

SHHR Launch Recording

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SPEAKERS

Marie McGregor Pitawanakwat, Cynthia Belaskie, Shannon, Shauna MacKinnon, Nadine Chalifoux, Catherine Lussier, Kat Roberts, Maria Roth

Shauna MacKinnon 00:02

Welcome, everyone to the launch of the Social Housing and Human Rights Campaign. My name is Shauna MacKinnon, and I'm a member of the Social Housing and Human Rights organizing committee. Social Housing and Human Rights is a grassroots coalition of community based organizations, university researchers and individuals from across Canada. We've been working together for the past year with a laser focus on immediate action to expand and maintain the supply of social housing that is affordable to those in greatest need. By social housing, we mean housing that exists outside of the market, so it cannot be used for speculation or to generate wealth. It is housing that cost less than 30% of household income. In Quebec, it's less than 25% of household income, or equivalent to social assistance housing allowances, it can be publicly owned, nonprofit or Co Op housing. We began our campaign by synthesizing a vast body of existing research having been actively involved in housing justice issues for many years, we felt that there was enough housing research from which to build our case for more social housing. What we need now is action and action will only come if communities mobilize and demand it. So last spring, we brought together people from across the country to the Canadian human Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg, where we began the process of developing a call to action aimed at the federal government. Our partners across the country are also working on campaigns calling on the other levels of government to invest in social housing. Now, throughout the past year, we have worked to build consensus on a call to action that we believe is possible to implement immediately, and will make a significant impact on the lives of households in greatest need. There are many strategies that need to be implemented simultaneously to meet housing need, including demand side strategies like rental assistance, rent regulations, and investments in wraparound supports and services for tenants. Expanding social housing supply while preserving the existing supply is one critical strategy for which there is currently no focus campaign at the national level. Our call to action is simple and straightforward, creating a minimum of 50,000 new rent geared to income social housing units each year for 10 years, and investing in the acquisition, construction, operation and maintenance of new and existing public nonprofit and cooperative owned housing, housing that meets the unique and varied requirements of people experiencing poor housing need and homelessness. Doing so will begin to make a considerable dent in the dire shortage of housing for those most vulnerable. Our target is relatively consistent with calls to double the number of social

housing units to more closely aligned with the OECD average. Our call to action more than triples the target in the national housing strategy and redirects the focus from modest affordability to deep affordability for the lowest income households. What we are calling for is just a start, governments of all levels will need to make non market housing a priority if we are to meet Canada's obligation to housing as a human right as outlined in the national housing strategy act. Next we will have others from across the country speak to the issues in their communities beginning with Catherine Lussier from Quebec

Catherine Lussier 03:25

Hi, everyone, thanks for receiving us. So FRAPRU, it's called Le Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain, is a provincial organization from Quebec so we're covering all the area and housing prices is a really strong also in Quebec as it is all over Canada. We have at least one quarter of the tenants that are actually paying more than 30% of their income for their rent, which is a catastrophe in a way. We have noticed also how the shortage of housing has become really stronger in the last year so there is less and less housing available especially in in region where where before we had access to a lot of housing so tenants are actually in difficult situation. All over Quebec. We, obviously, most of you probably know a lot of tenants are a victim of the eviction, sometimes really illegal eviction or processing of dwelling renting, abusing renting increase, all the situation is you know is amplified by this housing crisis. The first person that are touch or the tenant you know, are the low income tenants. That's why actually we are here today and that's why we are supporting the call for action for developing more social housing all over Canada. Because they only be are actually seeing that there is, you know, we need to have alternative to the private market because the private market is not going to answer the needs of the tenants, especially the low income tenants. And that's you know, that's why the focus of the federal government should be right now to answer to the most urgent needs in Quebec. it's 173,000 tenants that are actually having hard core needs. Which means that they're having either rent too expensive, their apartment is too small or actually is in bad condition and this has to stop and the federal government have to focus directly on social housing. There is you know, already the national housing strategy and yours a lot of different person including the Federal Housing advocate that have actually mentioned that it doesn't answer the needs that it was supposed to mention. So there is actually a place to you know, from the housing tragedy revenue programs or even you know, the funding that is there to redirect it to directly to social housing. So there is actually ways to do it. And you know, we are you know, we are here because all over Canada, this is happening also in Quebec and we we really need to find the solution now, if we don't want to have like situation worse for all these tenants. And that even can lead to homelessness. Thank you.

