



THE AGENCY
FOR CO-OPERATIVE
HOUSING

L'AGENCE
DES COOPÉRATIVES
D'HABITATION

metamorphosis

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

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“Mutable Arts and Gifts”: The CEO’s View



Alexandra Wilson,
Chief Executive Officer

Ovid’s poem “Metamorphosis” provides a powerful metaphor for the Agency’s experience of 2020. We began the year as one kind of organization and ended it in transition to another. Our services changed and these changes were incorporated into our agreement with Canada Mortgage and Housing, now renewed for a further five years. We continued our move to cloud computing. We started to refresh our brand. Our leadership changed, with my planned retirement preparing the way for still more changes.

When the Agency was first proposed in 1995, our role was to be the third-party administrator of CMHC’s legacy housing programs. We have fulfilled this mandate, acting in the shared, long-term interests of CMHC and housing co-operatives themselves by helping our clients improve their risk profile, strengthen their business performance and respect the terms of their operating agreements with CMHC. We expected to wind down our operations gradually as those agreements ended. However, the new Rental Assistance Program and CMHC’s naming the Agency as the program administrator have materially altered our prospects.

The Agency’s work is changing in parallel with our clients’ new relationship with CMHC. On September 1, half our clients moved to the Rental Assistance Program, which provides new income-tested assistance that allows co-operatives to house low-income individuals and families at rents they can afford. Every year from here on will see more clients emerge from their operating or financial workout agreements and move to the new program. While replicating such basic requirements of the old programs as an obligation to maintain the property in a fit state of repair, the Rental Assistance Program is not a financing program. As such, its narrower focus implies a much lighter supervisory role for the Agency. Our rental-assistance officers will each be responsible for three times as many clients as our relationship managers follow in overseeing CMHC’s operating agreements. As they move to the new program, clients that have been used to counting on the Agency for help with an array of problems will no longer be able to do so.



As the Agency prepared to deliver a Rental Assistance Program still short on detail, the threat of COVID-19 upended the world as we knew it. Later in this report, we explore how the pandemic affected our staff and clients. For me, it meant learning to work differently and accepting a changed relationship with my colleagues. Gone were the frequent, casual encounters I had previously enjoyed with staff in the Support Centre. New and unexpected was the opportunity that regular video conferencing gave me to interact with staff in the Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver regions, with whom I had previously had more remote relationships. While responding to the pandemic initially consumed the time of management and administrative staff, we were more than rewarded as the year progressed through efficiencies brought about by moving the last of our paper-based processes entirely online.

A change to our management structure was the Agency's next metamorphosis of 2020. The transformation began shortly after the pandemic was declared, when Cavelle Lane, our Director, Corporate Services, left to assume

a more senior position elsewhere. Jennifer Hobbs ably filled a place-holder position while we conducted a recruitment process that saw Jennifer Brett, a relationship manager from Calgary, warmly welcomed by staff as Cavelle's permanent replacement. In its current iteration, the Corporate Services division includes human resources, administrative services, procurement, governance, corporate communications, client service and organizational culture.

To head our new Information Services division, we again promoted from within, choosing Bridget Bayliss, a long-time employee who had demonstrated her leadership talents while filling in for Jennifer Hobbs during Jennifer's stint as acting Director, Corporate Services. Incorporating various roles previously distributed throughout the Operations and Corporate Services areas or reporting directly to myself, the division is responsible for information systems and technology, records management, client reporting and reporting to CMHC and the public.



“I just reread an e-mail you sent us a few weeks ago and am really hoping I misunderstood something. Are you done with us? ... You have been there through the thick, thin and ugly over the years... Let me know if there is anything we can do to keep you... last-ditch effort here!”

— A client

The year also saw the Operations division reshaped. Operations will now include Client Support Programs, with responsibility for legacy programs, Technical Services, the Agency's Annual Health Check service and the Rental Support Programs team, looking after the Rent Supplement and Rental Assistance Programs. Beginning in January 2021, Default Prevention Services, previously a separate division, will move there as well. Three former relationship managers became rental-assistance officers, while another, Francesca Sorace, slipped fluidly into the new position of Team Leader, Rental Support Programs.

