

# EVERYONE HAS A HOME: POLICY BRIEF TO THE NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY CONSULTATION

October 2016



## **Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton**

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**United Way Funded Agency**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## VISION<sup>1</sup>

Everyone has a home... Home is the foundation

## VALUES

- Efficient and Effective Use of Community Resources
- Evidence Based, Measurable and Impact-Driven
- Integrated and Comprehensive Community Planning
- Person-Centred Supports
- Place and Neighbourhoods
- Rights-Based and Anti-Discrimination
- Risk and Protective Factors

## POLICY PROPOSALS

<p><b>Outcome #1 Supply:</b> There is more affordable housing to meet the need and demand</p>	<p><b>Federal strategies to increase <u>Supply</u>:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GST rebate for new rental housing priced in the mid- or low- range of market prices</li> <li>• Increase non-profit social housing stock to develop mixed income communities</li> <li>• Collaborate to increase land supply</li> <li>• Support innovative housing models</li> </ul>
<p><b>Outcome #2 Affordability:</b> Canadians housing affordability, stability and choice is increased</p>	<p><b>Federal strategies to increase <u>Affordability</u>:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase public social expenditure to match OECD average</li> <li>• Protect existing social housing</li> <li>• Preserve low-cost rental housing</li> <li>• Increase the funding and use of portable housing benefits</li> </ul>
<p><b>Outcome #3 Supports:</b> People have the individualized supports they need to help them obtain and maintain housing</p>	<p><b>Federal strategies to increase <u>Supports</u>:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen the Homelessness Partnering Strategy</li> </ul>
<p><b>Outcome #4 Quality:</b> Housing providers offer good quality homes that are safe and suitable to meet the wide variety of Canadians needs, and are supported to implement best practices in the areas of maintenance, redevelopment, financing, residential supports and community engagement.</p>	<p><b>Federal strategies to increase <u>Quality</u>:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support capacity building within the social housing sector</li> <li>• Provide Tower Renewal funding</li> </ul>
<p><b>Outcome #5 Equity:</b> Disparities in housing outcomes are eliminated by reducing barriers, stigma and discrimination experienced by communities and groups of people. The federal government has a particular responsibility towards Indigenous Peoples to address the negative impacts of Canada's colonial legacy</p>	<p><b>Federal strategies to increase <u>Equity</u>:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond to Truth and Reconciliation Commission</li> <li>• Support Indigenous Social Housing providers</li> <li>• Enhance Self-governance for funding to improve housing for Indigenous Peoples</li> <li>• Increase access to housing which meets the full range of needs of persons with disabilities</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Vision and values extracted from Hamilton's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan

## INTRODUCTION

The SPRC has supported the creation of the City of Hamilton's 10 year housing and homelessness action plan, titled *Everyone has a home... Home is the foundation*. The vision, values and outcomes from Hamilton's housing and homeliness strategy were the result of wide community consultation, and we believe form a useful template for the federal government's National Housing Strategy. We offer this brief, adapted from the City of Hamilton's housing and homelessness action plan to fit a federal context and supplemented by suggested federal strategies, based on the SPRC's own consultations in this area, as well sound policy proposals from Ontario's Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Big Cities Mayor's Caucus, the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, and the Calgary Homeless Foundation.

## VISION<sup>2</sup>

### **Everyone has a home... Home is the foundation**

The federal government should adopt a National Housing Strategy that ensures **every person living in Canada has access to safe, affordable, accessible and suitable housing**, to provide the foundation to secure employment, raise a family and build strong communities.

This strategy must be supported by improved federal **funding and policies** and measured by achieving outcomes in the areas of **supply, affordability, supports, quality** and **equity**.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted in part from vision statements from Hamilton's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan, the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association and Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Update

## VALUES<sup>3</sup>

The strategy should commit to the following core values to ensure that everyone in Canada has a home:

**Efficient and Effective Use of Community Resources:** Human and financial resources spent to address housing and homelessness are investments in our community that reduce public costs in other areas.

**Evidence Based, Measurable and Impact-Driven:** People in our community deserve housing and homelessness solutions that are based on intentional planning and good evidence and that have measurable positive impacts and outcomes.

**Integrated and Comprehensive Community Planning:** The private, public and voluntary sectors, along with engaged citizens, are all important and interconnected parts of the community that plans together, as is the voice of people who have experienced homelessness and housing insecurity.

**Person-Centred Supports:** People and their experiences are central in all planning and development considerations. People are supported in ways that make sense for their unique circumstances and their economic, cultural, and gender realities.

