

Rent hikes loom for thousands

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It's being billed as Winnipeg's next housing crisis -- the slow expiry of hundreds of federal housing grants that could mean rent hikes for thousands of poor Manitobans.

The grants, which date back to the 1980s and early 1990s, have already begun to expire, and could affect as many as 17,000 units built and managed by non-profit housing agencies. Another 17,000 Manitoba Housing units built with federal help a generation ago are also affected.

It's a national problem that has received little attention.

Already, about \$10 million in federal housing money has evaporated from the province, one apartment block or seniors home at a time. By 2018, that dollar figure will double. That has housing advocates and the provincial government worried rents will spike, affordable units will shrink and Winnipeg's housing shortage will worsen.

"It just means losing a huge public resource that we need way more of, not less," said Clark Brownlee of Winnipeg's Right to Housing group. "It's grim."

Lawrence Poirier, manager of Kinew Housing, said his organization will lose federal subsidies for 380 units by 2017, and has already had to turn to the province for help. He said expiry of the federal subsidy was part of the funding agreements signed years ago with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp., so it's difficult to criticize the federal government now. But the result is a scramble for cash among city housing agencies.

"It's a big issue," said Poirier. "I refer to it as the next housing crisis."

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