Finally, after a meticulous search, the Agency's Board of Directors chose Olga Tasci, for many years our Director, Operations, to replace me as CEO on my retirement at the end of March 2021. Olga was among the first to join me on the Agency's staff in 2005. She understands the Agency's business and culture, root and branch, and will guide the organization wisely.

The final metamorphosis last year occurred not in the Agency, but in me. I was 18 when I began to work in the co-operative housing movement, joining my neighbours in a successful effort to



Homage to Older Women (sculptors Elizabeth Anne Brown and Victoria Anne Brown), OWN Housing Co-operative, Toronto

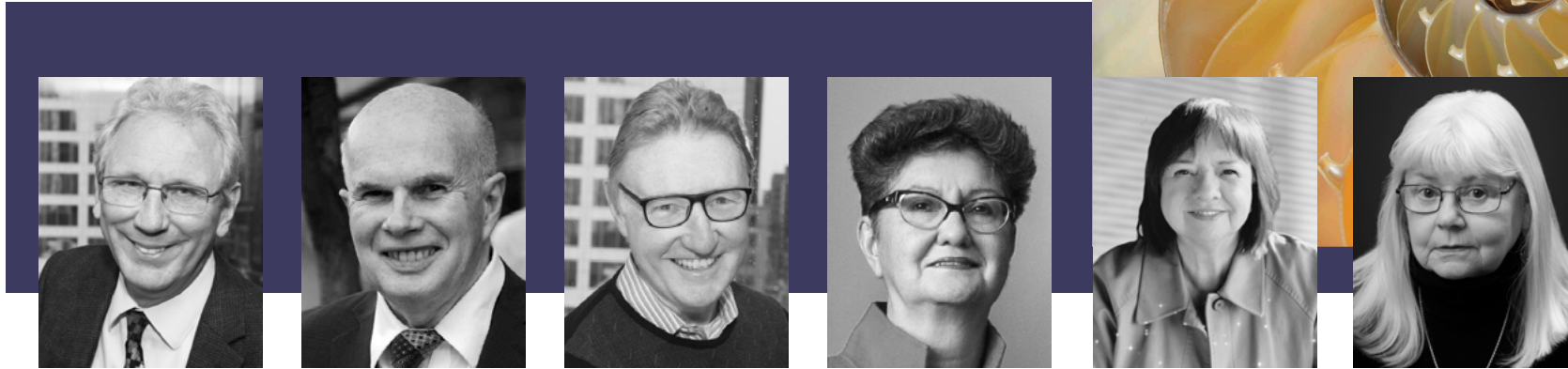
save an old apartment complex in Toronto's Riverdale neighbourhood from conversion to condominiums. After a short interlude of ownership by the City of Toronto, the historic garden-village development became the Bain Apartments Co-operative. My working life since has been spent in the local, national and international co-operative movements. I have been involved with non-profit and for-profit co-operative businesses. My service with co-operatives continues to span the local to the international, from the boards of the Funeral Co-operative of Ottawa to the global board of the International Co-operative Alliance. My passion for co-operatives has not weakened and there is much I still want to do in that realm but now I want to live differently, devoting more time to the arts I love, including the art of life.

As I look back over my career, I have learned a few things. Nothing can be achieved without patience. Everyone on the team matters. Everything takes longer than expected. Wisdom lies in knowing at what level a decision should be made. If one approach fails, try another. Quality matters. Never give up.

To close with a few lines from Ovid,
*And now the measure of my song is done.
The work has reached its end...*

At least, for me, as regards the Agency for Co-operative Housing. 🌀

The Board of Directors



The Agency's Board of Directors (December 2020)

[Left to Right]; Ken McFarland, Treasurer; Tom Clement; David Lach, Vice-President; Berta Zaccardi, President; Anne Davidson; Gail Church

The Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada appoints the Agency's six directors. In 2020, two board members hailed from British Columbia, one from the Prairies and three from Ontario.

