

the
Tortoise
Wins 2023
ANNUAL
REPORT



THE AGENCY
FOR CO-OPERATIVE
HOUSING

L'AGENCE
DES COOPÉRATIVES
D'HABITATION



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“Straight toward the Goal”: The CEO’s View



Olga Tasci,
Chief Executive Officer

In Aesop’s fable of the tortoise and the hare, the tortoise wins the race through sheer perseverance. We can almost claim the tortoise as our emblem, with a motto of “slow and steady wins the race.”

The Agency did not burst upon the world in a blaze of glory. We came into being only after a lobby of the federal government that went on for nine hard years, driven not just by our sector’s brilliant leaders, but by the determined participation of co-op members across Canada and at every level of the co-op housing movement.

Ever since the Agency opened its doors, our work with housing co-ops has been a form of sector housekeeping. Our job has been to help our clients clean up the metaphorical backrooms and neglected corners of their operations and keep them in good order.

Measurable success came gradually to us and our clients. Year after year, one after another responded to our recommendations and acted on the advice of their relationship manager. As our most recent [Portfolio Performance Review](#) shows, the co-operatives we work

with are doing better by every metric than they were when we opened our doors in 2006—this, despite their aging properties. Like all effective housekeeping, our work with housing co-operatives demands patient persistence and constant repetition, as new people replace more experienced board members and staff. Without the statistics we collect, our contribution would be almost invisible, just as housekeeping is barely noticed until it is neglected. A mark of our effectiveness is that in the 18 years since we first opened our doors, only one small housing co-operative has been lost.

Our more limited role as administrators of CMHC’s Rental Assistance Program has cut back our ability to support our clients’ continued operations. However, the new program exposed several areas where we believed we could help our clients fulfill the new requirements successfully. Our 2022 Annual Report discussed the launch of two well-received online tools that our clients use, not just to file the three-year Action Plan required under program rules, but to tailor it to their unique needs.



In 2023, after more than three years of work, we launched our Online Calculator. At a later point in the Annual Report, we will say more about this enormously challenging project and its many setbacks. Undeterred, our Information Services division would not be defeated. They consulted, persisted, recalibrated and delivered. The Calculator is now lightening the burden for our clients who manage the details of this complex and important rental-support program. We will continue to update the Calculator as CMHC advises us of changes so that our clients can use the program successfully at the grassroots level and our staff can reconcile their annual claims promptly.

Recognizing the value of the Agency’s data collection and information products to bolster housing co-op operations, we hope to see government and quasi-governmental organizations across Canada take up our offered Annual Health Check service.

The Agency does not expect immediate results from our outreach, but we will persist. Victory is not always to the strong, nor the race to the swift. We will keep on keeping on, neither ashamed nor afraid of drudgery, if that is required to succeed. As a 19th century writer observes, “The [one] who would gain the esteem of others, ...must be one that ... finishes his course without swerving....” 🐢

“I very much like this report. It is clear, concise and easy for the board members to understand. I think you have chosen the narrative appropriately, and I am excited to share this with the Board at their next board meeting on November 29/23. I think it will help them to feel less as though they have no control over the co-op’s financial position and strengthen their resolve to stick to the actions they are taking regarding arrears.”

— A client



The Board of Directors

The Agency's Board of Directors (December 2023)

[Left to Right]; Daniel Ish; Anne Davidson; Catherine Porter; Karla Skoutajan, Treasurer; Gail Church, Vice-President; Berta Zaccardi, President; Tom Clement

At the end of 2023, two of the Agency's seven board members were based in British Columbia, one in the Prairies and four in Ontario. Directors are appointed by the Board of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada to serve for a maximum of three consecutive three-year terms.

Members of the Board are selected for the professional reputation they have earned over the course of their careers and for their extensive knowledge of at least one

subject important for the Agency's effective governance. These include law, finance, public administration, information technology, cyber security, regional economic conditions, government housing programs, human resources and co-operative housing operations.

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 public, our government and co-operative partners, and our employees and other stakeholders.

The Agency is a net-zero organization, owing to our purchase of carbon offsets equal to our net 2023 greenhouse gas emissions.



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.

The Agency in 2023: The Basics



Grace MacInnis Housing Co-operative, Toronto

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 (FCHI-2), launched under the National Housing Strategy. In 2021 we rolled out the Temporary Rental Assistance initiative on CMHC’s behalf to housing co-operatives in B.C., Alberta, Ontario, Quebec and PEI whose operating agreements had expired before 2016. In 2022 we agreed to administer CMHC’s Preservation Funding for our clients.