Nadine Chalifoux 06:23

Thank you, Catherine. So my name is Nadine Chalifoux and I am the chairperson of Edmonton Coalition on housing and homelessness. In wealthy Edmonton, there are 50,000 households living in housing that is too expensive or not adequate. The Edmonton Coalition on housing and homelessness, ECOHH, supports the call for urgent federal government action to build housing for those who are in the toughest circumstances with no ability to pay market rate rents. The need for a significant public investment in this common good is long overdue. in financial terms, the cost of not acting is much greater over time, but in human terms, it is cast catastrophic. For each year, ECOHH holds a memorial for people who have died due to homelessness, which is in the next stage for many who cannot afford these high rents. Last year we mourn 256 people or lives that were lost in our city. Every day more than

3000 people endure the misery of homelessness. If everyone had adequate housing and a cost they could manage on their available resources. We would have healthier, safer communities with people where people could enjoy life and pursue their dreams. Rather than live with stress and fear. Instead of tents. Along snowy streets, we would have modest, warm, secure places where people could create the homes they wanted. Be ready to go to work or school, enjoy relationships and stay well. We have too many years of promises and platitudes instead of investment and good policy. Let's get on with the essential work of making the human right to adequate housing a reality. ECOHH will be holding a special screening of the documentary push on national housing day in Edmonton at the Metro theatre. We will be shedding light on social housing needs rent evictions and financialization of rental properties. We still have some tickets available. All information needed is on our website@ecohh.ca Thank you so much.

Maria Roth 06:23

Thank you, Nadine. My name is Maria Roth and I live in work on the traditional and unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. I'm a member of a non market housing Co Op in False Creek, South Vancouver, where I'm a community organizer and housing researcher. My community is rooted in the 1970s and 1980s, a period of time when the federal government invested in Co Op housing. The collective track records of housing coops across the country since that time has been an astonishing success for the mix of incomes, depth of affordability, and the move that was totally moving stories that I've heard for the last 10 to 15 years from Co Op members about what they've been able to accomplish because of stable permanently affordable collectively ran housing co ops. In False Creek, we went from being a neighborhood that was predicted to become a slum partly because of the large presence of co op homes, to being an internationally renowned thriving democratic community, a lot of which has to do with coops and our commitment to collective care. The latest stats that I have, which we're in the process of updating shows that 17% of all coop households in False Creek South earn less than \$30,000 a year, outperforming much housing in Vancouver. A community where every member has a voice, we participate in figuring out what capital items will replace each year. We set our housing charges balance that with long term stewardship for our buildings, and folks really connect and belong. Every door is the same and where your community has your back. If your kids get sick or you lose your job. I'm often told I want a housing lottery. It shouldn't be this way. Housing is a human right. Everyone deserves a community in which they are valued. We need more coops. And yet the federal government has not committed to building new Co Op housing since the early 1990s. This needs to change. I fully support the social housing and Human Rights Campaign, calling on the federal government to meaningfully invest over the next 10 years in creating a minimum of 50,000 net new social housing units per year. The price of land and construction is so high right now in Vancouver that even if a community housing developer is given the land for free, we can't afford to include homes for the very low and moderate income households that we need to and who are most vulnerable in the current housing crisis. Targeted Investment to make sure social housing is created and not torn down to make way for unaffordable homes is urgently needed now. Over the next several years, it is going to get even more difficult with rising interest rates. High material costs supply chain unpredictability and net loss of construction workforce as workforce as construction workers are retiring in large numbers. Without targeted federal support, housing which is a human right, will simply not be possible for many. Co Op housing is needed now more than ever. I urge the federal government

and the Minister of housing infrastructure and communities to commit to deeply affordable inclusive Co Op housing now. Thank you.