Members of the Board are selected for the professional reputation they have earned over the course of their careers and their extensive knowledge of at least one subject important for the Agency's effective governance. These

include law, finance, public administration, regional economic conditions, government housing programs, human resources and co-operative housing operations. Directors may serve a maximum of three consecutive three-year terms.

A summary of each director's experience appears on the Agency's website. [🔗](#)

Mission, Vision, Values

Our Mission

The Agency administers co-operative housing programs, deploying risk-based strategies, superior information management and client-centred service to safeguard the public's investment and help our government and co-operative partners attain their goals.

Our Vision

The Agency aspires to be a superlative administrator of co-operative housing programs, recognized for its leadership by governments across Canada and valued by housing co-operatives as a partner in their success.

Our Values

We hold to these values, which govern our conduct with the general public, our government and co-operative partners, and our employees and other stakeholders.



Respect

We esteem our clients and at all times treat them fairly and with consideration.



Trust

We earn the confidence of our co-operative and government partners through exceptional service and consistent performance.



Innovation

We challenge ourselves constantly to find fresh approaches that will lead to ever-better outcomes for our partners.



Accountability

We answer to our government and movement partners for the results we achieve as responsible stewards of the programs entrusted to us.



Transparency

We promote the open and honest sharing of knowledge and information, while guarding the privacy of individuals.



Excellence

We pursue superior results and continuous improvement. Success, for us, is getting the right things done as well as possible.



Co-operation

We work in concert with our stakeholders to achieve separate but complementary goals.



Sustainability

We look to the future, strengthening our operations, honouring the environment and encouraging our clients to sustain and conserve the properties they hold in common.



“You Rock!” — A client

The Agency in 2020: The Bare Facts

Since 2006, the Agency has administered Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's legacy co-operative housing programs in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Prince Edward Island. In 2016, we assumed responsibility for CMHC's Rent Supplement Program in Ontario and PEI, and, in September 2020, we began to administer CMHC's Rental Assistance Program, launched as Phase II of the Federal Community Housing Initiative.

A federally incorporated co-operative, the Agency has a single member—the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada—which, as such, appoints our board of directors. We are a certified Climate Smart organization that works to understand and reduce the impact of our operations on the climate.




At the beginning of 2020, our staff worked out of four Agency and eight home offices. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a work-from-home order in March. With very few exceptions, staff continued to work remotely throughout the year.

We ended 2020 with 53 staff members (45.2 full-time equivalents), including three on leave. Seven are in term positions. Nine are fluently bilingual in English and French.

In 2020, the Agency delivered seven services on CMHC's behalf:

- information services
- compliance management
- risk management
- default prevention
- default management
- Rent Supplement Program administration (Ontario and PEI)
- Rental Assistance Program administration

In addition, through the HomeRun website, we offered clients a self-directed benchmarking and best-practices service.

The Agency invites housing co-operatives whose agreements with CMHC have expired to subscribe to our Annual Health Check service for objective information about their operations. For a fee, this service provides a basic or premium suite of reports comprising Plain-Language Financials, a comparative Performance Report and an optional Risk Report. These reports, plus a Compliance Report, also go to active clients in the legacy programs. Co-operatives in the Rental Assistance Program receive a complimentary Premium Annual Health Check package. 

“Thank you for that wonderful information! That has helped immensely. Thanks for your availability and responses that are so full of information!” — A client

Key Dates from Our History

1995 CHF Canada presents the federal Minister Responsible for CMHC with a proposal for an independent agency to administer the federal co-operative housing programs.

1996 The federal budget proposes devolution of federal housing programs to the provinces and territories.

1997–98 Program devolution takes place in the territories and six provinces, affecting about 15 per cent of federal-program housing co-operatives.

1999 Halting further devolution, the federal Minister initiates a study of the agency proposal.

2004 CMHC agrees to the first steps towards creating an agency. CHF Canada appoints a board of directors to oversee its set-up.

