

The **Federal Poverty Reduction Plan**, a report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, was released in November.

The chapter dealing with housing is reproduced below. For the full report and all of the footnotes, please click [here](#).

CHAPTER 5: HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS INITIATIVES

A stable, decent, affordable home is a doorway to better health, education, and careers, and it is an important source of human pride and dignity.

Wayne de Jong, Habitat for Humanity Canada

5.1 A Place to Call Home

The Committee was told that decent, affordable housing is both an important foundation for healthy social and physical development and a springboard to exit poverty and take advantage of education, training and employment opportunities that can open doors to better economic and personal well-being. Some witnesses also stated that it is the fundamental right of every person in Canada to have a safe, adequate and affordable place to call home.

When people have a place to call home, they can seek and find a job, establish their children at school, and maintain a healthy household.

Diana Summers, Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association

Unfortunately, many Canadians living on low incomes experience difficulty securing appropriate accommodation and cannot satisfy their housing requirements. In 2006, 1.5 million households, or 12.7% of all households in Canada, lived in core housing need, relying on accommodation that was unaffordable, inadequate, and/or unsuitable, and unable to obtain acceptable alternative housing. In addition, homelessness has been growing in many communities across Canada, with as many as 300,000 people estimated to be facing this desperate situation. Certain social groups, including single adults, lone-parent families, visible minorities, recent immigrants, Aboriginal people and people with disabilities, are more likely to experience housing affordability problems. Many of these groups are also disproportionately represented among Canada's homeless population.

Witnesses across the country emphasized the importance of affordable housing not only for combating poverty, but also for fostering the full participation of vulnerable members of society in their communities.

Another core component of a poverty reduction strategy is decent affordable housing. This is significant because it's both a safety net and a springboard. It's a safety net in terms of providing support for people who are not able to pay their rent – and we have a lot of Canadians who are in very precarious positions right now – but having them in stable environments is also a springboard, because it contributes to healthy development of children, and it also allows people to participate in education and training.

Sherri Torjman, Caledon Institute for Social Policy

For the people you are talking about, I think that a house, a safe home, allows people to get a job or to access other things in the community. It starts the process. For me, affordable housing is the answer. It allows people to start. It's the bedrock beneath our feet, if you will, a safe, secure, stable, and nice place.
Diana Summers, Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association

Stakeholders argue that, because the private, for-profit housing market often does not build housing that meets the needs of people living on low incomes, government support for social housing⁷²⁶ is an important way to ensure housing affordability.

There are currently about 630,000 social housing units in Canada that receive government support. Unfortunately, Canada's social housing system is unable to meet the demand for affordable units. The Committee was told that waiting lists for social housing can be as long as 20 years in some regions. Witnesses also expressed dismay that, compared to its peer countries, Canada has a relatively small percentage of its housing stock in the social sector.

We have 13,500 families on the waiting list, and they may wait 20 years for homes they can afford. This is the longest list and the longest wait of any municipality, I think, in Canada – and certainly in Ontario.
Edna Toth, Peel Poverty Action Group

In Canada, less than 5% of our overall housing stock across the country is in the social sector. That puts us, among the developed countries, second to the bottom. The only country that has a worse record is the United States. European countries and other developed countries of the world, such as Hong Kong, all have a significantly higher social housing sector.

Michael Shapcott, Wellesley Institute

The Committee strongly believes that action must be taken to help struggling Canadians access and retain safe, decent, and affordable housing. In addition to government funding of social housing, there are a variety of alternative ways to increase the supply of affordable housing that meets the needs of low-income Canadians.

Witnesses who appeared before the Committee stressed the importance of working with the private sector through public-private partnerships (PPPs) and the tax system to develop affordable housing. The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit model, the foremost affordable housing program in the United States, was one idea put forward that could be applied in the Canadian context.

But I would say that there is much more potential to engage the private sector if we have a planned approach to development than is the case today. I would say that there's much greater potential in this.
Geoff Gillard, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association

Modelled on programs in the U.S., the federal government should give public housing providers financial supports to issue bonds to obtain the necessary upfront capital for new building projects. The government should also agree to finance interest that would accrue on these bonds to finance them over the long term. The housing provider would then issue the bond for the public housing market and pay back the principal through the sale of units or rental income obtained over the bond period. This would significantly reduce the public cost of housing and speed up construction.