**Place and Neighbourhoods:** Place matters. People will exercise choice over where they live. A full range of quality housing options contributes to neighbourhoods that are healthier and more dynamic. Healthy neighbourhoods are also a place where community and less formal supports can flourish and support people to feel connected and included in all elements of civic life.

**Rights-Based and Anti-Discrimination:** Housing is a fundamental human need. Some groups of people face more barriers to housing as a result of racism, oppression and discrimination. Efforts must intentionally work to eliminate these barriers.

**Risk and Protective Factors:** Evidence shows that people who have more protective factors in their lives are able to better mediate risks. Successful community responses around homelessness and housing insecurity work to increase the protective factors and decrease the risk factors in peoples' lives.

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<sup>3</sup> Values extracted from Hamilton's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan: <http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Hamilton-Housing-and-Homelessness-Action-Plan-Summary.pdf>

## OUTCOMES, ISSUES, AND STRATEGIES<sup>4</sup>

**Outcome #1 Supply:** There is more affordable housing to meet the need and demand

### Issues of concern:

The private market has not been able to meet the housing needs Canadians. Not enough private housing is being built in many communities, and the private housing that is built is aimed at very limited market which is not meeting Canadians needs for a greater variety of types of housing and at a wider variety of price points. In Hamilton for example, private rental housing is finally being built in Hamilton, after years of decline in the rental housing stock, but all new units are priced for the luxury end of the market. While the private market cannot be expected to offer affordable housing for the lowest income Canadians without government subsidies, there should be more regulations and incentives to ensure private market housing better suits the needs of middle income families, and not just the highest earners.

The aging of the social housing stock across Canada, including in Hamilton, and declining federal and provincial investments has led to poor quality housing and decreased quality of life for residents in this sector. Onerous rules and funding conditions on service providers have stifled innovation and opportunities for leveraging assets to better meet the increasingly diverse needs of communities across Canada.

Many past social housing programs required all units to be deeply subsidized, resulting in a scenario where housing providers will always be financially dependent on government money. Learning from past experience, new programs should be designed differently to allow a larger share of a base of middle income tenants to help share in the operating costs and financial sustainability of buildings.

In Hamilton, past opportunities for surplus federal lands to become sites for affordable housing have been missed, for example the sale of the Federal Building on Main Street W. did not include any obligation for the developer to include a proportion of new condo units in the redevelopment to be priced at or below market prices.

### Federal strategies to increase Supply:

- 1) GST rebate for new rental housing priced in the mid- or low- range of market prices<sup>5</sup>: The federal government should help shape private market housing to better meet Canada's housing needs by introducing a GST rebate program for new rental housing with units priced at or below 130% of average market rent (as defined by CMHC), which would help create 15,000 units per year at a cost of \$120 million per year. The GST rebate program should retain some measure of flexibility to meet communities' particular needs not currently met by the private market, such as accessibility and unit size benchmarks for setting rebate eligibility.

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<sup>4</sup> Outcomes are extracted in part from Hamilton's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan: <http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Hamilton-Housing-and-Homelessness-Action-Plan-Summary.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Extracted in part from Federation of Canadian Municipalities: [https://fcm.ca/Documents/issues/Canada\\_Housing\\_Opportunity\\_EN.pdf](https://fcm.ca/Documents/issues/Canada_Housing_Opportunity_EN.pdf)

- 2) Increase non-profit and co-operative housing stock to develop mixed income communities<sup>6</sup>: In partnership with the provinces and territories, senior levels of government should increase its per capita investment in social housing stock (including non-profit and co-operative housing), so that Canada's current rate of 5% of housing being social housing rises to rates more comparable with other OECD countries. New non-profit and co-operative housing funded by the federal government should not be subject to rigid rules that discourage innovation, sustainability and responding to local needs. In particular, new social housing developments reflect the range of incomes, household types/sizes, and no buildings are solely built for social housing purposes/all buildings include a proportion of market rent units to sustain the long term financial viability of the site).
- 3) Collaborate to increase land supply: The federal government should become a supportive partner to communities looking for cooperation from federally-regulated industries in the development of affordable housing. For example, the City of Hamilton has indicated it is interest in pursuing negotiations for the relocation of a CN rail yard to make the current land available for housing development. The federal government should play an active role, up to and including federal legislation, to encourage federally-regulated companies to join negotiation tables with communities who need cooperation from these companies for the development of new affordable housing. The federal government's own supply of surplus federal government lands should be prioritized for affordable housing. In Hamilton, that could be federal government assets that may become surplus in the coming decades, such as postal sorting facilities. Finally, the Federal government should increase funding for remediation of brownfield lands that will be used for affordable housing.
- 4) Support innovative housing models<sup>7</sup>: Experimentation, evaluation and replication of successful models in particular should be encouraged by the federal government, as innovative solutions—complementing the broader investment in new affordable and social housing—could include shared equity approaches, secondary/garden suite incentives, co-housing and land trusts, with their proven record of meeting housing needs.