2005 The Agency signs its first service agreement with CMHC.

2006 The Agency begins delivering five services for CMHC in B.C., Alberta, Ontario and PEI.

2011 The Agency's service agreement is renewed for a second five-year term.

2016 The Agency's service agreement is renewed for a third five-year term.

2017 The Agency assumes responsibility for managing CMHC's Rent Supplement Program for Ontario and PEI co-operatives.

2019 CMHC agrees that the Agency will administer CMHC's Rental Assistance Program for former federal-program housing co-operatives in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and PEI.

2020 The Rental Assistance Program is launched in September 2020.



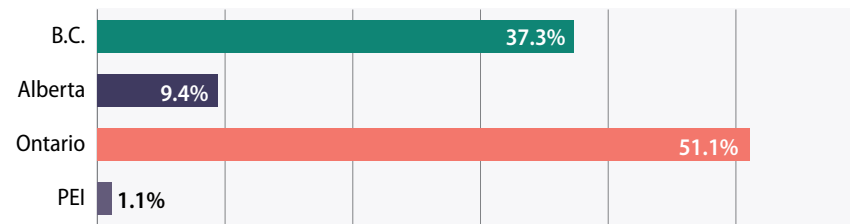
*Blue Skies Housing Co-operative,
Vernon, B.C.*

Standards of Performance and Client Service

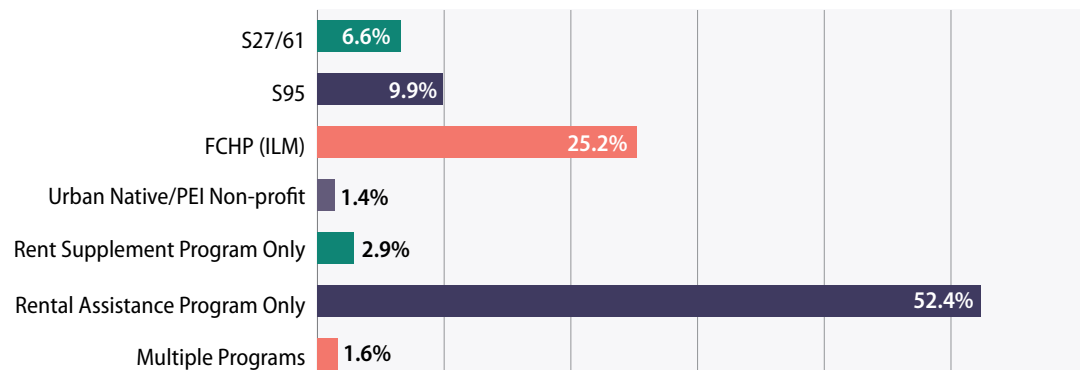
After reaching a peak of 554 active clients in 2013, our portfolio began to contract as operating agreements between Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and housing co-operatives reached the end of their term. However, almost all our clients welcomed CMHC's 2016 offer of operating-agreement extensions and then chose to sign on to the Rental Assistance Program, providing security for their low-income households. As a result, at the end of December 2020, our CMHC clients numbered 499 co-operatives, down only 10 per cent from seven years earlier.

The distribution of clients at the end of 2020 by province, housing program and status with the Agency is shown below. (Rounding accounts for totals that do not equal 100 per cent.)

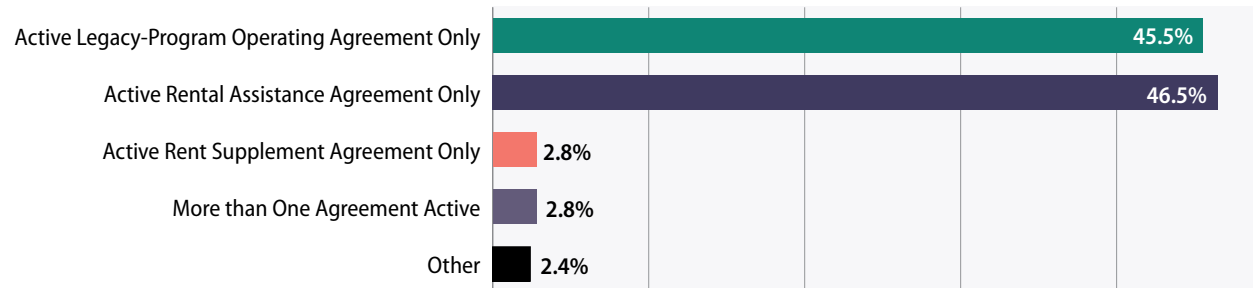
Distribution of Agency Clients — By Province



