

Affordable Housing and Homelessness

Issue

Everybody needs a home, but decent, affordable housing is currently out of reach for a growing number of Canadians.

Background

Too many people, particularly children, are living in temporary shelters or sub-standard and sometimes unsafe housing. Too many people are living on the street, straining the ability of social service agencies to help them. FCM's 2004 Quality of Life (QOL) report found a number of disturbing trends between 1991 and 2001 in the 20 QOL urban communities:

- Five of the seven indicators used to measure the risk of homelessness in the 20 QOL communities deteriorated;
- The proportion of renter households spending more than 30 per cent of their income on shelter in the 20 major municipalities studied increased from 35 per cent to 41 per cent¹;
- Low-end rents increased 20 per cent more than low-end individual incomes. Another FCM report published in 2004 showed that more than 700,000 households pay more than 50 per cent of their income for rent, leaving insufficient funds for other necessities.

Trends since that time have not significantly improved. The federal, provincial and territorial governments must work with municipal governments and their communities to ensure that all Canadians, regardless of income, have access to decent, affordable housing.

FCM's Position

FCM therefore urges the federal government to:

Develop a long-term National Housing Strategy to ensure all Canadians have access to adequate and affordable housing. This strategy should:

- Rehabilitate private and social housing units to preserve existing stock.
- Directly address affordability problems by providing people the income assistance they need to afford housing. This should come from the progressive tax sources of the federal and provincial/territorial governments.

- Encourage the creation of market rental housing by reforming the tax treatment of rental investment.
- Expand the supply of affordable housing where markets fail to produce sufficient lower cost housing.
- Ensure investments in housing construction and rehabilitation provide for energy efficient technologies.
- Continue to encourage regulatory reform as a means to ensure greater affordability, as has been done by FCM's Affordability and Choice Today (ACT) program.
- Ensure that federal infrastructure investments allow municipal governments to invest in social infrastructure, including municipally-owned housing.

Until a national, long-term housing strategy is fully implemented, FCM urges the federal government, as an interim measure, to:

- Provide for the continuation of the Affordable Housing Initiative (AHI), the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP), and the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI), or programs with similar core characteristics, with at least current funding levels and with current program parameters.
- Ensure that income assistance required to make housing affordable (defined as below market rent and not costing over a given percentage of the household's income), should come from the progressive tax sources of the federal and provincial/territorial governments.

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¹ FCM Quality of Life Reporting System 'Highlights Report 2004'