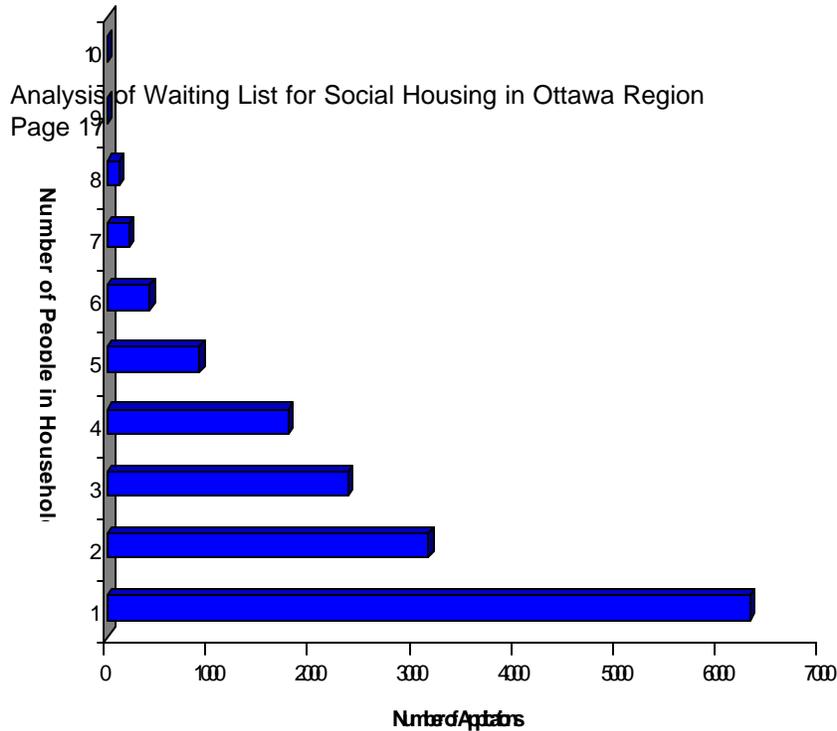
Unit Size Required

their own. In these circumstances, an applicant will qualify for both a two and three bedroom depending on the provider. The same case may be true for a single adult who qualifies for a one bedroom. This single adult applicant may also select a bachelor or a room on their application at The Registry.

All Applications by Number in Household:

This data is consistent with previously mentioned findings. The largest percentage of people applying for social housing are single adults, accounting for almost 33% of the total applications. The second largest demographic represented is the two person application. The definition of the relationship between these two applicants is not required to be disclosed. The two person applicants may be comprised of several different groupings: roommates, couples, adult children and parent, adult siblings, etc. It has been noted that in the last decade, older adult children stay at home longer and return home more frequently than in past generations. This could account for several of the two adult applicants.





It is of interest to note that some applications list up to eleven family members.

Recognizing that the largest unit available is a five bedroom, these families are looking at being underhoused in even the largest unit available. This emphasizes the need for some larger units to be available in the region.

Those applications requiring a five bedroom unit or more account for approximately ten percent of the total applicant pool. Due to the scarcity of the units and low turnover rates, this suggests that these applicants may wait longer than the average applicant.

Unit Preference:

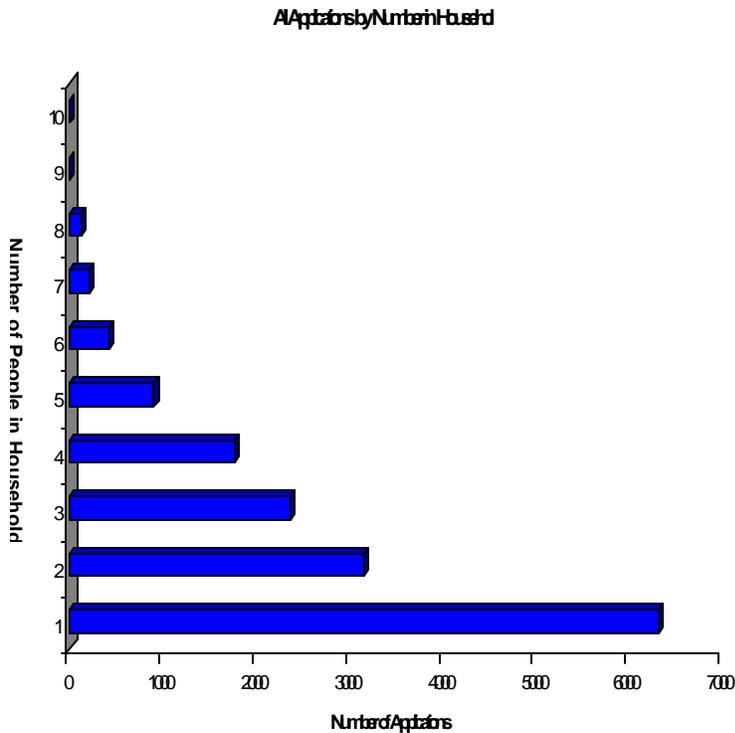
Seniors generally select apartments over townhouses (1,466:474) as indicated in the preference selection area. Compared to the regular chronological list, the preference between apartments and townhouses is split almost evenly (11,464:10,512).