Distribution of Agency Clients — By Housing Program



Distribution of Agency Clients — By Status



Performance Standards

The Agency’s agreement with CMHC sets out 30 service levels to be met in delivering the six services we were managing throughout 2020. (Four new service levels related to the Rental Assistance Program will take effect in 2021.) The required standard of performance ranges from 75 per cent in one case to 100 per cent in 15 others. All service levels were met or surpassed in 2020.

Services	Standards	Met or Surpassed
Information Services	3	3
Monitoring and Seeking Operating Agreement Compliance	9	9
Assessing and Taking Action to Mitigate Risk	7	7
Default Prevention Services	2	2
Default Management Services	5	5
Rent Supplement Program Management	4	4



Bain Co-operative Apartments, Toronto

“Oh, that is wonderful of you... Going beyond your job description, no doubt. Thank you so much.” — A client

Client Service Standards

Report Card

Towards delivering a superior client experience, the Agency has adopted and published client-service standards more stringent than the performance standards in our agreement with CMHC. Visitors to our website can read our policy on [client service and satisfaction](#), which sets out these board-determined standards.

Over the course of 2020, we met our client-service standards, in the aggregate, 99.5 per cent of the time. We missed our standard of 95 per cent for posting board contact information on our website within one week of a director’s appointment. We also fell short of our 100-per-cent standard for issuing Plain-Language Financials within four weeks of our Annual Health Check clients completing their AIR filing. All other reports were delivered in a timely fashion.

	Standards	Aggregate Achievement	Instances
Information Requests	1	100%	896 / 896
Reporting Standards	7	99.0%	814 / 822
Granting Approvals	7	98.9%	264 / 267
Concerns and Complaints	2	100%	29 / 29
Sharing Information	7	99.8%	1,216 / 1,218
Annual Health Check	2	83.3%	10 / 12
Services to Organizations Serving Agency Clients	3	100%	27 / 27
Total	29	99.5%	3,256 / 3,271

Client Satisfaction Survey

At regular intervals, the Agency commissions a third-party survey to test client satisfaction and identify aspects of our service that we can improve. Our most recent survey, conducted by Forum Research, took place in 2018. The results again showed higher satisfaction levels, compared with the 2005 baseline set in CMHC’s final year of managing the federal co-operative housing programs. We will conduct our next survey in 2022.

Our 2018 survey also tested satisfaction with the four Agency reports shared annually with clients, for the first time tapping the opinions of co-op housing directors, as well as co-op staff. The results prompted a reworking of the Risk, Compliance, Plain-Language Financials and Performance reports to revive client interest in information available nowhere else. Following a redesign in 2019, we began distributing the refreshed reports in 2020. 🌀

“A Plague Walked...”: The Agency and Our Clients



Cleaning staff at COHO Management Services, B.C.

The risk posed by COVID-19 ensured that 2020 was a year our clients and staff will always remember.

Though unexpected, the pandemic did not catch the Agency off guard. Pandemic risk regularly appears in our risk register, and a disaster-recovery table-top exercise conducted with all staff a few years ago featured a pandemic scenario. Agency employees have long been required to maintain work facilities in their home sufficient for basic service delivery in case of an office shutdown. All staff have remote access to the Agency’s systems, and video conferencing was a well-used tool before the pandemic struck.