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<sup>6</sup> Extracted in part from Calgary Homeless Foundation: [http://calgaryhomeless.com/wp-content/uploads/2016\\_NationalHousingStrategy\\_CHF\\_Brief.pdf](http://calgaryhomeless.com/wp-content/uploads/2016_NationalHousingStrategy_CHF_Brief.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Extracted in part from Big Cities Mayor's Caucus: [https://www.fcm.ca/Documents/reports/BCMC/BCMC\\_Housing-Principles\\_EN.pdf](https://www.fcm.ca/Documents/reports/BCMC/BCMC_Housing-Principles_EN.pdf)

## **Outcome #2 Affordability: Canadians housing affordability, stability and choice is increased**

### **Issues of concern:**

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities says that Canada is facing a housing crisis and housing is becoming less affordable at every income level, due to underinvestment from federal and provincial governments.<sup>8</sup>

Past affordable housing programs have been too rigid and were not adaptable to different communities' needs. The result has been that without an influx of new funding and better regulations at the federal, provincial and municipal levels, Canada's housing market is heading towards polarization, with primarily high priced, luxury housing being built in the private market, and only the very poorest being eligible for affordable public and non-profit housing, which is most often of poor quality. Affordability must be considered broadly with both shallow and deep subsidies, depending on family incomes, and programs that increase residents' choice of housing and offer long term housing stability should be prioritized.

### **Federal strategies to increase Affordability:**

- 1) **Increase public social expenditure to match OECD average**<sup>9</sup>: Senior levels of government in Canada should increase public social expenditure in relation to GDP. Greater public social expenditure on anti-poverty initiatives, including housing and income assistance can strengthen Canada's social welfare system and help prevent and reduce homelessness. In Canada, social expenditure by government—measured as a percentage of our GDP—is considerably less than the OECD average. According to OECD figures in 2014, Canada's total public social expenditure is approximately 17% of GDP, while the OECD average is almost 22% -a difference of \$80 billion annually.
- 2) **Protect existing social housing**<sup>10</sup>: Funding should be delivered through two distinct components: one for capital repairs/retrofits to ensure and preserve unit safety and quality, and one for rent subsidies to ensure deep affordability for low-income households now and into the future
- 3) **Preserve low-cost rental housing**<sup>11</sup>: A tax credit for rental property owners who sell relatively affordable assets to eligible non-profit providers and others who agree to hold rents at average market prices for a set period could protect 5,000 units annually at an estimated cost of \$75 million per year.
- 4) **Increase funding and use of portable housing benefits**: Rental subsidies that are designed to allow tenant choice of housing and are portable when a tenant moves should be increased to play a larger role in the strategies to ensure everyone has a home in Canada. A vibrant non-profit housing system should remain alongside a portable housing benefit framework and funding stream, so that Canadians have the choice of private or social housing and stigmatization around "subsidised housing" is reduced.

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<sup>8</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities: [https://fcm.ca/Documents/issues/Canada\\_Housing\\_Opportunity\\_EN.pdf](https://fcm.ca/Documents/issues/Canada_Housing_Opportunity_EN.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Extracted from Calgary Homeless Foundation: [http://calgaryhomeless.com/wp-content/uploads/2016\\_NationalHousingStrategy\\_CHF\\_Brief.pdf](http://calgaryhomeless.com/wp-content/uploads/2016_NationalHousingStrategy_CHF_Brief.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Extracted from Federation of Canadian Municipalities: [https://fcm.ca/Documents/issues/Canada\\_Housing\\_Opportunity\\_EN.pdf](https://fcm.ca/Documents/issues/Canada_Housing_Opportunity_EN.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Extracted from Federation of Canadian Municipalities: [https://fcm.ca/Documents/issues/Canada\\_Housing\\_Opportunity\\_EN.pdf](https://fcm.ca/Documents/issues/Canada_Housing_Opportunity_EN.pdf)

**Outcome #3 Supports:** People have the individualized supports they need to help them obtain and maintain housing

**Issues of concern<sup>12</sup>:**

An evaluation of the Mental Health Commission of Canada's At Home/Chez Soi project, found that for high-needs participants who experienced homelessness and mental illness, every \$10 investment in housing assistance with individualized support services resulted in average savings of \$21.72 (in averted costs for hospitalizations and other services). Participants also spent fewer nights in shelters or at emergency departments.

