



National Housing and Homelessness Network

November 30, 2004

Submission to: Federal-provincial-territorial housing ministers' meeting

1. Introduction: A national partnership of housing and homelessness groups

The National Housing and Homelessness Network (NHHN) is a partnership of provincial and local housing and homelessness advocates and groups from Vancouver to St. John's. The network was formed in March of 1999. Provincial partners include the Front d'Action Populaire in Quebec (FRAPRU), British Columbia Housing and Homelessness Network, Housing and Homelessness Network in Ontario, plus local groups in more than two dozen cities across the country. Our key allies include the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, National Aboriginal Housing Association, National Working Group on Women and Housing and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada. We connect globally through the Habitat International Coalition.

Our shared goal is the One Percent Solution - \$2 billion in funding for new social housing and related programs from the federal government, with matching funds from the provinces and territories. A renewed national housing program will include both capital dollars to get the homes built and rent-geared-to-income subsidies (or rent supplements) to make sure that the housing is affordable to low and moderate-income households.

The NHHN has had a strong presence at every recent federal-provincial-territorial housing ministers' meetings – Fredericton (2000), London (2001), Quebec City (2001) and Winnipeg (2003). We regularly meet with Ministers and housing officials, present research and analysis, press for solutions and organize public events, including forums and rallies. The NHHN has organized around pre-budget hearings, budgets, Throne Speeches and other political events.

2. Our common messages with our national allies

1. Communities have the skills and experience to help the provincial and federal governments achieve the goal of safe, decent and affordable shelter for Canadians.

Meeting local housing needs happens locally. As municipalities, non-profit housing providers, co-operatives, Aboriginal housing agencies and other community-based organizations, our

indispensable know-how and local expertise is what we have to contribute. Without engaging our sector's on-the-ground ability to deliver, we will not make progress in meeting our goals.

2. The housing needs of low-income Canadians are greater than ever.

According to CMHC, an estimated 1.7 million households are living in inadequate housing or are paying an unreasonable amount for shelter. This compares to 1.3 million households when Prime Minister Paul Martin and Housing Minister Joe Fontana wrote their ground-breaking housing policy paper in 1990. This high level of need means governments must work towards the goal of returning to the pre-1990 annual production of 25,000 units of primarily non-profit housing.

3. The federal government – both in its overall fiscal framework and within the housing envelope – has the means to deliver on its \$1.5 billion new housing commitment in the February 2005 budget.

The government can count on a solid majority in Parliament when it moves forward with its electoral commitment to invest a further \$1.5 billion to expand the supply of affordable housing. The government's overall fiscal framework and CMHC's surplus allow the government to meet this commitment plus continuing current funding for successful programs like RRAP and SCPI. The expiry of social housing operating agreements will also provide growing resources over the next three decades to keep current units viable and affordable while also expanding the affordable housing stock.

4. We need practical and innovative solutions that deliver real results.

We must learn from the strengths and weaknesses of the current Affordable Housing Initiative, which grew out of the 2001 Quebec City meeting. It is important to develop new and improved delivery mechanisms that will ensure that municipalities, community organizations, non-profit housing providers and co-operatives have access to the resources they need to meet local needs, including a rent supplement program that gives priority to existing and future non-profit housing. We urge the federal government to continue to work with First Nation, Metis, and Inuit to develop a national Aboriginal housing strategy, which addresses the housing needs of Aboriginal people regardless of where they live. All of these initiatives require on-going stable funding to achieve sustainable and lasting results.

3. Women and housing: National housing policy must be inclusive of women

The National Working Group on Women and Housing is a partner with the National Housing and Homelessness Network. Low-income women in Canada encounter the most severe housing disadvantage in Canada. This disadvantage is caused by a number of factors such as:

- women's poverty;
- systemic discrimination and inequality across the housing sector;
- women's over-representation as sole support households; and
- a shortage of affordable housing.

Women's experiences of housing crises and homelessness are different than men's. For example, for most women, living on the street is not an option because on the streets women invariably suffer physical violence and/or risk having their children apprehended. Most women will do anything to stay off the streets. As a result, women are often compelled to continue living with a violent spouse or family member because they have no other housing options. Many women, particularly racialized women and single mothers in receipt of social assistance, also experience widespread discrimination in the housing sector.