By February 2020, even as governments downplayed the risk of widespread infection in Canada, management had begun to discuss the implications of the novel coronavirus for the Agency and our clients. In early March, we moved to restrict non-essential travel. Two days before the first mandated lockdown began, we sent our employees home, inviting

them to take with them whatever equipment they judged necessary. Our IT team moved quickly to explore the different virtual meeting and collaboration platforms available, choosing one better suited to our needs than the system previously in use. Over the months that followed, Agency staff adapted well to the experience of working entirely remotely. We were able to maintain our momentum far more successfully than might have been anticipated.

And yet, suddenly we found that we were a different organization. No longer concentrated in four physical offices, the Agency had become a spider web of home offices spread from Vancouver Island to Eastern Quebec. During meetings, everyone was on an equal footing, with teleworkers no longer feeling at a disadvantage because they were not in the meeting room. The convenience of working at home was considerable for those more spaciouly accommodated, and many staff felt more productive than before.

However, with our movements restricted and contact with colleagues confined to the virtual, we realized how important had been the small human interactions associated with working in an office. Employees reported that their initial euphoria at the commuting time saved began to be replaced by anhedonia and even depression. Those with young children struggled to combine a demanding job with childcare and schooling. Overall, the Agency functioned very well, but our daily working life had been flattened and drained of accustomed small pleasures. Not surprisingly, the introverts, and those without small children to attend to, were happier than the extraverts and those living alone.

Relationship managers initially felt the loss of an important means of getting through to clients. While much of their work takes place on the phone and by e-mail, on certain occasions they attend client board and membership meetings where they use all their influence to promote better decisions. However, it was apparent that co-op boards, let alone members, were unwilling at first to meet, preferring to wait out a situation where, Ovid put it, “air was death.” Over the next few months, instead of focusing on performance, relationship managers partnered with local federations to help clients arrange for safe

and legal meetings on Zoom and other platforms. As the weather grew warmer, several co-operatives with parking lots held physically distanced, alfresco meetings. Those with insufficient outdoor space hired their local federations to host and chair virtual meetings. As they became accustomed to the new medium, they discovered unexpected benefits: more people turned out and determined chairpersons could readily expel disruptive members, making it easier to maintain order.

Once our clients’ property managers had worked out how to provide their services remotely and could return their attention to business matters, the Agency’s relationship managers had to explain to some co-operatives that we did not recommend a payment holiday, even for members who had been laid off.

Instead, they encouraged clients to collect the money due to them whenever possible, directing co-op members to the government support available to them. The CERB and rental-support programs that respond flexibly when a member’s income falls were instrumental in limiting co-ops’ losses at this difficult time. However, as the table below shows, arrears and bad debts inched up in 2020.

**Median Arrears and Bad Debts —
As a Percentage of Occupants’ Share
of Housing Charges**

	Portfolio	Clients without a Workout	Clients with a Workout
2020	0.48%	0.40%	0.91%
2019	0.38%	0.35%	0.98%



