



An Affordable Housing Policy for Canada

Executive summary

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1. THE PRINCIPLES OF A NATIONAL HOUSING POLICY

- Adequate housing is a basic necessity of life and a fundamental human right. Ensuring that all Canadians have access to adequate housing must be a national priority.
- Housing is a key determinant of health, a driver of the economy, a necessary part of any solution to homelessness, the foundation for individual functioning in society, and an important element of a sustainable community.
- All levels of government must commit to ensuring a healthy housing system.
- Federal and provincial governments must provide stable long-term financial investments and support mechanisms based on the needs identified in local communities.
- Federal and provincial government investments must be provided in a flexible manner that is responsive to unique community needs, including the needs of aboriginal communities, and which is accountable to broad system goals. They must respect the differences in the way housing is delivered in different provinces and territories.
- Local decision-makers must determine the range of needs in the community and identify the range of housing types and tenures appropriate to meet that need. The local community should also identify the social supports that are needed to help people to maintain housing and to support healthy community development. The mix of investments and tools needed to address local needs and individual circumstances should be determined locally.
- Solutions should be evidence based and outcome focused; local system maintenance needs to include mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation

of outcomes relative to the goals and intentions of the various government investments.

- Where the local community lacks the capacity to organize for housing system maintenance, the provincial or territorial government (or other entity) can play a facilitative role – providing expertise and resources as available to support local system maintenance.

2. TOWARD AN EFFECTIVE HOUSING SYSTEM

The housing system in Canada is a complex set of institutions and mechanisms which determines how housing is made available to people across the country. Canada's housing system provides various housing forms and tenures, including homeownership, private rental housing and social housing. When the housing system works well, it provides a range of appropriate housing solutions for a diverse population. Unfortunately, over the past years the different parts of the system have not always functioned well.

An affordable housing policy for Canada should ensure that the ownership, rental housing, social housing and emergency shelter components of the housing system all function well and contribute to a range of appropriate housing solutions for all Canadians, including very low income households and people with special needs. An affordable housing policy framework should work both to end homelessness and to prevent future homelessness.

While the housing system exists independent of government, governments at all levels can influence its healthy functioning. Many other players are involved, including private citizens, the home building industry and the non-profit sector. The various levels of government can support the healthy functioning of the system through planning, regulation and financial investments.

Maintenance of the housing system will require monitoring to identify barriers to its healthy functioning and to remove those barriers. The healthy functioning of the housing system can be measured for adequacy, suitability, affordability and sustainability. A healthy housing system should ensure a sufficient supply of each type and price of housing relative to community needs.

The housing system functions primarily at the local community level. The local community (including citizens and consumers, social agencies and civil society, business people and home builders, and municipal governments, including municipal planners) should work together to determine local needs and to define the most appropriate ways to ensure that those needs are met in the community. Governments can then provide the financial investments to implement the needed solutions.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Effective system functioning requires that a broad range of mechanisms be provided by various levels of government; these include legislation, regulation and financial investments.
- To avoid getting bogged down in jurisdictional finger pointing between governments, the investments by federal and provincial/territorial governments can be unilateral.
 - Matching funding should not be a precondition of funding by either level of government, unless joint objectives are articulated.
 - Ideally governments will not duplicate or work at cross purposes with one another – they can be independent and complementary.
 - Where collaboration between the levels of governments happens it can enhance the effectiveness of planning and interventions and increase the resources available.
- The planning and implementation roles in system maintenance are undertaken at the local level. Development of local community plans (identifying needs, prescribing solutions and defining outcomes) occurs in the context of housing investment by provincial and federal governments.
- Where the federal and provincial/territorial governments attach conditions to their investment of resources – negotiation of these conditions needs to happen both at the local community and at the national and provincial level.
- The private sector, the non-profit sector and civil society should be active partners in local community plan development and in sector level negotiation of government investments and interventions.
- Ongoing evaluation and outcome measurement needs to be built into community plans and into federal and provincial resource allocations.
- The Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, in partnership with provincial, territorial and local housing sector organizations, will provide support. This support will include policy advice and advocacy with all levels of government, particularly with the federal government. CHRA will continue to provide a range of forums and mechanisms for information sharing, identification of best practices and creative and collaborative problem solving.

4. CONCLUSION

Ensuring that all citizens have a decent and secure place to live and can contribute to the social and economic life of their community is a responsibility shared between all levels of government and local communities. By working together we can support the housing system to work for the benefit of all.



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