A federally incorporated co-operative, the Agency has a single member—the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada—which appoints Agency directors on the recommendation of the Agency’s board.

In 2023, the Agency moved to a hybrid staffing model. Most of our staff continued to work part time from their home offices but were required to return to their local office for at least one quarter of their workdays. Special monthly events, including a birthday celebration and a staff luncheon, provided attractive opportunities for socializing, sharing insights and talking shop. As always, the Agency continues to include some full-time teleworkers among its staff.

We ended 2023 with 45 staff members (43.4 full-time equivalents). Two were in term positions. Eight are fluently bilingual in English and French.

In 2023, the Agency delivered eight 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
- Preservation Funding administration

In addition, through the HomeRun website, we offered clients a self-directed benchmarking and best-practices service. We expect to launch a refreshed HomeRun in 2024.

The Agency invites housing co-operatives without a CMHC agreement to subscribe to our Annual Health Check service. This fee-based service delivers a basic or premium bundle 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 and the Rental Assistance Program without charge.

The Annual Health Check ensures that once a year a subscribing co-operative has its financial temperature measured, learns the result and, in most cases, is advised on how to correct any problems that may overshadow its future. 🐢

“Thanks for taking the time with me on this file. I appreciate your support. We can now finalize the claim. Whoopee!”

— A client



The Information Services Division



Michel St-Denis, Manager, Technical Services



Ellie Williams, Executive Assistant

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 B.C., Alberta, Ontario and PEI.

2020 The Rental Assistance Program is launched in September 2020.

2021 The Agency’s service agreement is renewed for a fourth five-year term. CMHC’s Temporary Rental Housing initiative, overseen by the Agency, is launched in January 2021.

2022 Housing co-operatives whose operating agreement expired prior to 2016 are invited to join the Rental Assistance Program.

CMHC gives the Agency responsibility for administering Preservation Funding.

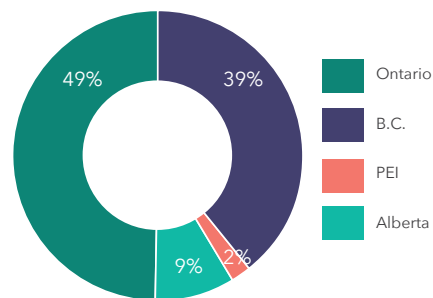
Standards of Performance and Client Service

The Agency’s portfolio peaked at 554 active clients in 2013. It then began to shrink as our client housing co-operatives’ operating agreements with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation expired. In 2016, most Agency clients welcomed CMHC’s offer of operating-agreement extensions for what eventually became a period of four years, preserving the housing for resident households of low and modest means. When CMHC invited these co-operatives to join the new Rental Assistance Program (FCHI-2), almost all gladly accepted.

Initially, housing co-operatives whose operating agreements that had expired prior to 2016 were excluded from the Rental Assistance Program. Fortunately, the 2022 federal budget provided extra funding that allowed CMHC to offer them a place within the program and a new relationship with the Agency. In the end, 49 additional clients in four provinces (excluding Quebec) joined the Agency portfolio in 2022.

The distribution of the Agency’s 537 client co-operatives is shown below by province and housing program as of the end of 2023. Because of rounding, the total does not equal 100 per cent. As some clients have agreements under more than one program, co-ops under the legacy programs of the 1970-1990s appear to comprise a greater percentage of the Agency’s portfolio than they actually do.

Distribution of Agency Clients — By Province



Distribution of Agency Clients — By Housing Program

Legacy Programs		18% 94 /537
	S27/61	29% 27/94
	FCHP (ILM)	64% 60/94
	Urban Native / PEI Non-Profit	7% 7/94
Rental Support Programs		93% 498/537
	Rent Supplement	15% 81/537
	Rental Assistance	78% 413/537



Olga Tasci, CEO; Jennifer Brett, Director, Corporate Services; Bridget Bayliss, Director, Information Services; Catriona McCallum, Manager, Client Support; Francesca Sorace, Manager, Rental Support Programs; Donna Charbonneau, Director, Operations; Payam Ressalat, Manager, Finance

Performance Standards

The Agency’s agreement with CMHC sets out 34 service levels to be met in 2023 when delivering the eight services we were managing on CMHC’s behalf. This total includes four service levels related to the Rental Assistance Program. The required standard of performance ranges from 75 per cent in one case to 100 per cent in 16 others. In aggregate, all service levels were met or surpassed in 2023.