Adam Spence, Ontario Association of Food Banks

Given the shortage of affordable housing in Canada, the Committee believes that opportunities to engage the private sector in affordable housing development should be pursued. Tax incentives can be an important tool to encourage investment in this area, and the federal government's first action should be to eliminate capital gains taxes on donations of

real estate to registered charities for the purpose of affordable housing. The government should also thoroughly examine additional tax measures that could promote the creation of affordable housing in Canada.

We're long overdue in this country for some changes to the federal tax system that would increase private investment, including philanthropic investment in affordable housing. There are five examples that I'll give you. The first would be to eliminate capital gains on real estate donations, made to registered charities, for affordable housing. The second would be to eliminate the GST on construction materials associated with the construction of affordable housing. The third would be to permit the deferral of capital gains taxes and recapture of the capital cost allowance on reinvestment in rental housing, which is in scarce supply in this part of the country. The fourth would be to increase the capital cost allowance on rental and affordable housing. And the last would be to permit small landlords to be taxed at the small business corporation rate as an incentive to increase the supply of rental housing.

Barbara Grantham, Streethome Foundation

Recommendation 5.1.1

The Committee recommends that the federal government immediately undertake a study to determine the feasibility of eliminating capital gains taxes on donations of real estate to registered charities for the purpose of affordable housing and that it conduct a thorough evaluation of additional tax measures that could promote the creation of affordable housing in Canada.

A third way of supporting the creation of affordable housing is through rent supplements and/or housing allowances, which reduce the gap between a household's income and the cost of housing.⁷³⁵ Such programs are in existence across Canada, funded in part by the federal government's Affordable Housing Initiative (discussed below) and administered by local levels of government.⁷³⁶ Rent supplements and housing allowances have been praised by stakeholders because they can be implemented discretely, quickly and at low cost.⁷³⁷ Others point out that they can have an inflationary impact across low-end rental units in jurisdictions where they are used.⁷³⁸ Witnesses who appeared before the Committee were also divided on the merits of these measures.

Social housing isn't always the answer. Sometimes being in social housing leads to more discrimination. For people with mental illness, full citizenship means community integration, which is the healthiest measure for people. So I think the portable housing benefit, not attached to programs, would be the ultimate solution.

Ruth-Anne Graig, Canadian Mental Health Association

The rent supplement model has been talked about. Certainly it's very positive, but for many of the clients we work with, it would not work well. They need the community base of a supportive housing community. An integration can happen in small supportive housing communities within the larger neighbourhood.

Margaret Singleton, Ottawa Salus Corporation

Asset-building programs can also help low-income Canadians access appropriate housing. These programs include mechanisms that encourage households to accumulate an amount of savings that they can then put towards rent or utility deposits, or even the purchase of a home. Witnesses told the Committee that such programs have been successfully implemented in Canada but that the federal government could do more to facilitate affordable home ownership. The Committee believes that the federal government should explore asset-building programs as a way to help low-income households meet their housing needs.

In this project, asset building was modified to enable account holders to use their own and matching savings for costs related to affordable, sustainable rental housing. These included rent deposits, savings to cover rent for multiple months in subsidized housing, deposits for utility hookup, and the cost of setting up a household. The result of this public, private, and non-profit project was that 57% of the participants who opened bank accounts successfully saved and moved out of the shelter system. Many participants retained their bank accounts and saved beyond what was required by the project; 95% of these participants were still housed independently eight to 15 months out of the project; and 82% of the participants indicated that they felt secure and would remain housed independently for the rest of their lives.

Barbara A. Gosse, Social and Enterprise Development Innovations

There are three key ways that housing can assist in poverty reduction. ... The second is by using housing programs as a basis for asset-building. These programs assist modest income households to move to home ownership and to begin building equity. The move to ownership also frees up community-based affordable housing, and thus reduces waiting lists.

Diana Summers, Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association

We urge you to recognize the importance of assisted home ownership solutions to the affordable housing crisis. ... An investment in affordable home ownership not only builds homes for families in need right now, but also, through their mortgage repayments, will help to fund homes for many more families in the future.

