



Discussion Paper:

A Human Rights-Based Approach to Housing



A message from the Minister



The Government of Canada believes all Canadians deserve access to housing that meets their needs and that they can afford. But many Canadians either don't have a home of their own or are living in housing that is unaffordable, unsafe or inadequate for their needs.

That's why the Government has committed to progressively develop and implement a human rights-based approach to housing in Canada.

A human rights-based approach to housing is one that focuses on ensuring that every Canadian has access to a safe and affordable place to call home. It is an approach that is integrally linked to other essential issues Canadians are facing today, like homelessness, poverty and the need to create opportunities for all Canadians to thrive. It is also an approach that is grounded in the core principles of inclusion, accountability, participation and non-discrimination.

On National Housing Day - November 22, 2017 - the federal government took an additional historic step towards the realization of a human rights-based approach to housing when we launched Canada's first ever National Housing Strategy. The National Housing Strategy is a comprehensive \$40-billion plan that will fuel our economy, strengthen the middle class and create inclusive, sustainable homes and communities where we can all grow and prosper.

Over the next 10 years, the Strategy sets ambitious targets to ensure that unprecedented investments and new programming deliver results. It will take bold action to cut chronic homelessness in half and help meet the housing needs of the most vulnerable Canadians. In short, the National Housing Strategy will make a real and lasting difference in people's lives.

Now, we are building on this historic milestone by introducing several bold new initiatives that will continue to take a human rights-based approach in Canada's housing policies, programs and legislation.

This year, we will be introducing a bill that will require the federal government to maintain the National Housing Strategy, and report regularly to Canadians on progress in realizing its key targets and outcomes.

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation will also establish a new Federal Housing Advocate and National Housing Council to help shape our housing policies and programs, and address the systemic barriers that many Canadians still face in accessing affordable housing.

We will create a Community-Based Tenant Initiative to promote more inclusive communities and build greater awareness of the challenges facing people who live in community housing and other vulnerable groups. We will also work to reduce stigma and discrimination in housing.

But we can't do it alone. We need to work with our partners in the provinces and territories, municipalities, the private and non-profit sectors, Indigenous organizations, and many others across the country who share our vision for a healthier, stronger Canada where everyone has a place to call home.

We want to hear your views on key principles of a human rights-based approach to housing, and what maintaining a National Housing Strategy for now and into the future means to you. We also want to hear your ideas on additional concepts related to this approach. By making sure your voice is heard, we can continue to improve the homes and lives of Canadians over the next decade, and for generations to come.



The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos

Minister of Families, Children and Social Development

ABOUT THIS PAPER

We want to hear your thought and views. This paper is meant to spark conversation and outline some of the key concepts and milestones that the Government is considering as it continues to realize a human rights-based approach to housing. It will be used to guide our consultations, but can also be used by community groups to organize discussions and generate submissions, which can be shared through the *Place to Call Home* website.

This paper will be supplemented by expert idea papers, which will be posted on the website and shared at roundtables that will be held to further stimulate dialogue.

Working together for Canadians

Canada is one of 166 countries around the world that is a party to the *United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)*. Canada has committed to take steps to progressively realize the right to adequate housing as part of an adequate standard of living for our citizens. To find out more about the ICESCR, download or read a copy of the [Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing](#).

In Canada, the funding of housing programs has long been a shared responsibility. The federal government works closely with its provincial and territorial partners to improve access to housing and meet the housing needs of Canadians.

Many provincial and territorial governments have taken steps to promote a human rights-based approach to housing, including initiatives like passing Tenancy Acts.

In addition to the provinces and territories, CMHC is working with municipalities, the private and non-profit sectors, Indigenous groups and other stakeholders who share our goal of stimulating new approaches to housing in Canada. The National Housing Strategy will build on these and other measures to help make sure Canadians have access to suitable and affordable housing, regardless of who they are or where they choose to live.

No relationship is more important to the Government of Canada than its relationship with Indigenous peoples. Indigenous leaders have told us that there is a pressing need to co-develop federally supported and distinctions-based First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation housing strategies, which are founded in the principles of self-determination, reconciliation, respect and co-operation. We agree, because the status quo is unacceptable.

In Budget 2018, the Government proposed dedicated funding to support the successful implementation of each of the distinctions-based housing strategies.

In addition, in February 2018, the Prime Minister announced the launch of a national engagement process with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and other partners to develop a Recognition of Indigenous Rights Framework.