Services	No. of Standards	Met or Surpassed
Information Services	3	✓
Monitoring and Seeking Operating Agreement Compliance	9	✓
Assessing and Taking Action to Mitigate Risk	7	✓
Default Prevention Services	2	✓
Default Management Services	5	✓
Rent Supplement Program Management	4	✓
Rental Assistance Program	4	✓

“I will miss working with the Agency—it has been a very long association. Mostly I will miss the people I have been working with. I will particularly miss the staff members, like you, who have always been sincerely friendly and helpful.”

— A client

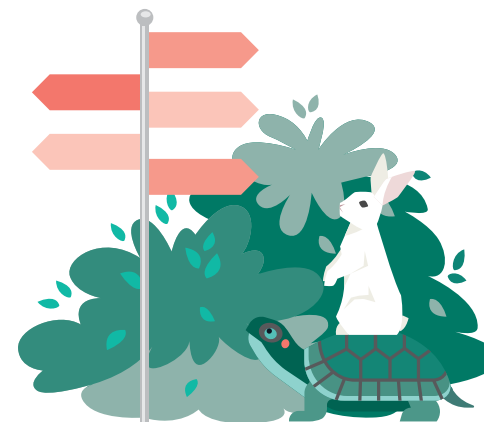
Client Service Standards

Report Card

Further to our goal of delivering a solid client experience, the Agency has adopted client-service standards, often more demanding than the performance standards in our agreement with CMHC. Our grades on performance depend on automated measurement—how long it takes us to respond to various service requests from our clients—and, as such, are not open to manipulation. Visitors to our website can read our policy on client service and satisfaction, which sets out these Agency board-approved standards.

Over 2023 we met our client-service standards, in the aggregate, 99.6 per cent of the time, surpassing our standard of 95 per cent.

In 2007, honouring our value of transparency we began to publish a report card showing how far we have met our public standards of service. Over the years, our performance has improved, partly because we have chosen to be open about our successes and failures, have learned from them, and have gone on to do better. Please see the [2023 Report Card](#) on our website for more information on the objective achievement of our standards. 🐢



	Standards	Aggregate Achievement	Instances
Information Requests	1	100%	554/554
Reporting Standards	7	99.7%	2195/2201
Granting Approvals	7	98.0%	167/170
Concerns and Complaints	2	100%	25 / 25
Sharing Information	7	100%	1420/1420
Annual Health Check	2	100%	1/1
Services to Organizations Serving Agency Clients	3	100%	10/10
Total	29	99.6%	4372/4383



Mitch Vanderborn, Digital Communications Officer

“Lost Ground to Make Up”: Client Satisfaction

Beyond our published standards is something more subjective: our clients’ feelings about our service. We know that co-operatives may feel satisfied, even after being disappointed at one or more touch-points, and may be dissatisfied even though all our contacts seem to have gone well. Because our clients’ subjective experience matters to us, every three years the Agency commissions a third-party survey to test co-ops’ feelings about our service. The delay since our 2018 survey was owing to the disruption of the pandemic.

Our most recent survey took place late in 2023, with a third party—Forum Research—at the helm. In rough figures, about one quarter of our clients returned the 2023 survey. About two-thirds were completed by co-op employees or management staff, and one-third by board members.

In general, the survey found that while clients were satisfied with many of the separate elements that form our relationship, their general satisfaction level with our service had fallen to 77 per cent, 13 percentage points below our results in 2018.

Although client satisfaction with their main Agency contact remains high at 95 and 89 per cent respectively for staff and board members, it has dropped slightly since our previous survey.

As our rental assistance clients first began to work with our new tools, their reactions were mixed. Eighty-three per cent of paid staff found the Online Calculator helpful in meeting program requirements and the majority found it easy to use, even though some noted they had experienced technical problems. Not all were able to answer this question as the phased launch of the Calculator was still underway. Ninety-one per cent of paid staff and 69 per cent of board members found the Action Plan tool easy to use.

With respect to our annual performance reports to clients, co-op managers continue to favour our Risk Report while board members now rate their Plain Language Financials as the most valuable report, with the Risk Report a close second.

We expected the 2023 survey to find dissatisfaction among our clients, owing to the transition to a new rental-support regime after over thirty-five years of stability, the delayed delivery of our Online Calculator and the reduced scope of support available from our staff under the new program. However, we chose to ask the hard questions. Now that our Online Calculator is fully launched to our rental assistance clients, we know they will come to appreciate it as a valuable tool for lightening their workload. Always keen to strive for improvement, 2024 will see us develop a plan to increase our clients’ satisfaction by the time our next survey is due. 🐢

“Your turnaround response time to our requests is super —I only note this to acknowledge and express our appreciation for your service.”

— A client



“Assisted by a Continued Diligence”: The Agency and Our Clients

Persistence pays off in the end. In July 2023, the Agency began a phased launch of our long-awaited Online Calculator.

