ONTARIO SUPPORTIVE HOUSING
BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

March 2017

Ontario

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INTRODUCTION

This Best Practice Guide ('Guide') is a companion document to the Supportive Housing Policy Framework ('Framework') and is intended to be a resource for all individuals and organizations that are involved in supportive housing and related services/systems. The Guide recognizes that a successful supportive housing system is a shared responsibility among partners, including:

- people living in supportive housing;
- community agencies;
- housing/supportive housing providers;
- local entities including Service Managers, Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs), Ministry of Community and Social Services regional offices, Ministry of Children and Youth Services regional offices and lead agencies, local planning tables and Indigenous organizations; and
- provincial ministries.

The Guide informs people living in supportive housing of best practices and may assist housing and service providers to improve their operations. These evidence-based practices were identified as follows:

- A review of published research/evidence. The references that informed this Guide are included at the end of this document;
- An examination of existing national and international practices; and
- Direct consultation with people with lived experience, community planners, service providers, and system planners.

Supportive housing may be delivered through a variety of approaches. Rather than identifying specific models of supportive housing that are considered best practice, the principles and practices that underlie these models have been included in this document. Implementing these practices aims to help improve client and system outcomes as identified in the Framework.

The Guide is a resource to assist people living in supportive housing and service providers to achieve the best possible outcomes. It is not intended to instruct service providers to replace existing practices that already facilitate the outcomes identified in the Framework, since not all practices fit in all situations. The guide sets out a common path forward to transform Ontario's supportive housing system. It will take time and contributions from all people and organizations involved in supportive housing to successfully achieve this transformation. Not all aspects of the Guide will be applicable to all types of supportive housing. The supportive housing community was asked through recent consultations to provide examples from their work where best practices are being used. These examples can be found throughout the document.

The information contained in the document reflects the knowledge and evidence as of the time of its release. The Guide will be periodically updated in consultation with supportive housing partners to reflect current best practices.

Best Practices in Supportive Housing - Support Services

Support services include both clinical and non-clinical services that help people to remain stably housed. These services may take a variety of forms and may vary in intensity based on people's needs. A few examples of supports include counselling, personal support, case management, income support and assistance with applying for social assistance, assistance with medication, and life skills training (e.g. purchasing food/meal preparation, and money management). In addition, people often require additional services and supports available in the community that help people to stay healthy and be involved in their communities. Support service agencies can help to facilitate access to these community-based services, such as primary care, employment and training opportunities, recreation, child care, and legal services.

Support service plans are developed and documented through collaboration between the service provider and the person living in supportive housing. The purpose of the plan is to document and establish a common understanding of a person's service requirements. A support service plan includes the person's goals, activities, types and levels of support to be provided, where the service will be provided, use of other community services, special accommodations required, service provider commitments, and are developed separately from tenancy agreements.

District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board (DSSMSSAB)
Sault Ste. Marie, ON

In order to provide adequate housing and supports for people with urgent and/or complex needs, housing and support services providers should look for innovative ways to address housing shortages. The District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board (DSSMSSAB) provides a few examples of this innovation including: 1) their conversion of 10 social housing units to provide housing and 24/7 support for clients with severe mental illness and/or addictions in partnership with the Sault Ste. Marie Canadian Mental Health Association, and 2) The DSSMSSAB's initiative to prioritize access to housing and provide wrap around supports for people that are chronically homeless. Since February 2015 this initiative has provided housing and supports to 41 individuals, 18 of which moved from hospitals into permanent housing. The DSSMSSAB estimates that housing these individuals has led to a reduction of up to 5,790 hospital days, resulting in approximately $5.8M in savings to the health care system.

Best practice support services are:

- Flexible;
- Promote and support independence, personal growth and dignity;
- Delivered in the most effective way possible; and
- Connect people with their communities and promote inclusion.

Support services are Flexible

- Supports respond to a person's changing needs, and are based on personal goals and choice

- Supports can be more intensive initially, if needed, to support transition. Supports may fluctuate in intensity, according to needs and are not time-limited

- Supports are available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, according to the range of people's needs: from off-site crisis support (on-call/hotline) through to on-site support

- Supports are re-assessed/modified regularly in partnership with the person receiving service

- Supports assist people to move from supportive housing, if they choose to do so, and help people to access support services after moving

- Supports may be available for people in their home, at service provider locations or in the community

Supportive Housing in Peel High Support Program for Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) alternate level of care patients
Peel Region

Personalized and flexible supports are critical in helping people achieve housing stability and independence. Supportive Housing in Peel's (SHIP) High Support program is guided by a rights-based, client-centered approach that emphasizes client choice in terms of housing and supports. SHIP uses a multi-disciplinary team comprised of a registered nurse, recreation therapist, and community mental health counsellors in order to provide a flexible, customized, personalized support plan in self-contained one bedroom furnished apartments. This 24 hour supportive model provides recovery-focused services to people with complex mental health issues. Services are more intensive initially to support successful transition into the community.