To find out more about the engagement process that is now underway, please visit www.canada.ca/indigenous-rights.

The National Housing Strategy: a human rights-based approach to housing

In November 2017, the Government launched Canada's first ever National Housing Strategy, a transformative vision for housing. Following extensive consultations, the National Housing Strategy was developed as a key step in progressively realizing the internationally recognized right to adequate housing in Canada. We want to sustain a National Housing Strategy now and into the future.

A Vision for Housing in Canada

The vision of the National Housing Strategy is to ensure Canadians have access to housing that meets their needs and they can afford. Affordable housing is a cornerstone of sustainable, inclusive communities and a Canadian economy where we can prosper and thrive.



The National Housing Strategy sets out bold outcomes and targets to help lift Canadians from housing need, to repair, renew and build more housing units, to provide households with affordability support, to protect and expand community housing and to reduce the number of persons who are chronically homeless by 50%.

National Housing Strategy Targets



100,000

new housing units created representing **4x** as many units built under federal programs from 2005 to 2015*



300,000

existing housing units repaired and renewed representing **3x** as many units repaired and renewed under federal programs from 2005 to 2015*



385,000

community housing units protected and another **50,000** created through an expansion of community housing



50%

reduction in estimated number of chronically homeless



530,000

households removed from housing need



300,000

households provided with affordability support through the Canada Housing Benefit

* Compared to units built and repaired through the Affordable Housing Initiative (AHI), Renovation Programs and the Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH).

While the National Housing Strategy covers a spectrum of housing needs, it prioritizes those in greatest need, reinforcing a human rights-based approach to housing. Through our extensive consultations with thousands of Canadians, the message was clear: Canadians want better housing outcomes not just for themselves, but for low-income families and other vulnerable groups with

distinct housing needs. These views were captured in the November 22, 2016, *What We Heard* report (http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2017/edsc-esdc/Em12-30-2016-eng.pdf).

Canadians also agreed that the housing needs of people who are homeless, or in danger of becoming homeless, must be a priority. Inclusiveness means, first of all, helping people living at the margins of our society.

The National Housing Strategy represents an additional step forward in recognizing the federal government's efforts to progressively realize a right to adequate housing. It adopts a human rights-based approach to housing in Canada.

While there is no universal definition of what a human rights-based approach to housing means, or precisely what it entails, we have looked at guiding documents from the United Nations, and focused on the core principles of **Accountability**; **Participation**; **Non-discrimination**; and **Inclusion**.¹ These principles have served to guide a human rights-based approach to housing that is best suited for Canada and the needs of Canadians.

"Housing disadvantage is not distributed evenly across the population. Tenants experience a much higher rate of affordability problems and overcrowding than homeowners. Women, persons with disabilities, Indigenous people, racialized communities, immigrants and refugees, youth and older adults face a disproportionate risk of housing insecurity and homelessness. Systemic solutions to poverty depend on ensuring that people can access affordable housing and the appropriate supports to meet their needs."

- Excerpt from Report to the National Housing Strategy Consultations by Maytree, United Way Centraide Canada and the Lived Experience Advisory Council (2016)

¹ The Human Rights Based Approach to Development Cooperation: Towards a Common Understanding Among UN Agencies available online at: <http://hrbportal.org/the-human-rights-based-approach-to-development-cooperation-towards-a-common-understanding-among-un-agencies>; Frequently Asked Questions on a Human Rights Based Approach to Development Cooperation see pages 23-25, available, online at: <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FAQen.pdf>

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What are your thoughts on the core principles that guide our human rights-based approach to housing? Should other ideas and concepts be taken into consideration?

Share your thoughts at www.placetocallhome.ca

Elements of the human-rights based approach to housing are outlined in detail below:

The National Housing Strategy will create...

Accountability and Participation

New legislation will require the federal government to maintain a National Housing Strategy and report to Parliament on housing targets and outcomes

A new Federal Housing Advocate will examine and recommend to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the responsible Minister, solutions to systemic barriers that Canadians face in accessing affordable housing

Non-discrimination and Inclusion

A new National Housing Council with diverse participation — including those with lived experience of housing need—will provide Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the responsible Minister with ongoing input on policy, programming and research related to the National Housing Strategy

A new Community- Based Tenant Initiative will provide funding to local organizations which assist people in housing need, so that they are better represented and able to participate in housing policy and housing project decision-making