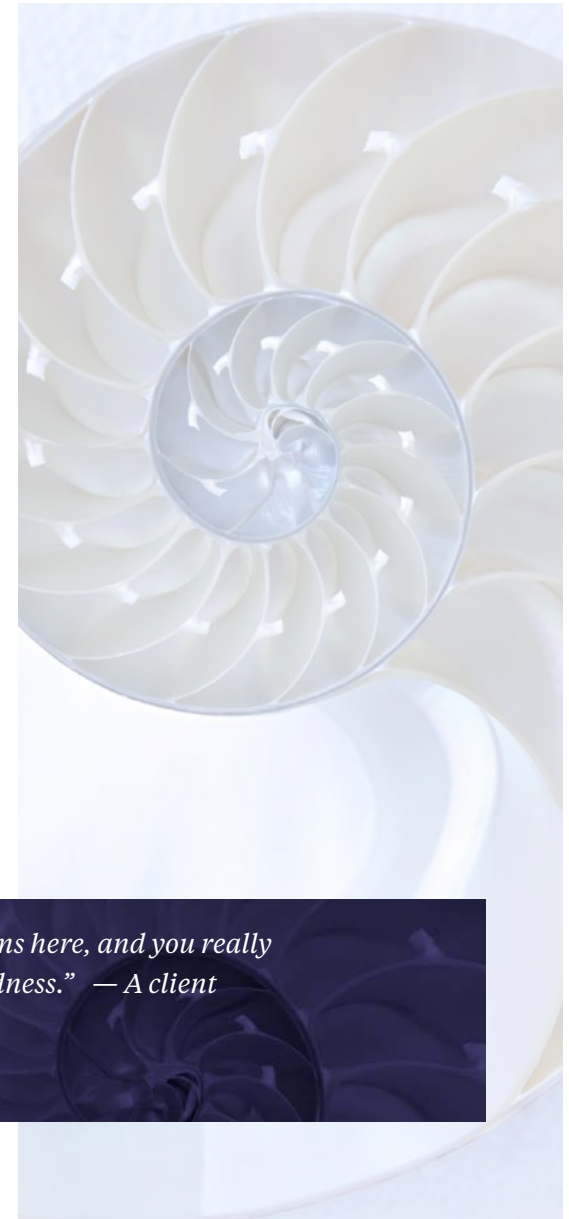
Westerdale Housing Co-operative, Vancouver

Timely filings of Annual Information Returns proved a greater challenge as neither auditors nor co-operatives were accustomed to audits conducted remotely. The most competent co-op staff and auditors rose to the occasion. However, many AIRs were filed later by a month or more than in 2019, as shown in the table below.

AIR Filings

	2020	2019
Full Return Filed when Due	40%	57%
Full Return Filed Late by 1-4 Months	26%	14%

Aside from the enormous distraction of COVID-19, the Agency entered 2020 prepared for the expiry of the extended operating agreements. We expected almost all our clients to transition to CMHC’s new Rental Assistance Program, which we were to administer on CMHC’s behalf, when their operating agreements finally expired at the end of March. In the event, the transition took place five months later, at the start of September. CMHC offered interim funding to bridge the gap between the conclusion of the extended operating agreements and the beginning of the new program, providing a welcome measure of security to low-income households, many of whom had experienced job losses resulting from the pandemic. 🌀



“We have all been stressing over the building problems here, and you really helped us with your wealth of information and kindness.” — A client

“Discordant Harmonies”: Concerns and Complaints

As an accountable organization, the Agency is committed to responding to and reporting on all concerns and complaints we receive about our service or other matters. We count it as a concern when a person is worried or unhappy about the Agency, CMHC, a program matter or anything else within our mandate and when an explanation or referral is accepted. We count as a complaint any concern that a person names as such or that cannot be resolved by the party receiving it.

Over the course of the year, we registered 28 concerns (2019: 26) and two complaints (2019: 2). The greatest number were from co-op members (2020: 26 concerns, 1 complaint). In comparison, co-op members filed 22 concerns and two complaints in 2019. Concerns were expressed by one member of the public (2019: 2 concerns) and one co-op staff member. The second complaint came from a co-op staff member.


Most concerns had to do with the governance or management of an individual housing co-operative (2020: 22 concerns, 1 complaint; 2019: 20 concerns, 0 complaints).


When co-ops or their members reached out to us, we generally tried to find a solution, even though our responsibilities were limited to rent-supplement and rental-assistance concerns and legacy-program matters affecting a client’s financial performance or compliance with a CMHC agreement. Sometimes clearing up a misunderstanding or explaining a program requirement solved the problem, but we often had to refer the party to another resource.

In 2020 we logged five concerns about the new Rental Assistance Program. We resolved three by clarifying the program requirements and two by referring the complainant to the local federation for help.

Only a single concern had to do with the Agency’s own services or processes, compared to five in 2019. In this case, a co-op manager objected to the relationship manager’s communication style. After discussion, the relationship manager agreed that a softer approach would be more effective.

In 2020 the Agency advised 15 complainants to take their concerns back to their co-operative’s board or manager (2019: 8). We referred eight to co-op federations (2019: 1). Five concerns and one complaint were resolved by the Agency itself (2019: 19 concerns, 2 complaints).