Like social housing, Ontario's supportive housing programs have developed separately over 50 years to meet a variety of challenges at specific points in time. This has resulted in programs and services that were developed without a common vision or principles, and aspects of some programs are inconsistent with current best practices.

Through funding support from the Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy, agencies across Canada offer Housing First and Intensive Case Management supports to end homelessness among persons who have experienced chronic or episodic housing instability. The time limited nature of the federal funding and attached conditions don't match the needs for longer term support among this population to ensure they don't return to homelessness.

**Federal strategies to increase Supports:**

- 1) **Strengthen the Homelessness Partnering Strategy**<sup>13</sup>: Permanently restore the federal annual homelessness funding (i.e., the Homelessness Partnering Strategy -HPS) to its 1999 levels. Accounting for inflation, this amount in 2016 would be \$349 million annually, a difference of \$158 million in funding. Funding for HPS programs should be negotiated for longer term supports which are currently limited to two years, because the needs for supports for many chronically and episodically homeless people once housed exceed this time frame.

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<sup>12</sup> Extracted in part from Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Update: <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=13683>

<sup>13</sup> Extracted from Calgary Homeless Foundation: [http://calgaryhomeless.com/wp-content/uploads/2016\\_NationalHousingStrategy\\_CHF\\_Brief.pdf](http://calgaryhomeless.com/wp-content/uploads/2016_NationalHousingStrategy_CHF_Brief.pdf)

**Outcome #4 Quality:** Housing providers offer good quality homes that are safe and suitable to meet the wide variety of Canadians needs, and are supported to implement best practices in the areas of maintenance, redevelopment, financing, residential supports and community engagement.

**Issues of concern:**

The end of operating agreements represents both threats (loss of funding and sustainability) and opportunities (redevelopment, improving housing quality by modernizing housing stock and renegotiating better funding agreements) for social housing providers. But social housing providers who already struggle with the challenges of operating aging housing stock for an increasingly more vulnerable tenant population do not have the resources or in-house expertise to take advantage of these opportunities.

The housing stock of both social housing and private rental housing in Canada includes a very large proportion of large and aging tower apartment blocks. Among the primary challenges with this type of housing stock is their energy inefficiency which means they have disproportionately high operating costs and negative environmental impacts.<sup>14</sup>

**Federal strategies to increase Quality:**

- 1) **Support capacity building within the social housing sector**<sup>15</sup>: The government should provide tools or resources for housing providers facing End of Operating Agreements (EOA), to help support and transition their assets, if desired, and build capacity within the non-market housing sector to become financially sustainable. In some cases, EOA provides financial flexibility to redevelop or sell assets and reshape housing portfolios. This requires business and real estate finance expertise to assess redevelopment potential, which may be lacking in the non-profit housing sector, especially amongst smaller providers. In cases where non-profit housing entities are dependent upon government funding (through operating agreements) in order to maintain their housing stock, the federal government should restore operating agreements.
- 2) **Provide Tower Renewal funding**: The federal government should support and fund initiatives in communities that are focussed on improving the building envelope, structure and building systems for private rental market and social housing residential towers buildings in the 1960s and 1970s, to increase energy efficiency, reduce operating costs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from these buildings.

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<sup>14</sup> Extracted in part from Evergreen Tower Renewal: <https://www.evergreen.ca/our-impact/cityworks/housing/tower-renewal/>

<sup>15</sup> Extracted from Calgary Homeless Foundation: [http://calgaryhomeless.com/wp-content/uploads/2016\\_NationalHousingStrategy\\_CHF\\_Brief.pdf](http://calgaryhomeless.com/wp-content/uploads/2016_NationalHousingStrategy_CHF_Brief.pdf)

**Outcome #5 Equity:** Disparities in housing outcomes are eliminated by reducing barriers, stigma and discrimination experienced by communities and groups of people. The federal government has a particular responsibility towards Indigenous Peoples to address the negative impacts of Canada's colonial legacy

**Issues of concern<sup>16</sup>:**

Any national housing strategy should prioritize the housing needs of Indigenous peoples. As of 2011, approximately 13% of Canadian households were considered to be in core housing need. By contrast, approximately 19% of all Indigenous households were considered to be in core housing need. For Inuit households, the figure is 34%. Indigenous peoples have been overrepresented among persons experiencing absolute homelessness in Canada. While Indigenous people represent approximately 3% of the general population in Hamilton, they represent approximately 28% of the homeless population in our city, according to the 2016 City of Hamilton Homeless Count.