Kat Roberts 12:25

Maria, my name is Kat and I live and work on treaty one territory. I've been fortunate enough for the past two years to focus on helping support work and advocacy through my work as a housing case manager, as well as part of as well as part of the right to housing coalition. As a housing first case manager, I support women and gender diverse individuals who experienced chronic housing, chronic homelessness to apply to make and maintain housing. I love the work I do. But due to the lack of social housing in Manitoba, it's nearly impossible. 100% of the individuals I support are on employment and income assistance. They are provided \$616 a month towards shelter allowing a single one bedroom apartment and one to pay currently costs \$1,300. So beyond the affordable housing rates, there's also the issue of private property management companies not wanting to rent to individuals on unemployment and income assistance. Even though this is a human rights violation. The need for guarantors leaves loads without natural supports unable to secure housing. Instead of relying on safe and stable housing with established property managers. We are forced to work with private individual landlords who refuse to hold the existence of tenancy a Residential Tenancies Act and regulation. Units are usually left in disrepair filled with pest issues, entranceways into apartment buildings are left unlocked. Making buildings unsafe. When asking for repairs or involving the Residential Tenancies branch. It will most likely lead to eviction. So the individuals I support are forced to either choose between substandard housing or reentering homelessness. So we can no longer rely on the private housing market. Social Housing is also life changing. Not only does it provide a safe, affordable and adequate house, it also allows individuals the opportunity to obtain their grade 12 diploma as a 10 second their education, take employment training programs, and re enter the workforce. Families are able to reunify and individuals can afford to take care of their physical and mental health. Not only are social housing units not being built in Manitoba, but the ones that we do have expiring and being sold to the private corporation. In the last decade, we lost about 5000 housing units with another 10,000 about to expire. The waitlist for Manitoba housing is currently 5300 applicants, with some families waiting up to nine years to get a placement. I alongside the Right to Housing, and West Central Women's Resource Centre, join others across Canada, calling on the federal government at a minimum of 50,000 net new social housing units at least over the next ten years. Thank you.

Nadine Chalifoux 15:45

Music from the SHHR campaign promotional video plays

Cynthia Belaskie 16:01

Hey, everyone, I'm Cynthia Belaskie. I'm one of the Organising Committee members of the Social Housing and Human Rights Coalition. And I'm also the managing director at the Canadian Housing Evidence Collaborative. I just wanted to let you know that there is going to be there is a recording of today's meeting. And we'll be able to provide a transcript for anyone who wants one after after the meeting is over. And I think I won't take a full 10 minutes. So we may actually have a few few minutes for questions at the end. So if you do have questions, and you want to pop them into chat, please do that now. So I do want to finish off today's launch though with some solid actions that we can all do starting today, to make a change towards having more affordable housing here in Canada. The first

thing you can do is endorse the call to action to unions and other social justice minded organizations to endorse as well as share and follow us on social media. I know that everybody says that, to click below. But it really does make a difference when we have more of that critical mass behind us making these calls. Sign up for our newsletter, and engage please attend one another's events. If you happen to be in town at National Housing day tomorrow, and you reach out to us at the coalition to tell us what your ideas are for involvement, we want to hear them. And we want this to be a movement of the people who are doing the moving. We are the doers. We are the actors here. There is no national organization who's going to do it for us. And please, if you are having an event tomorrow, do advertise for us at it and include some of the great social media and posters that we have available via our website. And so that your members and then for people who who are in your networks can can see what we're doing and participate as well. We put ECOHH's information for their national housing day in the chat and I know some others are there. So please do take a look at yours to the list if it's not there already. I also want to draw everyone's attention to our stunning new website. It's moresocialhousing.ca. This is where you can get links the link here that take action button will take you to the endorsement page to the list to download or the drive that has all of our endorsements, social media and other advertising materials in it. And now that they've given me the microphone, I wanted to take a minute to thank everybody who came out today to listen and participate and talk and share their stories and engage. I really do believe that 2024 is going to be a big year for this group with lots of opportunities to work together for more social housing. I have a few closing reflections that I've come from come up with from having worked with this group and that I want you to take with you today. When I lock my front door at night and I tuck my kids into bed, I'm claiming my human right to housing. When tenants go on a rent a rent strike. They're claiming their human right to housing. When people set up tents in city parks, they are claiming their human right to housing. And when we gather like this today, we're supporting one another. We're bringing hope, where there isn't enough. We are taking action. We are telling policymakers what the absolute minimum is that we need. And we are declaring the right to social housing. We are declaring the human right to safe and affordable housing for ourselves and for our neighbors. This is your movement. This is our movement. Together we can and together we will. Thank you all so much. And I think we can open it up to questions now if there are any.