Once again, we did not find it necessary to take any concerns to CMHC (2019: -0-). 



“Thank you for such a quick response and for the clear information. Always thankful for your help.” — A client

2020 Financial Highlights



		31 December 2020	31 December 2019
ASSETS			
	Cash and Investments	\$ 3,211,329	\$ 2,979,099
	Capital and Intangible Assets	737,231	645,296
	Other	377,773	194,927
		4,326,333	3,819,322
LIABILITIES		3,048,466	3,165,757
FUND BALANCES			
	Operating Reserve	235,000	204,501
	Capital Fund	1,042,867	449,064
		4,326,333	3,819,322
CHANGE IN OPERATING RESERVE		2020	2019
	Revenue	7,793,588	7,589,265
	Expenses	(7,227,089)	(7,085,054)
	Transfer to Capital Fund	(536,000)	(440,000)
		\$ 30,499	\$ 64,211

The full financial statements, audited by Marcil Lavallée, have been provided to the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Agency Staff on 31 December 2020

Alexandra Wilson, Chief Executive Officer

Corporate Services

Jennifer Brett, Director, Corporate Services

Mel Cameron, Culture and Client Service Champion

Nicola DeSousa, Senior Administrative Assistant

Maggie Keith, Communications Officer/Corporate Secretary

Michelle McHugh, Co-ordinator, Corporate Services

Sirikit Moreau, Team Leader, Human Resources and Administration

Nigel Morton, Specialist, Enterprise Records Management

Ricky Tolentino, Senior Administrative Assistant

Agata Nobrega, Manager, Finance and Facilities

Katrina Waters, Accounting Co-ordinator

Colin MacDougall, Manager, Special Projects

Information Services

Bridget Bayliss, Director, Information Services

Vicki Lackman, Specialist, Information Technology

Gail McKenzie, Software Quality Assurance Officer

Sergei Pershukovich, Database Administrator

Ellie Williams, Data and Records Assistant

Stan Piechocinski, Lead, System Design and Data Management

Larry Lenske, Business Applications Analyst

Tineke Vanderhorst, Specialist, IS and Records Management

Lending and Default Prevention Services

Jennifer Hobbs, Director, Lending and Default Prevention Services

Donna Burnett-Beckford, Default Management Officer

Payam Ressalat, Senior Analyst

Sandeep Thethy, Analyst (on long-term leave)

Nick Van Dyk, Senior Analyst

Grace Zhao, Analyst

Operations

Olga Tasci, Director, Operations

Erin Cousins, Co-ordinator, Data and Records

Tasheen Kara, Information Officer (temporary)

Jill Kelly, Financial Officer

Ken Lawson, AIR Help Desk Officer (on long-term leave)

Marisa Melchiorre, Senior Financial Officer

Natascha Morrison, Information Officer (on leave)

Jennifer van Oosteroom, Co-ordinator, Administrative and Communications Support

Francesca Sorace, Team Leader, Rental Support Programs

Hia Inthavixay, Rental Assistance Officer

Rosalind Morton, Rental Assistance Officer

Trina Murphy, Rent Supplement Co-ordinator

Tiffany Woodfield, Rental Assistance Officer

Donna Charbonneau, Manager, Operations (Ontario/PEI)

Jacqueline Cooper, Relationship Manager

Heather Kennedy, Relationship Manager

Catriona McCallum, Relationship Manager

David Nagy, Relationship Manager

G. Scott Wylie, Relationship Manager

Joanne Mick, Manager, Operations (B.C./Prairies)

Traci Dubeau, Relationship Manager

Cole Dudley, Relationship Manager

Meghan Friesen, Relationship Manager (on leave)

Shawn Preus, Relationship Manager

Heather Wesenberg, Relationship Manager

Michel St-Denis, Manager, Technical Services

Joanne Balmaceda, Co-ordinator, Technical Services

www.agency.coop



Olga Tasci,
incoming Chief
Executive Officer