Wayne de Jong, Habitat for Humanity Canada

Finally, the Committee heard about the role housing co-operatives can play in an affordable housing system. A housing co-operative is an organization that is collectively owned by its members. This type of housing is often more affordable than private market housing because households pay a monthly charge that is set by members in relation to the costs of running the cooperative. Government funding enables about half of the over 90,000 households living in housing cooperatives across Canada to pay a housing charge that is further reduced and geared to their income.⁷⁴⁴ Witnesses who appeared before the Committee emphasized the unique benefits of the cooperative housing model in the provision of affordable housing.

Over the past 40 years, the federal government and the provinces delivered altogether some 90,000 units of affordable cooperative housing for Canadians of moderate and low incomes. It is tremendously good value, in our view. Successive evaluations have shown that housing coops offer the best value for public spending. That's because there is no intermediary bureaucracy. The money that the government puts on the table for co-ops goes directly to the provider. There's a strong business discipline model. They have to make ends meet. There is no automatic funding of deficits by the government. They are self-directed, and the involvement of the members in the operations of the co-ops means tremendous opportunities for personal development, and the result is, of course, that they build families.

Nicholas Gazzard, Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada

Homelessness is a unique policy challenge in Canada and the country's network of emergency shelters is often the first recourse for individuals facing this situation. The Committee heard, however, that some communities have an insufficient number of shelter beds and are unable to meet the demand for emergency accommodation.

We have one emergency transition home for women who are experiencing violence. We have one emergency shelter for men and women that's run by the Salvation Army; it has 10 beds. That is supposed to serve the emergency shelter needs of the entire Yukon. It does not accept children. There are three beds reserved for women. Most women do not want to go there unless they are really facing 50 degrees below zero and a park bench, because in that shelter they are facing the very men who

abuse them. It's also first come, first served. They have to leave the shelter during the day, and in the winter go from, say, the detox centre to the library, to various other social agencies, until they are able to come back at suppertime.

Charlotte Hrenchuk, Yukon Status of Women Council

There exist two broad approaches to helping individuals experiencing homelessness become permanently housed. In the “continuum of care” or “treatment first” model, clients are referred to permanent housing only after they have proven their “housing readiness” by completing the prescribed treatment programs, such as programs for psychiatric or addiction-related problems. In comparison, the Housing First model is based on the belief that housing is a basic right and offers clients immediate access to stable accommodation in conjunction with treatment and support services provided as needed and on a voluntary basis. Having originated in the United States, the Housing First model is being successfully applied across Canada. Toronto’s Streets to Homes program, which follows this approach, has housed more than 2,400 people since 2005, 91% of whom remain in their homes. The Mental Health Commission of Canada has also launched demonstration projects based on the Housing First model in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montréal and Moncton that will focus on different aspects of mental health and homelessness. The Government of Canada in Budget 2008 provided \$110 million to support these projects. Many witnesses who appeared before the Committee supported the Housing First approach to reducing homelessness.

The Committee is pleased that the Housing First model is being studied and implemented across the country and believes that the federal government should continue to support these important initiatives.

Prior to the last, I would say, five years in North America, the idea has always been to take a homeless individual, who may or may not have problems with addiction or mental health, go through transitional housing or some other methods to get them free of their addictions, get them balanced on their medicine, and then try to get them a home.

What we found, and what they found in other cities such as New York and Portland and Toronto, is that in order to get someone balanced and stable, they really need to have a home first. That's why it's called Housing First. The first thing we do is get people into a house, and then we deal with their addictions, their mental health issues, and things like that. It's a complete flip-flop of the old philosophy...

Wendy Myshak, Homeward Trust Edmonton

We know, not from research done in Canada but from research done in other countries, that what's called a “housing first” approach has some very promising aspects to it, but it has never been tested in the Canadian context. That's an approach where client choice is what drives the services a person gets, where they are provided with not only adequate housing but also with a variety of health supports and mental health supports and services, so they can become functioning citizens.

