

In From The Margins: A Call To Action On Poverty, Housing And Homelessness

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The Subcommittee on Cities (the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology) has released its latest report on poverty, housing and homelessness. The 283 page report focuses on poverty reduction strategies, Employment Insurance, training and education, health, and housing and homelessness. A summary of the study on housing and homelessness is provided below. For the full report, click [here](#) (3.9MB).

Housing and Homelessness Summary

The Committee's study of housing and homelessness focused on these as separate policy areas, as many federal programs in particular separate the two. During our research, hearings and site visits, the Committee learned of important and exciting initiatives at the local and provincial levels, and how local and provincial governments, as well as private-sector and voluntary-sector developers, are sometimes constrained by regulations, time-frames, and declining operating support from the federal government.

As well, it has become clear to the Committee that a more integrated consideration of both housing and homelessness offers a better chance of implementing a "housing first" approach. With this approach, individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are stabilized with affordable housing, offering a base from which any other complicating factors in their lives can be addressed.

Further, the Committee is aware that unaffordable and inadequate housing, even for those who are currently able to meet their needs and aspirations, can contribute to poverty, and to a spiral that can include losing jobs, dropping out of school, and being unable to sustain families.

Not all solutions address both the needs of those who are currently homeless and the importance of a housing "system" that supplies affordable and adequate housing to those who are currently housed.

With respect to housing, **the Committee recommends that the federal government:**

- **provide sustained and adequate funding through the Affordable Housing Initiative to increase the supply of affordable housing [Recommendation 37];**
- **issue a White paper on tax measures to support construction of rental housing in general and affordable rental housing in particular, including for the donation of funds, lands or buildings for low-income housing provision [Recommendation 38];**
- **clarify the mandate of Canada Lands Corporation to favour use of surplus federal lands for development of affordable housing and to expedite planning processes to facilitate this use [Recommendation 39];**
- **support the work of local and provincial non-profit housing developers by making housing programs longer term to accommodate five-year development cycles and ten-year planning cycles, and to permit more effective planning at the local and provincial levels [Recommendation 40];**

- identify civil legal aid as an element to be supported by the Canada Social Transfer to assist tenants facing discrimination in housing [Recommendation 41];
- extend the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program as a permanent program, increase the budget allocations for this program, and amend eligibility requirements to take into account differential costs for repairs in different communities across Canada, and projects converting housing units for affordable rental accommodation [Recommendation 42]; and
- work with provincial housing authorities, private landlords' associations and non-profit housing providers, to assess impact of housing subsidies provided to individuals rather than landlords on rents [Recommendation 43].

With respect to homelessness, the Committee has heard of the effectiveness of the Homelessness Partnering Strategies and its predecessor programs in supporting communities to reduce homelessness and to move people from the streets into housing. **The Committee recommends that the federal government:**

- expand the Homelessness Partnering Strategy to play a greater coordinating role within the federal government, engaging all departments and agencies with a mandate that includes housing and homelessness, especially for those groups over-represented among those in need [Recommendation 47];
- provide financial incentives to encourage communities already supported through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy to use a 10-year time horizon in adjusting and renewing their community plans [Recommendation 48]; and
- continue to provide direct funding for and continued support of related research and knowledge dissemination about a “housing first” approach to eliminating homelessness [Recommendation 49].

With respect to an integrated approach to housing and homelessness, the Committee recommends that the federal government:

- in collaboration with provincial governments, representatives of municipal governments, First Nation organizations, and other housing providers, develop a national housing and homelessness strategy to include:
 - priorities established by and for each provincial and territory with respect to meeting existing needs for affordable and secure housing;
 - a 10-year commitment of funds from the federal government, to include similar commitments from provincial and territorial governments that will receive these funds;
 - annual reporting on how the money is being spent, with particular attention to the number of people housed who could not afford to secure housing in the private market;
 - a specific focus, with targets and funding commitments, with respect to meeting the needs for affordable housing for urban Aboriginal peoples;
 - a simpler, more integrated application process for funds, cutting across programs related to housing funded at the federal level;

- **the integration of the Homelessness Partnering Initiative, with an expanded mandate and budget to support combined local housing and homelessness plans and the initiatives identified in them;**
- **a thorough evaluation at the end of the 10-year period to assess achievements and continuing gaps [Recommendation 44]; and**
- **sustain federal funding focused on homelessness until a combined strategy on housing and homelessness is developed to guide federal investment [Recommendation 45].**

Posted on the [Winnipeg Rental Network](#)

