



CALL TO ACTION

We call on the Prime Minister and the Minister of Housing to fulfill their legal obligation to realize the human right to housing and:

- Create a minimum of 50,000 net new accessible rent-geared-to-income social housing units each year for 10 years, starting now. These units should be targeted for those experiencing core housing need and homelessness and have rents permanently set at no more than 30% of household income.
- Invest in the acquisition, construction, operation, and maintenance of new and existing public, non-profit, and cooperative-owned housing that meets the unique and varied requirements of people experiencing core housing need and homelessness.





BACKGROUND

In 2022, the Manitoba Research Alliance, a Winnipeg based research and policy advocacy consortium was awarded a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Connections Grant for the Social Housing and Human Rights (SHHR) project.

The aim of the project was to work with social housing researchers and activists across Canada to consolidate existing research and develop a mobilization plan around the specific multi-government actions needed to expand social housing across Canada.

Our initial partners for the project included, Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Canadian Housing Evidence Collaborative, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, Canadian Lived Experience Leadership Network, End Homelessness Winnipeg, Manitoba's Right to Housing Coalition, National Right to Housing Network, Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network, and Vote Housing.

Participation in the SHHR project expanded in April 2023, when over 100 researchers and advocates representing all provinces and territories across Canada attended The Social Housing and Human Rights Conference at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg. There was overwhelming agreement in the need for government action on social housing. Those in attendance agreed to collaborate in the development of a national call to action that could be used to mobilize social housing advocates across Canada to call on the government of Canada to invest in social housing.

In May 2023, the SHHR members reached a consensus on the call to action.



FAQS

What do we mean by “social housing” and why is that the focus?

Social housing is housing that exists outside of the market (so it cannot be used for speculation or to generate wealth) and that in most provinces and territories costs less than 30% of household income or equivalent to social assistance housing allowances. In provinces like Quebec, social housing costs less than 25% of household income and this must be maintained. Social housing can be owned by public, non-profit or co-operative housing providers. It cannot be owned by private housing providers. Agreements between governments and the housing provider limit how the property can be used, and provide subsidies to ensure that housing providers offer rents that are geared to income.

Since 1993, very few new units of social housing have been built, and old funding agreements are expiring. The 2017 National Housing Strategy, which was intended to address housing need across the housing spectrum, is producing very little housing accessible to the lowest-income households and to people experiencing homelessness. As a result, there is a large demand for good quality, non-market housing with rents that are geared to income.

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 wrap-around supports and services for tenants. Expanding social housing supply, while preserving the existing supply, is one critical strategy for which there is currently no focused campaign at the national level.



FAQS

Why a minimum of 50,000 units annually over 10 years?

The federal government has projected the need to expand overall supply by building 5.8 million homes over the next decade (580,000 per year). Because 33.5% of households are renters, 194,300 of this supply should be rental. Approximately one quarter of renters are in core housing need so a minimum of 48,575 (round up to 50,000) should be at rent geared to income rates affordable to low-income renters. This more than triples the target in the National Housing Strategy (NHS) to build 160,000 affordable homes and redirects the NHS focus from modest affordability to deeply affordable at 30% of household income. This amount is relatively consistent with calls to double the number of social housing units to more closely align with the OECD average.

Why “net new” social housing units?

Canada is losing social housing units as a result of expiring operating agreements and inadequate investments in the maintenance of existing properties, among other factors. We must maintain what we already have if new units are going to increase the overall stock of social housing. By calling for “net new social housing units” we are also calling for measures to protect the existing stock.

Why are investments needed in the “acquisition, construction, operation, and maintenance” of units?

New social housing supply requires capital investments for construction so that new housing can be built, and for acquisition so existing properties can be purchased and re-purposed/ renovated as needed. New (and existing) social housing supply also requires investments in ongoing subsidies to support the costs of operating the housing while charging rent geared to income (RGI) rents. Operating costs may include services and programs that support tenants who live within the property. Finally social housing requires ongoing capital investments for the purpose of maintaining the quality of housing and preserving the stock.



FAQS

What is "core housing need"?

A household is in core housing need when their housing does not meet one or more of the following standards: adequacy (not in need of major repairs), suitability (enough bedrooms for the size of the household) and affordability (housing costs are less than 30 percent of before-tax household income). In addition, the household would have to spend 30 percent or more of its before-tax income to access housing that meets all three of the above standards. Some groups, including women-led single parent households, racialized and immigrant families, people with disabilities, and Indigenous, Metis, and Inuit households are over-represented in core housing need.

What about other levels of government?

The expansion and preservation of social housing across Canada will require a significant funding commitment from the federal government. This call to action is focused on achieving that commitment. It provides a concrete goal targeting one level of government that individuals and groups from across the country can mobilize around through a coordinated national campaign. Provincial, territorial, and municipal levels of government all have important roles to play in the expansion and preservation of social housing. Individuals and organizations at the local level will need to come together to implement strategies/campaigns targeting local levels of government that complement the work happening at the national level.



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