Promote and Support Independence, Personal Growth, and Dignity

- Supports improve housing stability by assisting people to take on responsibilities to maintain their tenancy (e.g. keeping the unit clean, paying rent on time, maintaining good neighbourly relations)

- Supports assist people to navigate other systems when more intensive or different services are required (e.g. primary care, specialists, rehabilitation services)

- Supports must be free from discrimination on grounds listed in the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, be culturally sensitive, respectful and accepting of people's values, beliefs, identities and life experiences

Delivered in the most effective way possible

- Supports are provided by appropriately qualified staff who receive the ongoing training (e.g. training for cultural competency, Indigenous cultural awareness) and support needed to be effective in their work (e.g. peer support, multi-disciplinary teams)

- Supports include families/important people in the circle of support as per the wishes of the person receiving service

- Supports should be evaluated regularly, including developing a process for people using the service to provide anonymous feedback or complaints

Gardner Street Supportive Housing
Ottawa

When people are a part of a community and can share their experience, it can lead to better outcomes. For example, Gardner Street Enhanced Supportive Housing, operated by the John Howard Society of Ottawa, provides housing and intensive wrap-around social and medical supports for men who have been chronically homeless for an extended period of time and who have complex needs. This includes people with, an acquired brain injury, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, mental health issues, physical disabilities and/or substance use issues. Gardner is focused on working with residents in creating an "intentional community" to combat isolation and foster a healthy and safe home for everyone. A Residents' Committee has been established so that they have a strong role in shaping their community. The program is informed by Housing First and Harm Reduction principals in all of its work, and caters to each individual in an inclusive and holistic way.

Connect People with their Communities and Promote Inclusion

- Supports assist people to stay healthy, be involved in the community, develop skills, achieve goals and participate in meaningful activities/opportunities (e.g. employment, education/training, social activities, volunteering experiences)

- Supportive housing services staff establish linkages with, and help people to access a wide range of complementary community services, as required, in a timely manner

- Supports improve access to opportunities for social engagement, as well as help people to participate and be included in community life and gain independence (e.g. participate in social clubs/organizations, volunteer, employment, sports)

- Supports provide people with information about community resources and activities, including neighbourhood and building orientation, and rights and responsibilities of tenancy

- Supports assist people with access to transportation to community events

- Supports enable people to connect with peers and non-peers

- Supports help people to develop and strengthen positive relationships with family and friends

- Supports assist people to take on leadership opportunities in their supportive housing (e.g. to sit on the board of directors)

> **WoodGreen Community Services, Homeward Bound Program**
> Toronto
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> When people have opportunities for education and employment, they are more likely to advance. Homeward Bound provides up to 4 years of transitional housing and holistic supports that assist single, mother-led families living in unstable conditions to move out of poverty and transition to economic self-sufficiency. Homeward Bound integrates housing, training, and supportive services, including on-site child care for single mothers. Participants also earn tuition-paid college diplomas, complete professional internships, and begin careers targeted to the local labour market. By providing multi-year transitional housing along with wrap-around supports, this innovative model eliminates numerous barriers that prevent precariously-housed mother-led families from gaining stability and financial independence. Upon completion of Homeward Bound, graduates of the program move into independent housing, maintain employment and continue to thrive.

Best Practices in Supportive Housing – Housing

Supportive housing is provided in a variety of ways: in apartment buildings where all units provide supportive housing; through a rent subsidy in apartments in the private sector; through group home settings; and through rent-geared-to-income apartments in non-profit and co-op housing, and in boarding homes. Different approaches provide people with choice and results in better outcomes for people.

Best practice housing:

- Promotes social inclusion;
- Is affordable;
- Is Safe and well-maintained;
- Suitable; and
- Tenancy rights are promoted and respected.