The early indications are that people who participate in that kind of program can become contributing citizens again and have housing stability and health stability. We're hoping that out of the research demonstration projects that we're doing we'll get some solid policy evidence we can bring to the government that will have recommendations to address exactly what you're talking about.

Jayne Barker, Mental Health Commission of Canada

The Housing First model speaks to the importance of putting in place adequate supports for people making the transition from situations of homelessness or unstable shelter to decent, stable, and affordable housing. The Committee heard from many witnesses who stressed that

supported housing arrangements⁷⁵¹ help recipients learn skills that enhance their wellbeing and are often fundamental to housing retention. Supported housing was also identified as an area for improvement in Canada's housing system.

People need a "relationship and work attitude" apprenticeship program much more than they need a hard skill apprenticeship. And that's the nature of what supported housing means. People are moved into supported housing, and that outreach support provides that mentorship on how to relate to your landlord, how to manage your time budget so that you have time for cleaning and food preparation, and how to shop on a budget, provided you have some semblance of income, which we could talk about as well. But outreach is key.

Michael Poworoznyk, Saint Leonard's Society of Nova Scotia

One of the key solutions we've found is supported housing. It integrates individuals who've experienced homelessness into communities so that housing doesn't become ghettoized. One of our programs is called WISH.

[...]

We help women who are leaving the shelter system by providing them with their own apartments. We provide financial trusteeship and management. We provide them with life skills development and 24-hour assistance. We give them the tools they need to be successful and independent.

Tanis Crosby, YWCA Halifax

5.2 Federal Housing Programs

Housing-related funding and programs are delivered across the country by all three levels of government in a system that has been described as a "patchwork." Despite the provinces and territories having primary jurisdiction over housing, the federal government plays an active role in this area. The current federal response to housing issues centres on the themes of homelessness, affordable housing, and residential upgrading.

a. Homelessness Partnering Strategy

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), introduced in 2006 and administered by HRSDC, encourages cooperation among stakeholders, including federal departments and agencies, other levels of government, and the private and voluntary sectors, to identify local responses to homelessness and strengthen the capacity to address this challenge. The largest element of the HPS is the Homelessness Partnering Initiative (HPI), through which the federal government invests in specific community projects. Other components of the HPS include the Homelessness Accountability Network, which promotes knowledge development and data collection, and the Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative, which makes surplus federal real properties available to organizations for homelessness-related projects. The HPS was originally established as a two-year strategy funded at \$134.8 million per year. A recent review found that the HPS is successful in addressing communities' most pressing needs with respect to homelessness; however, the effectiveness of the HPS is limited by its two-year time frame. These findings were echoed by the Committee's witnesses, who also raised concerns that HPS funding is too limited and is delivered primarily to infrastructure-related projects at the expense of operational requirements and other homelessness-related services. The HPS has been renewed until March 2011.

The federal government has been successful in facilitating community collaboration and project funding through the [H]omelessness [P]artnering [S]trategy. We've seen very positive results from inter-agency collaboration with the key players all at the same table. We appreciate the role the federal government

played as a catalyst in that example; more funding and a less onerous application process for that program would benefit those living in inadequate housing and those trying to support them.

Laura MacFeeters, Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition

You mentioned the SCPI [Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative] which is now called HPI, or the homelessness partnership initiative. ... It is an excellent program for what it is, because the federal government is in fact an enabler. The program allows the communities to define their homelessness needs, and the federal government provides the tool kit in terms of finance and other supports.

[...]

So it's a good program where it works, although I should say there has been a problem with SCPI as well, or HPI now, in that the program dollars are basically the same as they were when Minister Bradshaw first announced the program at Christmas 1999. Essentially, we're dealing with the same dollars, which means there is less.

Michael Shapcott, Wellesley Institute

I can speak for my area of expertise, which is homelessness and the [H]omelessness [P]artnering [S]trategy, which is actually working very well. I must say there are lots of compliments for this program. For the last ten years it has been not only the only program in the country that addresses specifically homelessness, but it is distributed in consultation with the community and it's praised for its innovative model.

[...]

There are some points of criticism in regard to the program. One of them is the short-term nature of it, which makes strategic planning impossible.