Shauna MacKinnon 20:55

Cynthia, Marie McGregor Pitawanakwat is here and we had hoped that she would have a chance to say a few words so maybe we could invite her to do so.

Cynthia Belaskie 21:05

Great, do so, of course.

Marie McGregor Pitawanakwat 21:21

Greetings, everyone. My name is Marie McGregor Pitawanakwat, in English meaning woman from South Bay. The in Southbay in English. I'm from the Daawganing unceded territory on Manitoulin Island in northeastern Ontario, thank you for letting me have a couple of minutes to make some comments. I fully support this call to action for social housing units. When I think of the role of governments, I think that the purpose of government is to take care of its people. The purpose of a government is not to become a business. And that's what's been happening in the last few years with the financialization of rental housing, and also the decrease in socially available housing for low income people. So that's,

that's alarming. And it's discouraging, and it's just not necessary. I also wanted to provide some perspective, Canada consists of 9,985,000 square kilometers of land from coast to coast to coast, it is the second largest landmass in the world. How is it possible that even one person is homeless, given the size of the territory and the amount of resources that are extracted there from on a yearly basis? That's my question. And so when the fall economic statement comes out, I sincerely hope that there are substantial and solid plans and commitments to provide social housing for people in Canada, the seriousness of the housing crisis should not even be and yet I understand how it happened, given that we went through the pandemic, and that also, the business interests are flexing their arms and saying that business trumps social community, and that's what I wanted to say today. And I thank you for your time. Well, one last little thing. I serve as a co chair of the National indigenous Housing Network, and I serve as a co chair to the Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network. And I support all of you in your efforts at obtaining affordable housing for social groups.

Cynthia Belaskie 23:56

Thank you so much, Marie. And I'm glad that you were here and that that Shauna, Shauna took note of it. So we didn't miss hearing that it's an important message. I do see some comments in the chat. And I think that these are things that we as a coalition have definitely been contending with around you know, the systems for building social housing, and how that needs to be reinstated. And I think that that's definitely something that is on it is on our mind is a problem, but that we're also aware that we're not the ones who have to fix it, right. We just have to keep the keep the pressure up to ensure that that that the that our public leaders are are doing what their constituents are demanding. Are no other questions? Oh, yeah, go ahead, Shannon.

Shannon 24:56

Hello, my name is Shannon and I'm from a rural area. county outside of Ottawa. And I've either I'm very familiar with social housing. And I think probably there's a lot of people on this call that either require social housing or work with people who are in need of social housing. And by social housing, I mean, where you're going to pay 30% of your income, whether that's in my case, in Ontario's case, Ontario Works, or Ontario Disability Support Program, or old age security/guaranteed income supplement, and then CPP, okay, so these are fixed incomes, and they're, they're very low people on Ontario Works are making under \$800 a month, where are they living? What are they eating? So here's an idea that I've come up with that I think might work when when I look at having been involved in in Ottawa for 40 years in the housing field, and then here in a rural setting for the last six years. What if, if, let's say we had 1000 people on a waiting list, all these people we presume, because they have been vetted to some extent, are living in in situations that they cannot afford? It's not tenable for them, the places might be unsuitable, as people have pointed out. So what if we took those 1000 units that are that are usually market rent, obviously, and what if we put them on a registry, and that registry then became offered to people who are in social housing, or on various social housing lists, and they could choose if they so decided to rent one of those units that would free the unit that they're let's say, they're living in social housing, or they're on the list that would reduce the list. And it would people living in social housing, who no longer belong living in social housing. And this is a given in my area, they don't make people move out after you've, you know, your kids grown up and, and you've gone to school and you got your trade, you've got your education, and you're working, you don't have to move out, you get to stay there with you new pickup truck, and your trampoline and your, you know, \$2,000 barbecue, you get to stay

