

## Raise the (welfare) rent, inner-city advocates say

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This fall, housing activists want the Manitoba government to do something it hasn't done since the New Kids on the Block topped the charts: Boost what welfare pays for rent.

A new lobbying effort, the latest in a years-long fight, is afoot to convince the Selinger government to hike the basic housing allowance given to welfare recipients, many of whom are disabled and can't work. That rate stands at \$285 a month, an amount largely unchanged since 1992 and only a fraction of what it costs to secure a decent apartment in Winnipeg's tight rental market. Inner-city housing experts say it's the single biggest thing the province could do to improve the slum housing crisis.

So far, agencies from inner-city non-profits to more conservative business and real estate groups have signed on to a campaign led by [Make Poverty History Manitoba](#). They are asking for a commitment in this fall's throne speech to boost the housing allowance, and real cash in next spring's budget.

"The increase in rent has just really gotten out of pace and that gap is really having an effect on people," said Marianne Cerilli, the policy and program analyst at the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, which is also working on the campaign.

About 35,000 Manitobans are on income assistance and roughly 60 per cent of those are part of the disability program and are unable to work. Most of the rest are single mothers.

Advocates want the province to return to its pre-1992 policy of pegging welfare's housing allocation to 75 per cent of average rents. In Winnipeg, that would boost the basic monthly amount to \$522 from \$285 for a one-bedroom. That increase would cost taxpayers about \$19 million more a year.

The welfare allocation would still be about \$200 below average rents, but it's a practical, politically doable improvement, advocates say.

For more on this story, [click here](#).

For the [Make Poverty History campaign](#), [click here](#).

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