Promotes Social Inclusion

- People have choice in deciding who they live with, where they live, including rural and urban communities and location within the community, as well as the housing type/form

- Housing is connected to a community (i.e. not isolated or segregated) and location enables access to community services, such as shopping, schools, services, transportation, recreation, employment, and social networks)

- Housing is provided in a culturally appropriate setting

RAFT Niagara Resource Service for Youth
Niagara Region
Rapid access to housing helps to create stability for youth experiencing homelessness. The RAFT's Housing First for Youth program supports youth, 16 to 24 years old, who experience homelessness by providing access to permanent housing. Workers help youth to develop and pursue their goals, and will support them to identify access and navigate service systems relevant to their specific needs.

- Housing must be free of discriminatory practices and respectful of people's values, identities, beliefs, cultures and life experiences and life stages. This includes ensuring that supportive housing is free from discrimination on the grounds listed in the *Ontario Human Rights Code*

Affordable

- To support housing stability, housing assistance (rent subsidy, rent-geared-to-income, rent supplement, or housing allowance) is provided to people in supportive housing who cannot afford their rent

- Where appropriate, housing assistance is portable, supporting a person's choice to move from one location to another without losing their rent subsidy or supports

Safe and Well Maintained

- Housing providers create a safe and secure environment for people

- Housing is of good quality

  - The building meets health, safety, housing and municipal standards; and fire safety laws

  - The building/unit is in a good state of repair including, but not limited to:

    - Electrical, plumbing and heating systems;

    - Elevators, appliances and laundry rooms; and

    - Building elements including walls, floors, roof, ceilings, walkways, windows, doors, locks, lighting, etc.

  - The building is kept clean and free of infestations

  - There is a clear procedure to report maintenance problems

  - Maintenance problems are addressed and fixed in a timely manner

> **Mainstay Housing**
> Toronto
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> Mainstay Housing focuses on creating an environment that fosters a sense of belonging and community for its residents. Mainstay is a non-profit agency that provides housing and housing support services to over 1,000 individuals who are living with complex mental health and addiction issues. This program co-creates activities with its residents aimed at increasing individual and community skills and reducing social isolation. Monthly building-based community meetings provide a forum for residents to air their differences and engage in joint problem solving. Mainstay offers a variety of opportunities to include resident voices and create communities; ranging from Train the Trainer Community Kitchen to help residents learn how to shop and prepare healthy meals, to residents sitting on steering and advisory committees that plan and shape programs for all Mainstay residents.

Suitable

- Housing is physically accessible, appropriate for the person(s) living in it, and the unit/building accommodates (or is accessible to) people with special needs

- There is an adequate number of bedrooms and the living space is appropriate for the size of the household

- People have privacy, unrelated single adults are not required to share bedrooms

Tenancy Rights are Promoted and Respected

- Rights of tenancy apply according to the *Residential Tenancies Act 2006* (except where legislative exemptions apply). People have the right to reasonable enjoyment of the rental unit and the residential setting in which it is located for all usual purposes

- People have security of tenure – no limits on length of stay. Housing security is not contingent on participating in support services (except where *Residential Tenancies Act* care home rules apply)

- People have a written lease and are provided with a signed copy of the lease. People are supported to understand their rights and responsibilities as tenants

- Procedures are in place to help to prevent eviction

- People and their family/caregivers (with consent) are updated on building events (e.g. use of common space by outsiders, repairs going on in the building)

Na-Me-Res – Sagatay
Toronto

The Sagatay program (A New Beginning), provided by Na-Me-Res, exemplifies how culturally appropriate housing and supports can lead to better housing and quality of life outcomes for Indigenous people. Sagatay is a transitional housing program that helps homeless Indigenous men and male youth make the transition to permanent and stable housing. The program offers safe supportive housing in a culture-based learning environment to develop the skills they need to succeed in their communities. For example, Sagatay clients take part in a three to six month life skills program called Apaenmowineen (Having Confidence in Myself). Residents can access workshops on literacy, employment, addictions counselling, community gardening, drumming, sharing circles, and traditional teachings.

Best Practices in Supportive Housing – Coordination of Housing and Supports

To best meet people's needs, services must be coordinated across systems. Coordination of housing and supports means:

- Service providers (community support services agencies, housing providers, etc. work together to provide person-directed services);
- Local entities (e.g. LHINs, Service Managers, regional offices, lead agencies, local planning tables, Indigenous organizations) plan together to achieve common outcomes; and
- Provincial ministries work together to support the implementation of the Supportive Housing Policy Framework, improve coordination across the supportive housing system, continue work to improve programs and share best practices.

Coordinating services will reduce barriers to access to housing and support services, and improve transitions within and between sectors.