We decided to create this tool in 2020 when CMHC gave the Agency administrative responsibilities for its new Rental Assistance Program, FCHI-2. This program imposes few requirements on housing co-operatives, being limited to setting goals in a three-year Action Plan and assisting qualified households in paying their housing charge. However, the rules about rent geared to income are more complex, compared with those of the Section 95 program. The Agency’s idea was to create an online tool in which we could embed the directives about, for example, what utility allowances and charges apply. By automating access to this information, we knew we could eliminate mistakes and make the calculation of assisted charges and the annual reconciliation of assistance easier, faster and more accurate. So our work began.

While the Calculator was under development, clients used CMHC’s Excel spreadsheet to calculate assisted charges, with the worksheet updated as the program rules changed. Specifications were altered and our staff and software developers had to adjust their work on more than one occasion to accommodate rule changes. An earlier launch in 2022 had to be aborted when we discovered that the tool was producing corrupted data. Still we persisted.

We are now hearing that once a co-operative has entered its core information, the system is working well and saving staff time. It is also feeding the Agency’s database with a hoard of valuable information that facilitates our reporting back to CMHC, while protecting the personal details of assisted households.

The delay in launching the Calculator left the Agency with a multi-year backlog of annual rental assistance reconciliations. Before the Calculator was even available, the Agency trained and redeployed staff from all divisions to assist with these reconciliations. Thanks to their hard work, by year end we were almost caught up.

At the beginning of 2023, about 78 per cent of our clients were in the Rental Assistance Program. Relationship managers continued to advise the shrinking legacy cohort on ways to improve their operations. This included carefully monitoring the spending of Special Contribution Funding, which some co-ops in difficulty had received for capital repairs. Relationship managers focused on clients at risk, with the goal of ensuring their long-term viability and their eventual entry into the Rental Assistance Program.



*Maggie Keith, Communications Officer and
Jennie Cottenden, Senior Administrative Assistant*

As Agency clients transitioned out of the legacy programs (Section 95, Section 27/61 and ILM/ FCHP), the scope of our work with them became more limited, to our regret. Under the Rental Assistance Program, our frontline staff can assist clients only when they need information about the program or help with administering it or using the program tools.

However, through our various means of communication, we continued to make all clients aware of relevant issues and opportunities not to be missed. We were delighted that 99 clients applied for financial support for technical studies or building retrofits in 2023 and that, by year end, 54 had already commissioned and received building condition assessments, energy audits and aging-in-place assessments. With more studies underway, we know that our communications not only reach our clients but also stir them into action.

In our annual report for 2022, we noted our successful launch of two related online tools. These were created to help clients meet the Rental Assistance Program's requirement to file a three-year Action Plan, which must be reviewed and updated annually. The first of these tools is an online Self Assessment, a questionnaire that helps co-ops select at least one area for potential improvement from among those listed in the sidebar. We were

convinced that clients who begin with a Self Assessment were more likely to create an appropriate and relevant Action Plan that would be effective over time.

In 2023, we decided to find out how many clients were using our Self Assessment for their first Action Plan. The news was good! Of the 44 co-ops that submitted an Action Plan in 2023, 41 fully or partially completed a Self Assessment first. We are also hearing that some co-op housing federations are using the Self Assessment tool to help their members with planning, whether or not they are in the Rental Assistance Program.

Action Plan Goals

Goals are set in at least one of

- ✓ governance
- ✓ social inclusion
- ✓ financial viability
- ✓ property management

Co-ops can also set goals in environmental sustainability.



Olga Tasci, CEO; Gail Church, Vice-President; Tina Stevens, President, Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada

Our frontline staff continue to work closely with legacy-program clients. One of our 2023 initiatives may seem like the reverse of our goals in previous years: we are encouraging these co-operatives to spend more! Many years of urging clients to put funds aside for the future have had the unexpected result of causing some to hold tight to their growing wealth. Our approach now is to encourage co-ops to invest their precious reserves in the capital projects that aging buildings plead for. In 2023 the average capital expenditure for this group of clients was 30 per cent higher than in 2022, and the various technical studies they have been commissioning have ensured that these funds were carefully spent in the areas of need.

Whatever their role, Agency staff recognize the need for patience and persistence even more than for the online tools that are improving co-op operations. Very little in the world of co-operative housing happens quickly, partly owing to the democratic process and partly to the challenge of shifting the direction of even a small business. Like the tortoise, we accept that our clients' success and our own can come only from consistent, diligent effort that always keeps us moving toward our goals. 🐢



Windward Housing Co-operative, Toronto

“Unwavering and Unresting”: Concerns and Complaints.