These root causes of the high rates of homelessness among Indigenous peoples can be traced back through intergenerational trauma caused by the Indian Act, the Residential school system, policies and practices in the child welfare system, and societal discrimination and racism towards Indigenous Peoples which has fostered distrust and misunderstanding<sup>17</sup>. These outcomes of Canada's colonial relationship with Indigenous Peoples remain to be fully addressed and redressed by the federal government and Canadian society more broadly.

The end of operating agreements that affect most social housing providers in Canada is particularly challenging for many urban Aboriginal housing providers because many of their portfolios originally involved the acquisition of existing dwellings, putting their post expiry viability at risk. These portfolios require special attention in planning for the end of operating agreements.

Collaboration among Hamilton's community of Indigenous service providers and with the City offers a model for funding and self-governance for urban Indigenous communities across Canada. In the 1990s, Hamilton was the first urban Aboriginal community in Canada to create a leadership table of Indigenous agencies and negotiated with the city for their share of funding for services to address homelessness to be proportional to the rate of Indigenous people among persons experiencing homeless in Hamilton. In addition, the city has delegated funding decision-making power so that Indigenous agencies now collaborate on a self-governance model to allocate and manage funding. HEDAC (Hamilton's Executive Directors' Aboriginal Coalition) is also collaborating with the city of Hamilton to develop the position of a Senior Project Manager for the city's Urban Aboriginal Strategy to further strengthen Indigenous leadership in Hamilton.

For people across Canada who have disabilities, housing access is improving due to provincial and federal legislative and regulatory changes. Yet most housing is still inaccessible for too many Canadians, and with the aging of Canada's population, the population of persons needing accessible housing is increasing. Accessible housing is not simply housing that meets current accessibility legislation or building code requirements. Accessible housing should pose no barrier outside or inside to persons in motorized wheelchairs, has entryways without steps, wider doors, lever door handles, washrooms of sufficient size with pocket doors and support bars, has kitchens with sink and taps, appliances and cabinetry which may be used by both care-givers and occupants, and has a room which

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<sup>16</sup> Extracted in part from Calgary Homeless Foundation: [http://calgaryhomeless.com/wp-content/uploads/2016\\_NationalHousingStrategy\\_CHF\\_Brief.pdf](http://calgaryhomeless.com/wp-content/uploads/2016_NationalHousingStrategy_CHF_Brief.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Peter Menzies. *Aboriginal Homelessness Through the Eyes of Intergenerational Trauma: A Working Framework*. Presentation to Hamilton's Aboriginal Community Advisory Board, March 27, 2015.

might be used as a bedroom and washroom on the main floor and may have a basement and second floor.

**Federal strategies to increase Equity:**

- 1) Respond to Truth and Reconciliation Commission: The federal government must respond with funding and policy changes to all the Calls to Action from the TRC in areas of federal jurisdiction that contribute directly and indirectly to disproportionately high rates of homelessness among Canada's Indigenous Peoples.
- 2) Support Indigenous social housing providers<sup>18</sup>: The federal government provide distinct support for Indigenous social housing providers, recognizing the specific needs of the populations they serve and existing limitations resulting from earlier program designs.
- 3) Enhance self-governance for funding to improve housing for Indigenous Peoples: The self-governance model developed in Hamilton should be supported by the federal government to be expanded to other urban Indigenous communities so that Indigenous agencies can have more control over decisions and funding aimed at improving housing outcomes for Indigenous Peoples.
- 4) Increase access to housing which meets the full range of needs of persons with disabilities: Both affordable and market housing created should exceed legislated requirements for accommodating physical and other disabilities and should be designed to facilitate aging in place where feasible.

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<sup>18</sup> Extracted in part from Big Cities Mayor's Caucus: [https://www.fcm.ca/Documents/reports/BCMC/BCMC\\_Housing-Principles\\_EN.pdf](https://www.fcm.ca/Documents/reports/BCMC/BCMC_Housing-Principles_EN.pdf)