Claudia Jahn, Community Action on Homelessness

Through the federal government and under the [H]omelessness [P]artnering [S]trategy, it's not a problem to get money to build a new shelter. Grace House, our women's shelter, was opened in 2001. There was some money through the old SCPI program. You can get projects and extra funding in projects to go on, but we can't get operational funding, which would allow us to be able to help coordinate those activities for individuals.

Brian Duplessis, Fredericton Homeless Shelters

b. Affordable Housing Initiative

The CMHC operates an Affordable Housing Centre that provides information and financial assistance to individual organizations interested in creating affordable housing. The bulk of federal investments in this area, however, are channelled through the Affordable Housing Initiative (AHI). Under the AHI program, federal and provincial/territorial governments work together through bilateral agreements to fund off reserve affordable housing on a cost-shared basis. During the first two phases of the AHI, announced in 2001 and 2003, \$1 billion in federal funding was committed. As a result of this funding, matched by provinces, territories and other groups, 44,175 new affordable housing units had been announced or committed as of September 2009. Unfortunately, the Committee heard that some regions of the country are unable to benefit from AHI funding to the same extent as others due to variations in housing construction costs.

The affordable housing initiative is very difficult to implement in Yukon. The current program allows for 50-50 cost-sharing up to a maximum of \$75,000 per unit. However, it costs approximately \$300,000 to build a new unit in Yukon. Instead of a 50-50 partnership, it becomes a 25-75 relationship, plus Yukon is responsible for all lifetime O and M [operations and maintenance] costs associated with the unit.

Don Routledge, Yukon Housing Corporation

c. Affordable Housing Sector

The Committee understands that the private housing market often does not provide accommodation at a price that is affordable to low-income Canadians and that government support for the affordable housing sector is crucial. In addition to AHF funding, the federal government spends about \$1.7 billion annually to assist provinces and territories with the maintenance and management of existing affordable housing stock.⁷⁶⁵ Numerous witnesses expressed concern, however, that with the expiration of long-term social housing agreements over the next few decades, thousands of affordable housing units that currently receive support from the federal government are at risk of disappearing.

At issue is the fact that federal long-term social housing operating agreements and the mortgages attached to them have begun to expire. Over the next 10 years, the pace of these expiries will accelerate dramatically and the process will continue ever more rapidly until 2030, after which only a few mortgages will remain. One of the implications of this is that the financial viability of many housing projects will be compromised when the mortgages expire. In many instances, the projects will have maintenance and operating needs beyond that which current rent levels can cover. Rents will need to rise for low income tenants, who cannot afford to pay more, and many will likely be forced to vacate their homes.

A second implication is that as these mortgages expire, savings to the federal treasury will not necessarily be reinvested in affordable housing, as policy currently stands, representing a net loss to a sector that is already vastly underfunded. This, in turn, will result in an exacerbation of already dire core housing need and instances of homelessness.

Geoff Gillard, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association

There are some 650,000 units of affordable housing in this country that have been developed in the post-war period. Most of it has been developed under federal programs of one kind or another. That's an enormous asset legacy, and we think it should be preserved, and we think its affordability should be preserved. The funding agreements that provide affordability in those programs are starting to come to an end, and they're going to come to an end in very large numbers over the next 10 to 15 years.

[...]

If you're hearing the message from anyone, whether it's a crown corporation or anyone else, that these housing providers are going to be okay after these funding agreements end, then you're hearing about a very rose-coloured picture. Some might be; most won't be. Most providers will not be able to provide the level of affordability in their housing that they're offering now.... Again, we're not saying more money needs to go on the table; we're saying maintain the existing parliamentary allocations at their present level.

Nicholas Gazzard, Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada

Some of these agreements have already ended. The worst is yet to come, and even so people have been calling us recently and telling us that their rent has been increased because of the lack of federal subsidies. I think that the federal government absolutely must settle this issue immediately. The existing agreements must be extended for another 35 years, if necessary. It would not cost a single cent more than the current funding. It would just be a matter of maintaining the current funding.

François Saillant, Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain

The preservation of Canada's existing stock of affordable housing is an important first step to strengthening this sector of the housing system. In order to accomplish this, the Committee encourages the government to maintain current levels of spending on affordable housing and provide additional funding as needed.