The Agency is an accountable organization, committed to responding to all client concerns and complaints. For us, a concern is a situation where someone is worried or unhappy about the Agency, CMHC, a program feature or anything else within our mandate and where the person accepts our explanation or referral. A complaint is any matter described in that way or that we cannot resolve or refer. We report annually on all concerns and complaints.

During 2023, we registered 21 concerns (2022: 33) and zero complaints (2022: 1). Most came from co-op members (2023: 17 concerns). We received no concerns or complaints from any member of the public in 2023. Two co-op housing staff and two board members came to us with a concern in 2023.

Once again, most concerns were with the governance or management of a particular housing co-operative (2023: 13 concerns).

When co-ops or their members contact us, we always try to find a solution, even though our responsibility is limited to funding, program matters affecting a client’s financial performance or compliance with a CMHC agreement. Sometimes clearing up a misunderstanding or explaining a program feature solved the problem. On other occasions, we had to refer the complainant elsewhere.

In 2023 the Agency advised 10 co-op member complainants to present their concerns to their co-operative’s board or manager (2022:12). We referred seven to co-op federations. Four concerns were resolved by the Agency itself (2022: 12 concerns, 1 complaint). Once again, it was not necessary to refer any concerns or complaints to CMHC (2022: -0-). 🐢



Westboro Housing Co-operative, Ottawa

2023 Financial Highlights



Marina Housing Co-operative, Vancouver

		31 December 2023	31 December 2022
ASSETS			
	Cash and Investments	\$ 3,011,415	\$ 3,223,247
	Capital and Intangible Assets	1,084,262	1,238,446
	Other	151,430	120,606
		4,247,107	4,582,299
LIABILITIES		3,089,087	3,036,881
FUND BALANCES			
	Operating Reserve	358,761	331,302
	Capital Fund	799,259	1,214,116
		4,247,107	4,582,299
CHANGE IN OPERATING RESERVE		2023	2022
	Revenue	8,233,799	7,789,069
	Expenses	7,876,340	7,198,232
	Transfer to Capital Fund	(330,000)	(534,000)
		\$ 27,459	\$ 56,837

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 2023

Olga Tasci, Chief Executive Officer

Corporate Services

Jennifer Brett, Director, Corporate Services

Mel Cameron, Culture and Client Service Champion

Jennie Cottenden, Senior Administrative Assistant

Nicola DeSousa, Senior Administrative Assistant

Maggie Keith, Communications Officer/Corporate Secretary

Michelle McHugh, Co-ordinator, Corporate Services

Sabine Saintilus, Human Resources Officer

Mitchell Vandeborn, Digital Communications Officer

Ellie Williams, Executive Assistant

Payam Ressalat, Manager, Finance

Kim Bakir, Accounting Co-ordinator

Information Services

Bridget Bayliss, Director, Information Services

Adewale Ketiku, Lead, Information System Projects

Vicki Lackman, Specialist, Information Technology

Gail McKenzie, Software Quality Assurance Officer

Natascha Morrison, Information Officer

Sergei Pershukovich, Database Administrator

Stan Piechocinski, Lead, System Design and Data Management

Larry Lenske, Senior Business Applications Analyst

Tineke Vanderhorst, Business Applications Analyst

Operations

Donna Charbonneau, Director, Operations

Michel St-Denis, Manager, Technical Services

Joanne Balmaceda, Co-ordinator, Technical Services

Francesca Sorace, Manager, Rental Support Programs

Jean-Philippe Beaudet, Rental Assistance Officer

Brianne Dawson, Rental Assistance Officer

Erin Cousins, Rental Assistance Officer

Meghan Friesen, Rental Assistance Officer (on leave)

Allie Lacasse, Rental Assistance Officer

Daniel Melchiorre, Rental Assistance Officer

Rosalind Morton, Rental Assistance Officer

Catriona McCallum, Manager, Client Support

Jacqueline Cooper, Relationship Manager

Traci Dubeau, Relationship Manager

Hia Inthavixay, Relationship Manager/Analyst

Heather Kennedy, Relationship Manager

Marisa Melchiorre, Senior Financial Officer

Trina Murphy, Rent Supplement Co-ordinator/AIR Reviewer

David Nagy, Relationship Manager/Analyst

Heather Wesenberg, Relationship Manager/AIR Reviewer

G. Scott Wylie, Relationship Manager/Analyst

Grace Zhao, Senior Analyst

www.agency.coop



“Thanks so much, especially for your speedy response.”

— A client



Agency for Co-operative Housing Staff, 2023