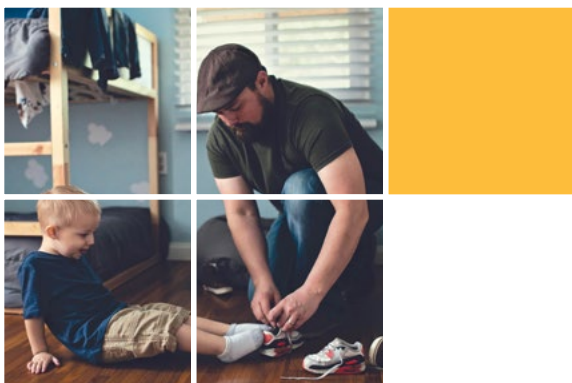
A new public engagement campaign will seek to reduce stigma and discrimination and highlight the benefits of inclusive communities and inclusive housing

1. New legislation

This year, building upon our consultations with Canadians, the Government of Canada will introduce a bill to promote a human rights-based approach to housing in Canada. Among other elements, the legislation would require the federal government to maintain a National Housing Strategy that prioritizes the housing needs of the most vulnerable Canadians both now and in the future. The National Housing Strategy is therefore embedded in our future, rather than being just a single event.

To allow for the flexibility needed to keep pace with the changing needs of Canadian families, the bill will not spell out every detail of the Strategy. But it would include such key elements as:

- a **long-term vision** that recognizes the importance of housing in achieving other social, economic, health and environmental goals;
- a set of **core priorities, principles and desired outcomes** related to housing in Canada;



- a focus on **improving specific, enumerated and measurable housing outcomes for those in greatest need**; and
- a series of mechanisms and processes to **encourage ongoing engagement** in the National Housing Strategy by all Canadians, including vulnerable groups, stakeholders and the general public.

“The effective monitoring of the implementation and outcomes of housing strategies is a firm obligation of States.”

Leilani Farha - UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing

The lack of appropriate housing options for people with diverse housing or support needs meant that many of them were forced to live in unhealthy, unsafe or undignified conditions. They also spoke about the importance of having a home that is affordable, healthy and stable—a place where the repairs are done on time, family can visit, and which provides peace and hope for the future.

“Nothing about us, without us.”

- Summary of Report to the National Housing Strategy Consultations by Maytree, United Way Centraide Canada and the Lived Experience Advisory Council (2016)

To ensure **full accountability** to Canadians, the bill would include a requirement for the Minister responsible for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) to provide a detailed **report to Parliament every three years** on Canada’s progress in achieving the National Housing Strategy’s primary outcomes and targets, starting in 2020.

These regular reports will keep the Government of Canada accountable and keep Canadians informed. They will also help shape any adjustments to the Strategy that are needed to reflect future changes in housing needs and priorities, and make sure we are on track to achieve better outcomes for Canadians.

2. A New Federal Housing Advocate

To ensure that those who will be most affected by the National Housing Strategy are involved in its ongoing development in a way that is both significant and meaningful, CMHC will appoint a new Federal Housing Advocate.

The Advocate will focus first and foremost on those Canadians who are in greatest need of assistance, by helping to identify systemic issues and barriers that many Canadians face in accessing a suitable or affordable place to live. This includes low-income individuals and families, people who are experiencing core housing need and homelessness, racialized and other vulnerable groups.

The Advocate will also provide advice to CMHC on how to address or eliminate systemic barriers, and help more Canadians access affordable housing. The Advocate will identify and propose solutions to systemic barriers through ongoing dialogue with those in greatest need.

A national call for interested candidates will be released in spring 2018 to find the most qualified person for the job. Visit www.placetocallhome.ca for more details.

3. A New National Housing Council

The Strategy will also establish a new National Housing Council to promote participation by a broader range of Canadians in Canada’s housing policies, and to support CMHC with the evolution of the National Housing Strategy, including the NHS research agenda.

The Council will be made up of people from a wide variety of backgrounds, including representatives from CMHC, our primary housing partners the provincial and territorial governments, municipalities, housing experts, researchers, and practitioners, Indigenous people, newcomers to Canada, and Canadians who have lived experience with housing need and homelessness. We are also committed to selecting a diverse gender-balanced group of members.

The National Housing Council is expected to begin its work before the end of 2018. An upcoming call for participants in the Council will be made this spring. Visit www.placetocallhome.ca for the latest news and announcements.

4. Community-Based Tenant Initiative

To promote more inclusive communities and build greater awareness of the challenges facing people who live in community housing and other vulnerable groups, a new Community-Based Tenant Initiative will be launched to provide funding to local organizations that help people in housing need.