Recommendation 5.2.1

The Committee recommends that the federal government commit to preserving Canada's existing affordable housing stock, which is at risk with the upcoming expiration of long-term social housing agreements. Current levels of spending on affordable housing must increase, with additional funding provided as needed.

d. Homeowner Residential Rehabilitation and Assistance Program

The federal government also offers a variety of financial assistance programs to homeowners and landlords for renovations and upgrades to existing housing occupied by low-income households. These programs help preserve the quality of Canada's affordable housing stock. The Homeowner Residential Rehabilitation and Assistance Program (RRAP) allows low-income homeowners living in substandard housing to complete mandatory home repairs generally related to heating, structural, electrical, plumbing and fire safety components. Assistance takes the form of a fully forgivable loan, the amount of which varies by geographic region with homeowners in the far north eligible for as much as \$24,000. Similar programs support housing improvements for low-income seniors and low-income people with disabilities, and funding is also available for improvements to multi-unit facilities such as rooming houses and shelters. These programs are cost-shared by the federal and provincial/territorial governments and are delivered by the provinces/territories in most jurisdictions. ⁷⁷⁰ The Committee was told that, while the RRAPs are beneficial programs, more funding is needed in order to meet the need that exists.

We applaud the federal government's residential rehabilitation assistance program, which offers financial assistance to low-income homeowners for repairs. This program helps people who live in substandard dwellings and cannot afford to pay for necessary repairs. Some of Lookout's housing, though, can be called below par, yet we've been unable to access RRAP funding. RRAP is an excellent program, but it needs more resources.

Irene Jaakson, Lookout Emergency Aid Society

e. Recent Funding Announcements

The federal government recently announced additional funding for housing- and homelessness-related programs. In September 2008, \$1.9 billion was committed over five years to extend housing and homelessness programs for low-income households, an investment of \$387.9 million per year.⁷⁷² The HPS, AHI and RRAP initiatives, which were originally set to expire in 2009, were consequently renewed until March 31, 2011.

In Budget 2009, *Canada's Economic Action Plan*, the federal government also committed to spending \$1 billion over two years for the renovation and retrofit of existing social housing. It is estimated that 200,000 units will become more accessible and energy efficient with this investment, which will be provided on a cost-shared basis with the provinces and territories. Budget 2009 also committed new funding over the next two years for social housing for seniors (\$400 million), persons with disabilities (\$75 million), and First Nations people living on reserve (\$400 million), as well as areas in the North (\$200 million). In addition, it promised \$2 billion over two years for low-cost loans to municipalities for housing-related infrastructure. Witnesses praised these housing related investments. They also expressed concern,

however, that the new funding does little to meet the level of demand for affordable housing across the country and is not being delivered quickly enough.

We were very pleased to see the investment in affordable housing in the last budget: the \$1 billion for social housing, the \$1.9 billion to the affordable housing agreements, the additional billions that were spent for housing on reserves and in the north and for seniors, and the \$75 million for housing for disability. All those are very significant, and we have supported that and said this is an essential part of our social infrastructure.

Sherri Torjman, Caledon Institute of Social Policy

Concerning the budget for the programs and their renewal, we hailed the fact that funding had been allocated for new social housing. However, we must take into account the limited opportunities that it represents. If we add the various amounts for the announcements made in the fall, the extension of the affordable housing initiative and the provisions of the new budget, we see that this funding will allow the Government of Québec to subsidize 2,600 units over two years. Yet Québec currently has 448,000 tenant households that are paying rent that is above the standard

François Saillant, Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain

The Committee believes that the federal government's main housing-related programs, the HPS, AHI and RRAP, are essential to Canada's housing system. These programs provide a range of housing-related benefits to low-income households and the homeless. The Committee applauds the government's decision to extend these programs to 2011 but is concerned that the two-year timeframe continues to limit the effectiveness of the programs. Numerous witnesses recommended that the government increase funding for these programs and extend them beyond the current commitment.

We would like to see permanent funding and increases for the homelessness prevention initiative and the residential rehabilitation assistance program. We think these should be permanent. They are good, effective programs.