It has been evidenced that while a townhouse may be indicated as a preference by an applicant, providers are able to offer apartments with suitable bedroom counts to applicants. An applicant is not guaranteed their choice of apartment versus townhouse but preference will be taken into consideration at the time of offer.

Geographic Area of Preference:

Through the data examined, the largest number of applicants select Ottawa Central and Ottawa East, followed by Ottawa West and Ottawa South.

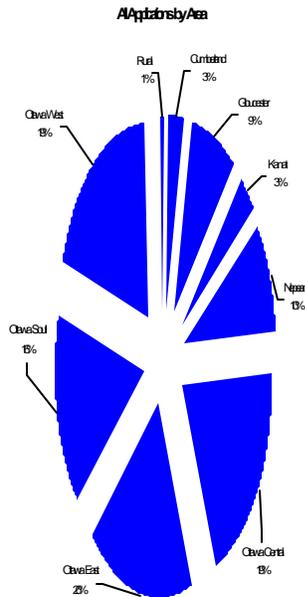
Applicants are able to apply to more than one area so as to maximize potential offers. As a result of this, the same trend of double counting that was identified in the unit size section of this report is also identified within this section.



Based on accessibility to resources and the total number of units that are available in this area, it is not surprising that Ottawa Central is featured predominantly in area of selection by the applicant. What is of interest to note is the large number of applications for areas such as Nepean, Gloucester, Kanata and Cumberland considering the fewer number of units that are available in these areas. Nepean Housing has a waiting list of 4,210 applicants with 265 RGI units. There were over 1,445 preferences for Kanata selected when there are only approximately 262 RGI units available from the housing providers that utilize The Registry waiting list.

*** Rural areas include Rideau, Goulbourn, Osgoode and West Carleton**

Unfortunately at this time, the data is unable to provide a clear picture of the relationship between the current area of the resident and the area of preference. This would be useful for future reference to assist



in determining the role that area of current residence plays in future area selection.

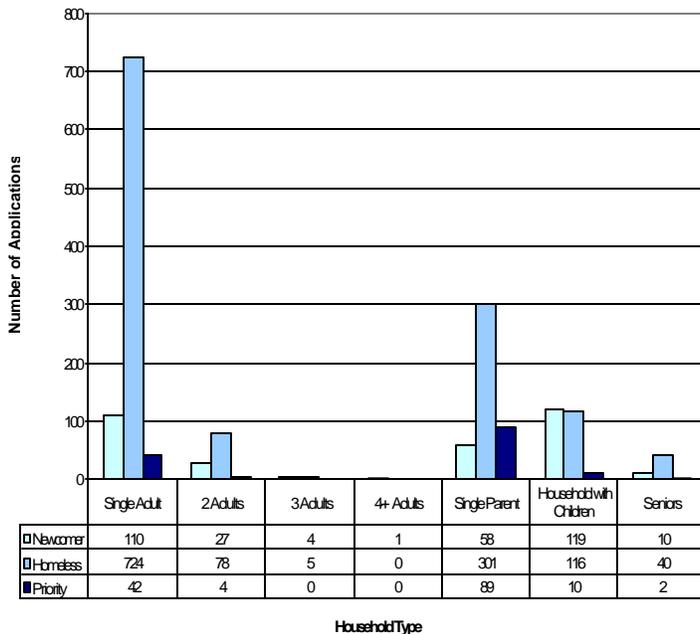
Victims of Abuse (Special Priority) and Disadvantaged by Chronology:

These two groupings comprise approximately 12% of the total waiting list at The Registry. Of this total group, homeless applicants comprise approximately 70%.

The household types are displayed with approximately the same frequency as the chronological list including single adults, single parents and households with children, with slight variations. These variations are most noticeable in the homeless, newcomer and victims of abuse (special priority) status views.

In both the victims of abuse (special priority) and newcomer views, household types of single parents and households with children are more pronounced than any other status. In the

Newcomer, Homeless and Priority Statuses by Household Type



homeless view, it is predominantly the single adult that appears more frequently than any other.