Bridges to Housing
Toronto

The Bridges to Housing initiative is an example of a coordinated and multi-disciplinary approach to supporting housing. Bridges to Housing offers housing to people who are homeless and living with a developmental disability transition from shelters to housing with appropriate community-based supports. This initiative involves a partnership between the City of Toronto (including Seaton House and Streets to Homes), the Inner City Family Health Team and Community Living Toronto. The partnership collaborates with Developmental Services Ontario and is funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services. The initiative includes a number of individualized services and supports, such as the rapid assessment of housing and support needs, coordinated support services, and the provision of affordable housing through a housing allowance.

Service Providers

- Work together with the common goal of supporting people to keep stable housing and to flourish

- Establish roles and responsibilities, and communication strategies, and processes for addressing issues (e.g. regular meetings)

- Have clearly documented and regularly reviewed service goals, roles, responsibilities and communication strategies

    o Housing staff closely monitor and promptly notify support or service staff of people's unmet service needs

- o Support service staff promptly notifies housing staff of building/unit maintenance concerns

- Discuss and develop tools to coordinate service. When possible and with consent, service providers collaborate on individual service plans, share client data, and monitor/reassess outcomes and progress

- Engage in community processes to coordinate access and where appropriate, to prioritize access to housing and/or supports, including transitions to other support or housing services

- Participate in community discharge planning and support efforts to ensure that people discharged from hospitals or jails do not become homeless

- Work together to supporting people to transition seamlessly from one service/program/location to another

- Collaborate to make direct referrals to the services people need/request

- Reduce duplication by ensuring partners have distinct and clearly defined roles in service provision

- Have a written eviction prevention policy that notes all service partners agree to support the common goal of housing stability

- Promptly notify the other partners if changes to services are planned and work with partners to develop alternative arrangements (written agreements)

Ottawa Housing Registry
Ottawa

Coordinated access systems can help people to more easily find the right housing and supports. The Ottawa Housing Registry coordinates access to social housing, affordable housing and supportive housing in Ottawa, enabling people to apply for a wide range of housing and supports in one place. This system also helps to provide better information on the specific needs of people waiting for housing and supports, which can inform new investment.

Cheshire Supportive Housing Maple Grove Place
Dunnville, ON

The Cheshire Supportive Housing Maple Grove Place is a great example of coordination between LHINs, Service Managers, and service providers to create 21 new seniors supportive housing units that are fully accessible. This initiative was supported by funding and contributions from a number of partners, including the federal-provincial Affordable Housing Program-Extension (capital funding), the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant LHIN (operating funding for supports), and Haldimand County (provided a 49 year lease for $1). An essential component of this development is the work of personal support workers, who are available 24-hours a day to help residents with personal care and day-to-day activities. The program provides a place to live for individuals whose personal and health care needs exceed those that can be provided in their own home, but are not great enough to be admitted to a long-term care home.

Local Entities (Service Managers, LHINs, etc.)

- Plan together to develop common priorities and outcomes, including outcome measures

- Adopt common tools to navigate service systems and coordinate access

- Support and encourage partnerships between housing and service providers

- Develop protocols for resolution of complex service issues, including cross boundary issues

- Align policy, programs and funding for housing and support services to ensure a variety of supportive housing models and locations to promote choice and address local needs

- Ensure effective communication with service delivery organizations

Central East Housing and Homelessness Steering Committee
Central East Ontario

Addressing the diverse needs of people living in supportive housing requires extensive coordination and collaboration. Central East LHIN has established a partnership with four Service Managers through the Central East Housing and Homelessness Steering Committee. The committee collaborates on strategic and service level planning to improve timely access to housing and supports that best meet people's needs.

Ministries

- Collaborate to develop strategic approaches to improve coordination across the supportive housing system

- Encourage and support local entities to work together

- Communicate effectively with local entities

Supportive Housing Best Practices – Overview

Support Services

Flexible
- Supports respond to a person's changing needs, and are based on personal goals and choice

Promote and support independence, personal growth, and dignity
- Supports assist people to take on responsibilities to maintain their tenancy and must be free from discriminatory practices

Delivered in the most effective way possible
- Supports are provided by appropriately qualified staff, and are evaluated regularly to ensure people get quality service

Connect people with their communities and promote inclusion
- Supports improve access to opportunities for social engagement, as well as help people to participate and be included in community life

Housing

Promotes social inclusion
- Is connected to a community that enables access to services, employment opportunities, and social networks, and must be free from discriminatory practices

Affordable
- Housing assistance is provided to people in supportive housing who cannot afford their rent

Safe and well maintained
- Housing providers create a safe and secure environment for people by ensuring housing is of good quality and maintenance problems are addressed in a timely manner