Patricia Smiley, South Etobicoke Social Reform Committee

Coming back to the [H]omelessness [P]artnering [S]trategy, I would like to add, as I mentioned before, that the short-term nature of the program has to be looked at. The allocated funds are certainly not enough. We received just over \$3 million over two years. It has been the same amount for the last 10 years. And the administrative burden on the non-profits to apply to and report on this program are just too high.

Claudia Jahn, Community Action on Homelessness

But again, some of the programs, especially the ones attached to the economic stimulus, have a short-term timeframe, so we need to get on with the delivery of the programs. Instead of having short-term program timelines, we strongly urge the federal government to have a longer-term vision in mind so that groups can operate more effectively over time.

Gary Glauser, New Brunswick Non-Profit Housing Association

It is also the Committee's view that stable, long-term program funding would better serve Canadians by allowing funding recipients to plan for the future. We urge the government to fund these programs on a permanent basis, with funding increases as necessary to ensure that the programs respond appropriately to the needs of Canada's housing system.

Recommendation 5.2.2

The Committee recommends that the federal government fund the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, the Affordable Housing Initiative and the

Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program on a permanent basis, and regularly review funding levels to ensure that the programs meet the housing needs of Canadians.

The Committee welcomes the recent federal investment of \$2.75 billion in social housing announced in Budget 2009. This investment includes funding for the renovation and retrofit of existing social housing and targets the social housing needs of seniors, people with disabilities, Aboriginal people, and areas in the North. The Committee calls on the federal government to ensure that this new funding is promptly delivered so that it can immediately assist those in need. The housing situation of these target groups should also be monitored closely, with additional funding provided as needed to fully address their housing needs.

... CHRA [Canadian Housing and Renewal Association] asks the Government of Canada to closely monitor stimulus spending on housing to ensure that the programs are meeting their objectives and that the budgets are fully allocated. Should signs of difficulty appear in rolling out that funding, we would call on the federal government to identify the issues early and address them, because we have a short timeframe here to make a big difference with this money.

Geoff Gillard, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association

Recommendation 5.2.3

The Committee recommends that the federal government ensure that the measures announced in Budget 2009 for the construction of social housing units for low-income seniors, people with disabilities, Aboriginal people, and areas of the North are promptly delivered. The housing situation of these target groups should be monitored closely, and the need for more funding should be regularly assessed.

The Committee believes that social housing must be accessible to all Canadians, and was troubled to learn that the design of many affordable units does not accommodate the needs of people with disabilities as well as the elderly, who represent a growing segment of the population. The Committee suggests that the federal government promote adherence to universal design principles in the construction or retrofit of social housing by including in all funding agreements the requirement that a certain percentage of units be fully accessible. In addition, universal design principles should be actively encouraged in the design of all new infrastructure developments. By adopting these measures, the federal government can play an important role in promoting adequate, affordable housing for Canadians with disabilities.

Until the money that is provided through the [H]omelessness [P]artnering [S]trategy, and earlier through NHI [National Homelessness Initiative], has accessibility and access principles attached, what will happen is that we will continue to spend fantastic, phenomenal amounts of money, thank you very much, and make investments in housing that is not accessible.

Marie White, Council of Canadians with Disabilities

When the province or the federal government gives money for building any kind of infrastructure, all of that infrastructure has to be accessible to people with disabilities.

Bev Matthiessen, Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities

[E]nsure that housing units where federal investment is made include at least 15% of units that are universally designed...

Courtney Keenan, Canadian Paraplegic Association

Recommendation 5.2.4

The Committee recommends that all federal funding agreements for the construction or retrofit of social housing include a requirement that a certain percentage of units respect universal design principles. The federal government should also actively promote the importance of opting for a universal design in all new infrastructures.

The federal government must demonstrate leadership on housing and homelessness issues and make these a priority in any national plan to reduce poverty. Over the course of its hearings, the Committee was alerted to a variety of improvements that could be made to the federal government's housing-related programs in order to better assist Canadians facing housing affordability challenges or experiencing homelessness. Many of these could be implemented in the short term to provide immediate housing assistance to low-income Canadians.

