

Implementing the Human Right to Housing in Canada's National Housing Strategy

“Canadians deserve safe and affordable housing. That is why the federal government is taking these additional steps to progressively implement the right of every Canadian to access adequate housing. Our plan is grounded in the principles of inclusion, accountability, participation and non-discrimination, and will contribute to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and affirm the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.” The National Housing Strategy, November 2017

The federal government has announced a National Housing Strategy based on Canada's obligations under international human rights law to implement the right to housing. This is an historic opportunity, and the government is currently seeking feedback on how the National Housing Strategy (NHS) can embed this “rights-based approach” to housing in legislation.

In the early stages of these consultations, it has become clear that the government needs to hear from all of us that for the Housing Strategy to be truly rights-based, the legislation must include the key elements identified below.

Key elements of a rights-based National Housing Strategy

The NHS legislation should be based on Canada's obligations under international covenants and include the following:

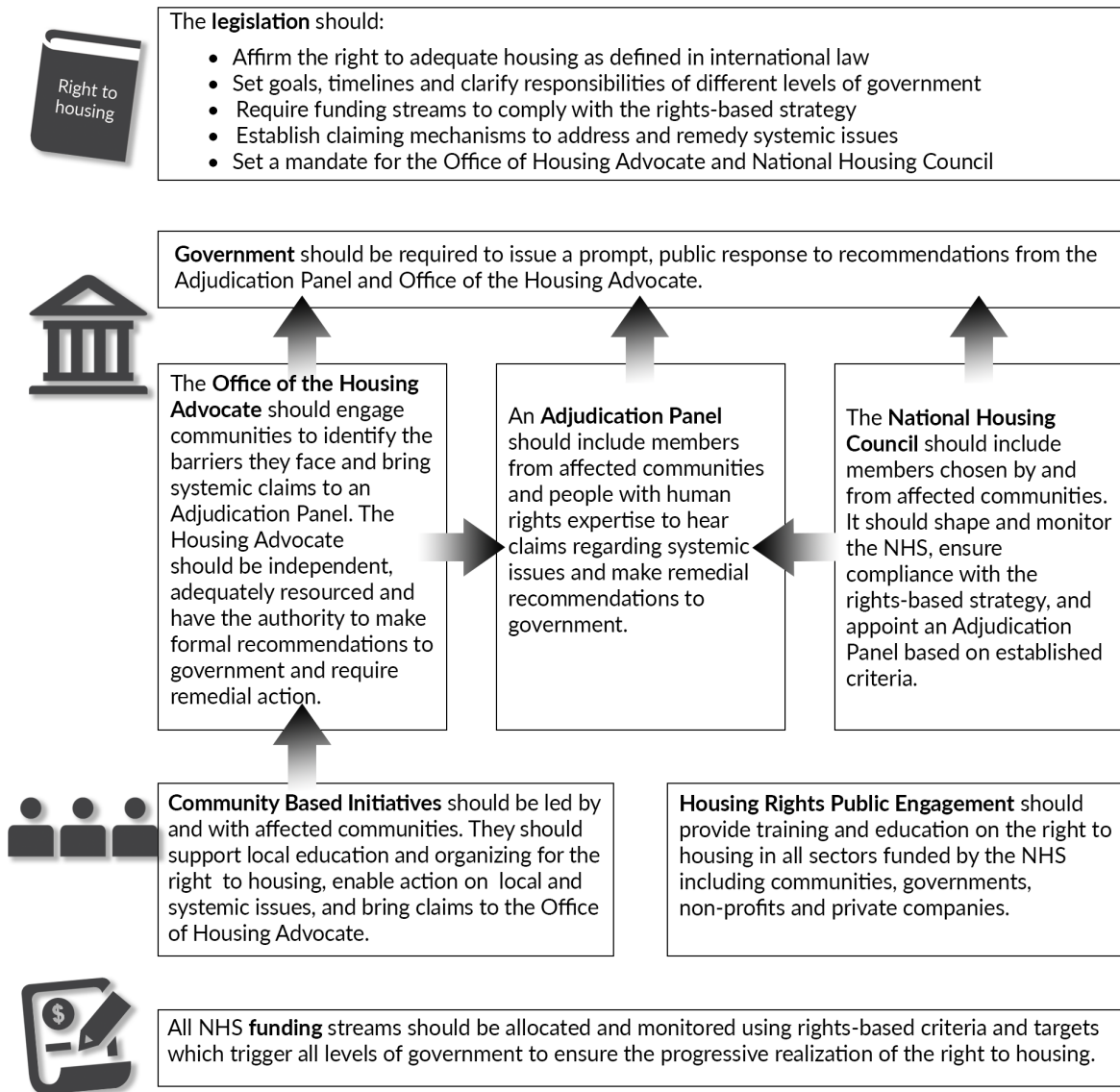
1. Explicit recognition of the right to adequate housing as defined in international law and of the obligation of governments to progressively implement the right within a reasonable period of time.
2. A commitment to address systemic inequality on the basis of race, gender, disability, and other grounds, the impacts of colonization, and the rights of Indigenous communities, including those in urban centres.
3. Prioritization of those in most urgent housing need and a commitment to eliminate homelessness by 2030 as Canada has agreed to under the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
4. An accessible process through which systemic issues are subject to public hearings, adjudication and remedies.
5. Independent monitoring of progress and accountability based on human rights-based goals and timelines.

Further, this human rights framework should be embedded in every aspect of the NHS. This means:

6. Individuals and communities affected by homelessness and inadequate housing have opportunities for input, leadership and decision-making throughout – as rights claimants and program beneficiaries, and also in monitoring, evaluation, and oversight roles.

7. The NHS enshrines an all-of-government approach where all implicated ministries and all levels of government recognize their obligations with respect to the right to housing.
8. NHS funding is allocated and monitored using rights-based criteria and targets which trigger local, provincial, and territorial governments' obligations to realize the right to housing.

What a rights-based NHS framework should look like



About this paper

This document was developed by Bruce Porter of Social Rights Advocacy Centre and Emily Paradis. It reflects a consensus on key principles arrived at by civil society representatives at the first CMHC Consultation Roundtable held in Ottawa April 19 2018. It builds upon two ideas papers that can be found at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybf4vcz8> and <https://tinyurl.com/ydeo78bm>. The authors are grateful to Maytree for financial support for this work.