there. Well, meanwhile, you've got people who can't eat living in market rent, housing, which they can afford, but which other people cannot. So you see, if they were given the option to rent some of these market rent rentals, because now what everybody says is, well, there's nowhere to go. There's nowhere to go. Yes, there is. Yes, there is. There are 1000 units that I just mentioned, of people on a waiting list who can't afford these units. Now, there's also programs, if people living in social housing need that little top up, they can go and they can get up to \$300 in some of these programs, to help them with the market rent. However, people living in market rent who can't afford it, we don't have anything, we've got nothing. We're paying all of our money to live in inadequate, inappropriate circumstances. So I call this the man plan based on my last name, which is Mannion, because how come no one else has come up with this? This is a no brainer. Thank you.

Cynthia Belaskie 28:07

Thank you so much. Shannon, I'd love to talk to you about where you are in the Ottawa Valley sometime. Or maybe it's not the valley.

Shannon 28:15

My email, people want to contact me for more

Cynthia Belaskie 28:17

information. But yes, anybody please do. You know, I think it's these kinds of innovative solutions and thinking about things in a different way that we, as a group want to come together and sort of harness that energy, learn about what one another are doing in different locations, and make sure that we don't feel alone, right. So to make sure that people would you do have a great idea, like the man plan that it has a place to land? Catherine, I do see that your that your hand is up, but I'm very mindful that we've already gone over time for people. So I will pass it over to you. And then if you don't mind closing the meeting, that would be great.

Catherine Lussier 28:58

I will be short, I just wanted to react to what Shannon, you were mentioning, maybe we are in a different ecosystem in Quebec, but I think that what we are looking for is housing out of the market, how to have you know, all this what we're seeing anything, you know, everything is in the idea of like housing is in the market. So what we have to do get is get out of as much possible housing out of the market, obviously, we need to answer first to the needs that are the most urgent of tenants, the one you were mentioning, but I think overall, it will be to have as much as possible and to answer as much as possible people to kind of get out the logic of housing as you know, a merchandise that we can exchange, put a price on it, and maybe better protect against eviction against rent, increase, abusive rent increase. So we maybe need any, you know, innovation, but at the same time, I think we also have to stay on the focus of I have as much as possible housing out the market. And I think I could I could close it by, thank you very much for having me here. Thank you for interacting with us. The campaign just is just starting, we really want to continue to mobilize as much people as you know, as much people, as much organizations as possible. The message needs to reach to the government and as much more we're going to be as a group as much more we will have like chances to do have a good investment we need and we are asking for so it's just the first step we will continue and we will still key in was still keep you know, having action mobilizations. So keep up with us receive our, sorry, mailing

list, you know, and subscribers on our list to receive as much as information and to be part of like with us to ask, I don't know if we if we had any question for medias and I'm passing you back towards Cynthia. Thank

Cynthia Belaskie 31:08

you so much. So yeah, there will be a transcript of this of this launch made available. If you endorse and sign up for our newsletter, we're definitely going to be in touch with what some of our next actions are going to be, and different ways that you can support and as I mentioned earlier, we're always open to your ideas, right? This is this is our movement. we're in it together. This is definitely something that you have a voice in as someone who's working for social housing. So absolutely, go to our website, sign up for the newsletter, stay in touch. We we want to hear from you and we want to support you. Thank you all so much, and we will be in touch soon. Bye, folks.