While the immediate need for adequate, affordable housing in Canada was apparent in the Committee's hearings, so too was the necessity of long-term strategic planning in order to ensure that the housing system responds to the needs of all Canadians in the future. The idea of a national housing strategy for Canada is not new. It was recommended by the UN Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Mr. Miloon Kothari, after visiting Canada in 2007. In his report "the Special Rapporteur calls for Canada to adopt a comprehensive and coordinated housing policy based on indivisibility of human right and the protection of the most vulnerable.

This national strategy would include measurable goals and timetables, consultation and collaboration with affected communities, complaints procedures, and transparent accountability mechanisms".⁷⁸⁵ Numerous witnesses also underscored the importance of a national housing strategy to poverty reduction efforts and implored the federal government to take action on this issue.

Many times over history in our country, the federal government has had to take a lead and implement a strategy to resolve a national problem. I suggest that the time is here. At the top of this strategy must be a provision for affordable housing for all Canadians.

Without affordable housing, a person cannot gain their dignity, improve their diet, manage their own health and mental health, get a job, or get up in the morning to get to that job, let alone receive the care they need for things as critical as a heart transplant.

Robert Lundrigan, Salvation Army

We need new affordable housing and we need a public intervention to see that getting it happens. That requires an integrated strategy involving the federal, provincial, and territorial governments working in cooperation with each other to reduce housing need. Housing is a federal issue because it's a national problem, and that's why we believe the federal government needs to take the lead on it.

Nicholas Gazzard, Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada

First, underlying the case for the development of a national housing policy framework is the need to match the scope and depth of our response to the scope of the need that exists. We currently invest a great deal of money in this country in affordable housing, but we do so without a plan, without a framework ... which would really allow us to measure results and really tie investments to outcomes.

This is something that we really call on you to have addressed, not just at the federal level, but also by your provincial, territorial, and municipal counterparts.

Geoff Gillard, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association

A cornerstone of any federal anti-poverty strategy or poverty reduction strategy must include a national housing plan that includes substantial federal funding for social housing and a means for holding provinces and territories accountable for delivering social housing. There is a role for the federal government.

Maylanne Maybee, Canadian Council of Churches

We must establish a national housing strategy with clear targets and timelines aimed at ensuring that every resident of Canada has access to housing that is safe, healthy, dignified, and truly affordable. We've seen the difference that housing makes in people's lives. If we don't have housing, I don't see how we're going to be able to reduce poverty in Canada. We're really looking for leadership from our federal government to establish a national housing strategy.

Tim Dickau, Salsbury Community Society

The Committee believes that all Canadians have a right to adequate shelter and that a comprehensive, long-term national housing strategy is essential to making this a reality. The Committee was told that the federal government must work with its provincial and territorial counterparts, as well as municipalities, service providers and other stakeholders, to develop and implement a housing strategy that includes measurable goals and timelines, reporting requirements, and accountability mechanisms. The strategy should include a plan to tackle homelessness based on the Housing First model. It should also provide for sustained funding for affordable housing aimed at building mixed communities and increasing the quantity, quality and variety of housing options such as transitional housing, supportive housing, co-operative housing, and non-profit housing.

Where low-income households cannot access affordable housing, it should provide for assistance such as rent supplements, shelter allowances and subsidies. Finally, the strategy should include provisions for collecting and sharing best practices.

Implementing a national housing strategy would demonstrate the federal government's commitment to housing as a basic right of all Canadians and represent a key contribution to the fight against poverty in Canada. A national housing strategy should be a government priority and should be enshrined in legislation. In fall 2009, the Committee reviewed Bill C-304, *An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians*. If passed, this Private Members' Bill would require the federal government to establish a national housing strategy that fulfills many of the priorities outlined above.

Recommendation 5.2.5

The Committee recommends that the federal government, in collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, municipalities, service providers and other stakeholders, develop a comprehensive, long-term national housing strategy. The strategy should address the problem of homelessness, as well as the need for adequate and affordable housing in Canada, with the goal of providing a range of housing solutions to meet the needs of Canada's diverse population. It should provide for sustained funding to tackle these issues and include measurable goals, timelines, and accountability mechanisms.