Women's housing disadvantage is inextricably linked with women's poverty. According to Statistics Canada approximately 19% of adult women in Canada are poor. These statistics are even more alarming when focused on particular groups of women. For example, close to 75% of Aboriginal single mothers live in poverty.

To address women's housing disadvantage and women's poverty, the NWG supports the recommendations of the National Housing and Homelessness Network and further calls on the federal government to adopt a national housing policy that is inclusive of women. A national housing policy that is inclusive of women must, at a minimum:

- establish national standards to ensure the housing needs of women are fully accounted for in the design, implementation, monitoring and enforcement of policies and programs related to housing and income support programs;
- ensure an adequate supply of social housing and ensure that new supply is allocated in a manner that ensures access for those most in need;
- incorporate and uphold principles of equality and non-discrimination in all aspects.

A more detailed statement from NWG is included as an appendix to this submission.

4. Painfully slow progress in meeting commitments of November 2001 agreement

The federal, provincial and territorial governments signed the Affordable Housing Framework Agreement in November of 2001. While there has been some positive momentum in year three of the Affordable Housing Program, the progress in implementing the commitments made by senior levels of government three years ago is painfully slow. The federal government announced additional funding for the Affordable Housing Program in February of 2003 and, to date, only Quebec has signed a bilateral housing deal with the federal government to implement phase two of AHP.

The provincial and territorial governments are required to prepare audited annual financial statements and performance reports as part of the accountability mechanism of the AHP. Despite repeated requests from NHHN, none of these reports has been released publicly. Therefore, the network has prepared – once again – our own report card which represents our best efforts at assessing progress made by senior levels of government in implementing phase one and phase two of AHP. The report card is attached as an appendix to this document.

We have six important observations based on our analysis:

The good news: Our report card shows that the **AHP has funded more than 10,500 affordable homes for as many as 30,000 women, men and children** across Canada. The ramp-up has been considerable in 2004, with more than three times the number of new homes funded this year as in 2003. This is substantial progress, considering the huge cutbacks in housing funding at the federal level and in most provinces and territories during the 1990s. The results confirm that a combination of effective political pressure at the national level along with the smart and creative efforts of community-based housing providers across the country can solve our nation-wide affordable housing crisis and homelessness disaster. In addition to the new homes, the AHP has generated jobs (directly in construction and induced in related sectors) and significant community benefits, along with federal, provincial and municipal taxes.

More good news: **Quebec is the first province to sign onto phase two of AHP** in August of 2003, agreeing to match \$75 million in new federal affordable housing funding with matching provincial dollars.

Bad news #1: The **progress is painfully short of the goal set by federal, provincial and territorial governments** when they signed the Affordable Housing Framework Agreement in November 2001. Three years into the program, the worst culprits are Ontario (where the provincial government still hasn't honoured its commitment to match federal dollars) and the Atlantic provinces (especially Newfoundland and Labrador, which has failed to fund a single new home over the past three years).

Bad news #2: British Columbia has ploughed most of the AHP dollars into seniors supportive housing and assisted housing for those with physical disabilities. There is no doubt that there is a significant need for housing for this group, but B.C. has cut provincial spending in this area and replaced it with AHP money. The Affordable Housing Framework Agreement stipulates: "This initiative needs to create affordable housing for low to moderate income households." **The housing needs of one group of needy people should not be set against the housing needs of another group of needy people.**

Bad news #3: In most provinces, **housing spending continues to be well below the levels of the early 1990s**, when the major cuts started. Some provinces have continued to cut provincial housing spending, even after they agreed in November 2001 to match new federal housing dollars. The federal government housing spending is also projected to drop by 13% over the next four years. New spending is required in all provinces, territories and at the federal level.

Bad news #4: **A significant number of the new "affordable" units aren't affordable at all.** In Ontario, more than half the new units will only be affordable to the richest one-third of tenant households. The funding under the AHP should be targeted to a comprehensive social housing program that includes capital subsidies AND rent supplements (rent-geared-to-income subsidies for low-income households).