The funding will also be available to local organizations that help tenants access information on their housing options, participate in on-site consultations for major new developments or improve financial literacy.



DID YOU KNOW?

About 1 in 8 Canadians require assistance to meet their housing needs. These include people who are homeless, recent immigrants, lone-parent families, seniors, persons with disabilities, Indigenous households and victims of family violence.

5. Public Engagement Campaign

Lastly, in 2020, CMHC will carry out a national public engagement campaign to inform public views about the different types and tenures of affordable housing that exist today, and support the development of more socially-inclusive housing projects in vibrant neighbourhoods. This will help to reduce or eliminate stigmatization and discrimination of low-income housing.

By addressing the effects of discrimination and exclusion in housing types and tenures, we will help ensure more Canadians have access to adequate housing and foster more inclusive homes and communities across the country.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What does the adoption of a human rights-based approach to housing mean to you? How can we measure Canada's progress in achieving the goals and outcomes set out in the National Housing Strategy?

Share your thoughts at www.placetocallhome.ca

Helping those in Greatest Need

In 2016, CMHC carried out an extensive consultation process on housing with Canadians, the provinces and territories, municipalities, housing stakeholders, Indigenous peoples and housing experts, as well as people with lived experience of housing need. The goal was to frame the challenges facing our housing system and gather as much input, innovative ideas and solutions from as many different sources as possible. This helped to clarify and define the vision, themes, principles and desired outcomes for the National Housing Strategy.

As a response, through the National Housing Strategy, the Government is taking the lead in addressing the specific housing needs of other vulnerable groups, such as homeless women, seniors, newcomers, women and children who are victims or at risk of family violence, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, veterans, at risk youth, the LGBTQ2 community and people who are dealing with mental health or addiction issues.

We recognize that housing is about more than shelter. It is intrinsically linked to a wide range of other key Canadian priorities, such as jobs and education, reducing poverty, protecting and preserving our environment, and creating opportunities for all Canadians to thrive. The Government of Canada has adopted a broad approach to achieving better social, economic and environmental outcomes in areas ranging from homelessness and poverty reduction to public safety, and community inclusion.

By working together, we will be able to tackle several priorities at once, have a greater impact in communities across the country, and help more

Canadians change their lives for the better. By taking action on a multi-year Strategy, we will also be able to make significant progress toward ending the cycles of poverty and homelessness, and improving housing outcomes for thousands of Canadians.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What else needs to be done to continue to realize a human rights-based approach to housing?
Are there best practices or approaches that you would like to share?

Share your thoughts at www.placetocallhome.ca

Next steps

The Government of Canada and CMHC are inviting and encouraging Canadians from all walks of life to share their thoughts and ideas on how we can work towards the progressive realization of a human rights-based approach to housing in Canada.

We particularly need to hear your thoughts on the proposed new legislation, because it would enshrine the National Housing Strategy into federal law and make the Government of Canada accountable for its outcomes.

In many ways, this approach needs to be unique, in order to reflect the particular nature of Canada, its regional differences and our multi-culturalism.

Following our consultations, CMHC will release another *What We Heard* report to summarize the feedback we received. Your thoughts and ideas will help shape our human rights-based approach to housing and guide the future evolution of the National Housing Strategy.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How can Canadians continue to participate in the National Housing Strategy?

Share your thoughts at www.placetocallhome.ca



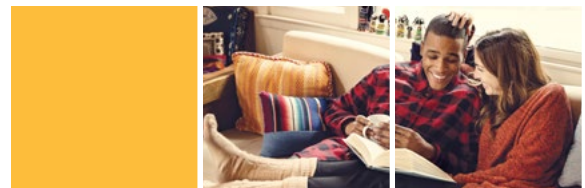
Make your voice heard

Public consultations on the National Housing Strategy's human rights-based approach to housing are now underway up until June 2018. To make your voice heard and help further a human rights-based approach to socially inclusive homes and communities in Canada, submit a written submission or share your thoughts and ideas by June 1, 2018 to the **A Place to Call Home website** at www.placetocallhome.ca.

This consultation phase will help to, in part, inform how the Government will ensure an ongoing dialogue on the human rights-based approach to housing, and to ensure that diverse voices are included in the discussion.

The home is the wellspring of personhood. When we try to understand ourselves, we often begin by considering the kind of home in which we were raised.