Suitable
- Housing is accessible, appropriate, provides adequate living space, and allows for privacy

Tenancy rights are promoted and respected
- Rights of tenancy apply according to the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 (except where legislative exemptions apply)

Coordination of Housing and Supports

Service providers
- Work together with the common goal of supporting people to transition seamlessly from one service/program/location to another

Local entities
(i.e. Service Managers, LHINs, Developmental Services Ontario)
- Plan together to develop common priorities, support and encourage partnerships, and align existing and new investments

Ministries
- Collaborate to develop strategic approaches for supportive housing and encourage and support local entities

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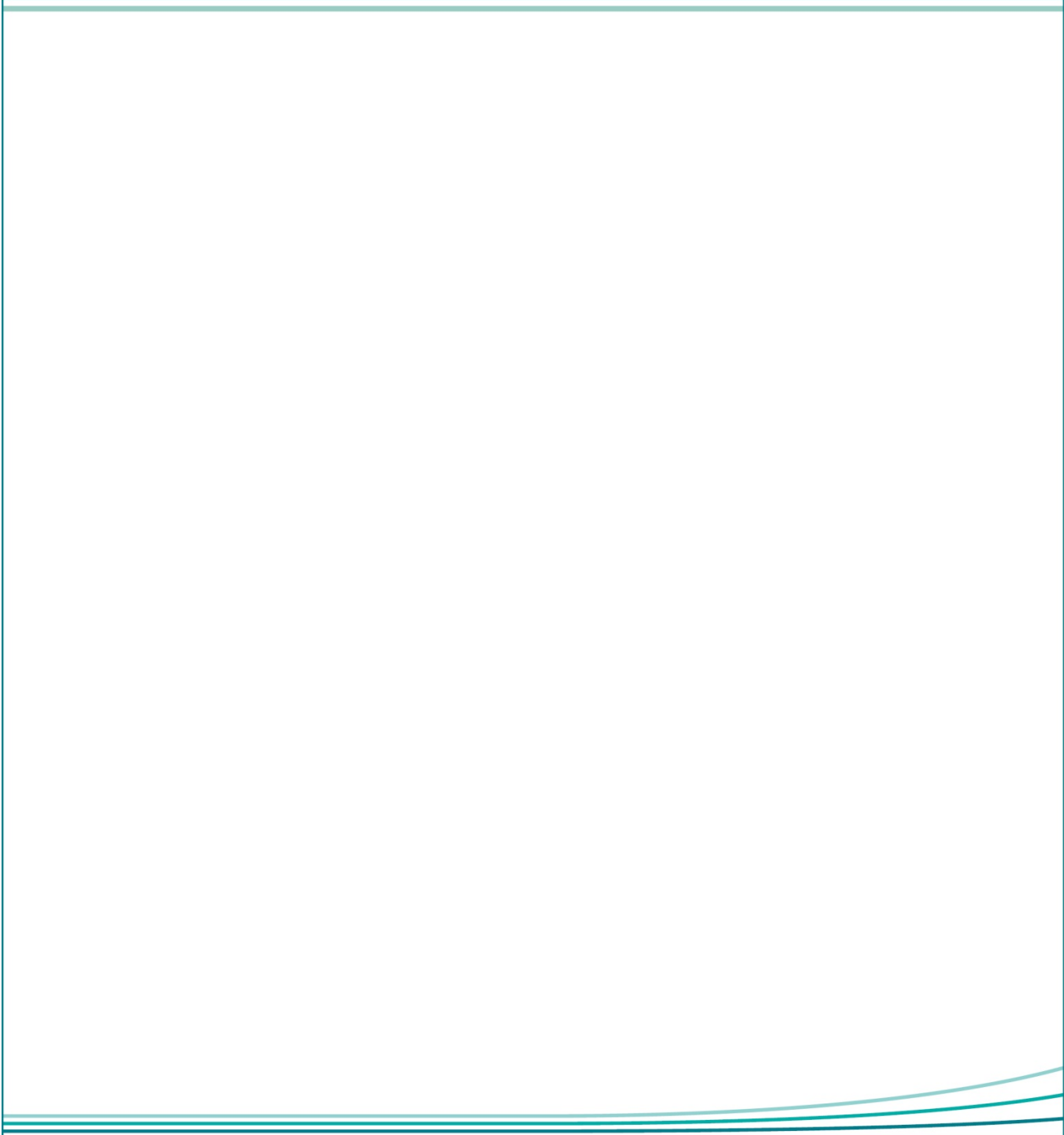
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