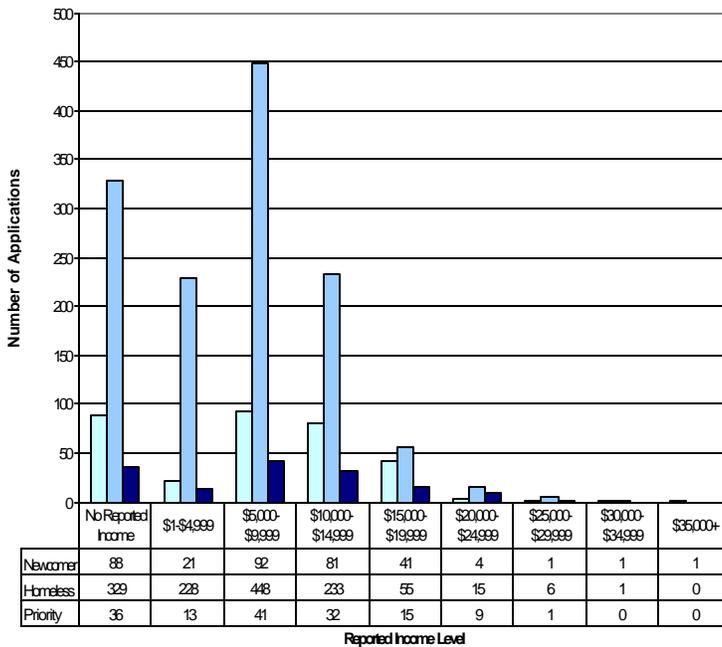
It is also of interest to note that the information regarding income amounts recognized in the chronological list also holds true to an even greater extent in these views. In the victims of abuse (special priority) and newcomer views the majority of applicants reported an income of \$5,000.00 to \$15,000.00. In the homeless view, the majority of applicants reported an income \$5,000.00 to \$10,000.00.

Applicants in the youth category report even greater economic disadvantage. No youth applicant reports an income greater than fifteen thousand dollars. As well, more than half identified as youth applicants are parents with children in their care.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

The research has demonstrated that in examining the waiting list for subsidized housing there is a

Newcomer, Homeless and Priority Statuses by Income Level



clear need for greater resources to be expended in the region. The average length of time spent on the waiting list for housing, between five and eight years, presents real day to day challenges for those in need of affordable housing. This quantitative analysis found that there were several significant trends regarding the waiting list for social housing maintained by The Registry. Most notably among these are:

- 1) Almost eighty percent of the applicants on the active waiting list at The Registry have an annual revenue of less than \$20,000.00.
- 2) Of the fifteen thousand active files on The Registry's waiting list, over 7,800 of these applicants are responsible for at least one child.
- 3) Applicants between the ages of 30 and 49 account for approximately half of the active waiting list for subsidized housing.
- 4) Demand for one bedroom units, including bachelor units and rooms, exceeds any other even though single applicants account for only an approximate one third of the total waiting list.
- 5) In the disadvantaged by chronology status applicants who declare themselves to be homeless far outnumber any other disadvantaged status on the waiting list. The majority of homeless applicants report an annual income of less than \$15,000.00.
- 6) Homeless applicants generally self identify as single adults
- 7) Newcomers primarily identify as single adults, followed closely by households with children.

While all observations lead to the conclusion that there is a serious shortage of affordable housing in the Region of Ottawa-Carleton, they also suggest the necessity for additional research. This analysis was quantitative in nature and would benefit from a qualitative aspect, to give a "voice" to those who awaiting subsidized housing. This qualitative aspect could be assimilated into current data collection techniques.

Other areas that would benefit from further analysis include additional work on behalf of The Registry in undertaking another data refinement of the files in the income level and income source categories. With recent changes to the provincial assistance plans, the data is difficult to examine at this time due to the inconsistencies in classification. It would be of interest to determine further details in this category.

As well, determining the total number of people waiting on the list would be beneficial. The ability to determine housed by bedroom counts and household type would assist in analysing the turnover trends within units and help assess current and future requirements.

Another area for future investigation could be the examination of the relationship between the area of preference as selected by the applicant and their current geographic location. At the present time, it is possible to determine geographic areas of preference but it would be of great interest to examine the correlation between the two. Technical limitations of The Registry's current data collection program do not allow for this.

While numbers of applications received by The Registry each year continue to soar, the available resources remain steadfast, thus increasing the demand for affordable housing in the region. What is unclear, is the method by which these individuals will continue to provide for themselves and their families with the limited resources they possess.