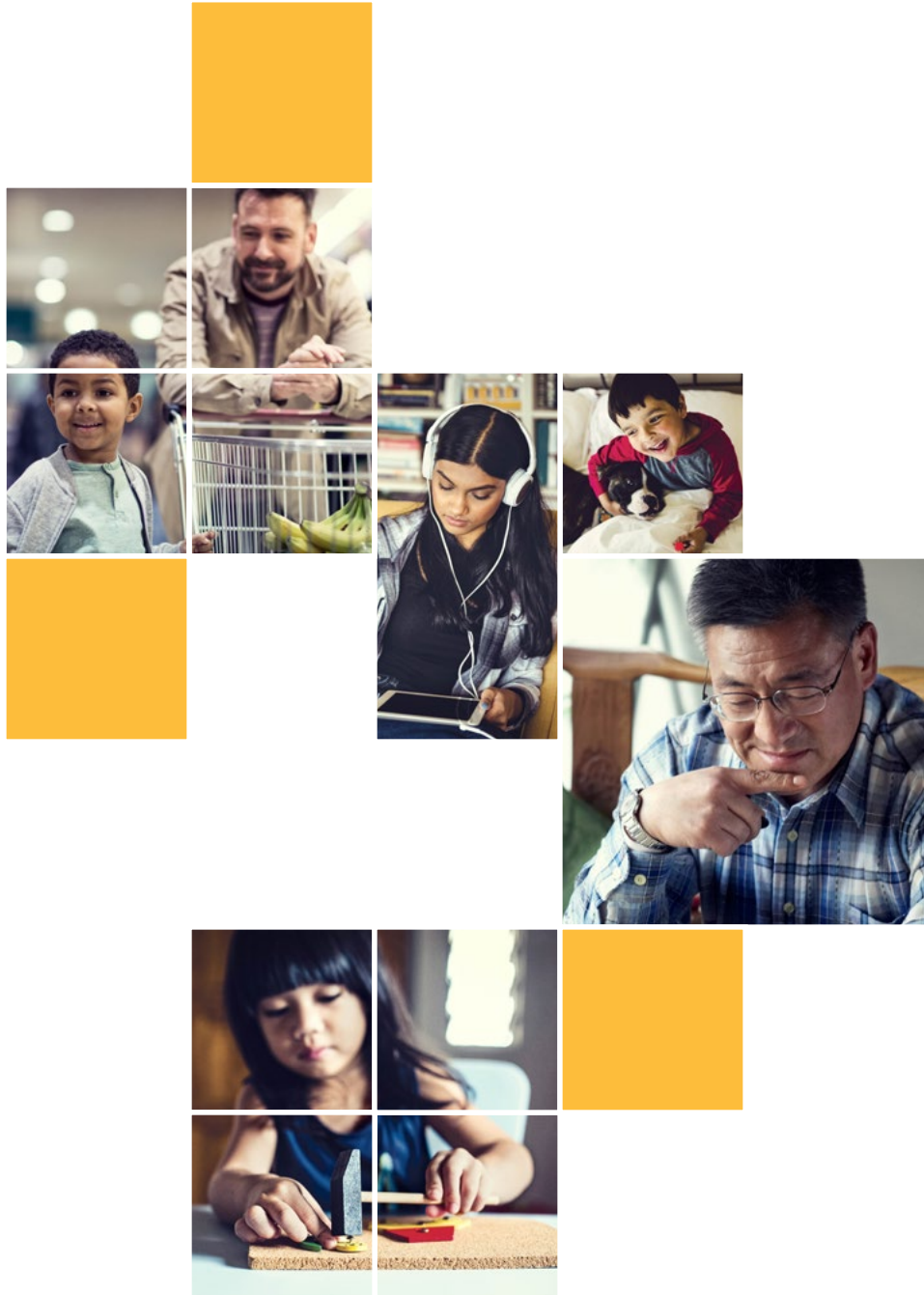
Matthew Desmond
Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City (2017)



Annex A

Potential Questions to Guide Community Discussion on a Human Rights-Based Approach to Housing

1. What do you like about the Government's human rights-based approach to housing?
2. What does the adoption of a human rights-based approach to housing mean to you?
3. What are your thoughts on the core principles that guide our human rights-based approach to housing?
4. What else needs to be done to continue to realize a human rights-based approach to housing? Should other ideas and concepts be taken into consideration?
5. Are there best practices or approaches in human rights-based approaches to housing in other jurisdictions or other policy areas that have been successful?
6. What should the Government do to ensure continuous engagement on and evaluation of its human rights-based approach to housing?



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