

# **Toward a New Canadian Housing Framework**

**Final Report**

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## Introduction

*“The goal of a Canadian Housing Framework is simple, yet fundamental: to ensure that all Canadians, regardless of circumstance, have a safe, affordable place to call home.”*

The Honourable Joe Fontana, Minister of Labour and Housing

In January and February 2005, the National Secretariat on Homelessness of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) conducted a series of consultations to seek the contribution of stakeholders in the development of a new Canadian Housing Framework.

The consultations were conducted under the leadership of the Honourable Joseph Fontana, Minister of Labour and Housing. Key officials responsible for managing the consultative process included Ms. Bayla Kolk, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Housing and Homelessness, HRSDC and Ms. Karen Kinsley, President and CEO, CMHC.

This report provides an overview of what was heard throughout the consultative process. It is not meant to be an exhaustive summary of the discussions, but rather is intended to provide a synthesis of the perspectives and ideas raised by participants.

The report is divided into four sections:

- **Section I** provides an overview of the consultations by outlining the consultative process, including the approaches used to solicit input and stimulate exchanges among participants, and describing the tone and highlights of the discussions;
- **Section II** sets out the key themes raised during the consultations, structured according to the characteristics that participants said they would like to see in a Canadian Housing Framework, namely: flexibility, simplicity, sustainability, community leadership, a holistic approach, federal government leadership, and broad public engagement;
- **Section III** summarizes the major recommendations made by participants during the consultative process on future approaches to housing and homelessness policy and programming; and
- **Section IV** sets out the Government of Canada’s view of the implications of the consultations for the development of a new Canadian Housing Framework.

# I. Overview of the Consultations

## ***The Consultative Process***

HRSDC and CMHC traveled to every province and to one territory to seek the input of stakeholders and experts in a series of eleven community consultations and five expert roundtables<sup>1</sup>. The consultations were structured as follows:

- *Invitational Community Fora*: These eleven regional fora provided an opportunity for representatives of stakeholder groups to present and discuss their views with a panel of senior officials from HRSDC and CMHC responsible for Canada's national housing and homelessness initiatives. In each community where a forum was held, observers were also welcome.
- *Expert Roundtables*: Expert roundtables were designed to gain new insights and innovative ideas from the perspectives of a wide range of experts. The roundtables were national in scope, and participants were invited to contribute their expertise on five topics: horizontality and linkages to the broader social policy agenda; partnerships, financial tools and land acquisition for housing development; integrating support services; housing affordability challenges; and delivery models.
- *Aboriginal*: An Urban Aboriginal Homelessness (UAH) roundtable and an Aboriginal Housing Roundtable consultation focused exclusively on Aboriginal homelessness and the need to adopt a holistic approach to Aboriginal housing. Participants in both forums discussed many of the same challenges and solutions to Aboriginal housing and homelessness. Some of the challenges discussed were sustainability, accountability and capacity building. These forums were complementary to the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable, which included a sectoral session on housing, and brought together 70 Aboriginal groups from across the country and representatives of all levels of government.

The community sessions were designed to facilitate individual presentations and interaction between presenters and government officials, while the expert roundtables served to build and test ideas and proposals to address housing and homelessness issues

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<sup>1</sup> A separate Urban Aboriginal Homelessness (UAH) roundtable for UAH service providers was held in Regina in January 2005, in addition to the Aboriginal Housing Consultation, which took place in Montreal in April 2005. The results of that consultation are reported on separately. Reports on both meetings may be found at [www.homelessness.gc.ca](http://www.homelessness.gc.ca).

in a facilitated roundtable exchange among participants. Approximately 200 participants were involved in the community fora and 170 in the expert roundtables. The consultations brought together people in communities facing housing difficulties, advocacy groups, service providers working to address housing problems, and government policy-makers, academics, researchers and private sector resource people in the field.

A context paper proposing initial ideas from the Government of Canada on the development of a Canadian Housing Framework was provided to participants in advance. All materials related to the consultative process, including individual reports on each session, can be found online at [www.homelessness.gc.ca](http://www.homelessness.gc.ca).<sup>2</sup>

### ***Highlights of the Discussion***

Throughout the consultations, the tone of the discussion was constructive. Participants were eager to provide views and ideas on what has worked and what needs to be fixed in terms of current housing policy and programming, and listened carefully to what others had to say. At the community level, and among service providers in particular, there was a strong sense of frustration that in a country as rich as Canada, there are still so many people in housing need.

Across all the consultative meetings, participants stated that there is an urgent need for a new national vision – a Canadian Housing Framework – with clear benchmarks and outcomes to address pressing housing and homelessness problems within the broader context of Canada’s economic and social objectives of prosperity and inclusion. They also stressed that it was important for such a national vision to focus not only on extreme housing need experienced by homeless people, but more broadly on moving people out of housing need altogether and into affordable and supportive housing. They said that homelessness and housing policy and programming need to be integrated, so that investments are made in the context of both short- and long-term needs, along the entire housing continuum.

There was broad agreement among participants that the current range of program, policy, regulatory and legislative tools available to address housing needs and homelessness is inadequate. This being said, participants also agreed that a great deal of progress has been made over the past few years through a number of targeted programs<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Participants at the sessions and other interested Canadians were also invited to submit comments online through [www.homelessness.gc.ca](http://www.homelessness.gc.ca). A total of 75 online submissions were received between Jan. 1 and May 10, 2005, and they have been reviewed by HRSDC and CMHC as input in the development of a Canadian Housing Framework.

<sup>3</sup> Participants named a range of programs and initiatives that have helped communities make progress on housing and homelessness issues. Some of those most frequently mentioned as helpful (although not perfect) included the National Homelessness Initiative, the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) and the Urban Aboriginal Homelessness (UAH) initiative.

Participants were also of the view that there is already a great deal of knowledge among community workers, service providers, researchers and policy-makers on what works. They gave several examples of cases in which the private sector has contributed to developing and implementing innovative affordable housing solutions, which they said could be helpful in broadening the private sector's involvement in affordable housing solutions in particular. They stressed that a Canadian Housing Framework should not "reinvent the wheel", but should instead draw on the base of information available about successes and failures to date in addressing housing need. Having said that, they also stressed that the system already relies heavily on existing community leaders and volunteers, and that capacity building is required to shore up expertise and skills to address affordable housing issues at the community level.

Participants at both the community fora and expert roundtables were unanimous in the view that communities themselves are best placed to make decisions about the mix of measures and tools which will be most effective in meeting the needs of citizens in housing need, and to apply them in a way that is complementary to broader community development efforts. Community workers said their views on this point were shaped by their own experience on the ground about what works and what does not work, which experts said was backed up by research and evaluation results.

While the community fora brought together people who were already working together at the local level, many of the participants in the expert roundtables (which were thematic in nature and national in scope, as outlined above) commented that meeting others working across the country in their specific area of interest was an important side-benefit of their participation.

Participants at both sessions proposed local Aboriginal control and authority over program decision-making and spending. Participants felt that Aboriginal people are best positioned to deliver services to their community, and that there was ample evidence of this. As well, participants called for increased, stable, predictable, multi-year funding that would allow Aboriginal organizations to build their capacity to effectively address the multi-faceted needs of the many Aboriginal people they serve.

## II. Overview of Key Themes

This section provides an overview of common themes raised by participants as important characteristics for a new Canadian Housing Framework, and provides some context around the discussions.

### ***Flexibility***

***Participants stressed that there is no single solution to homelessness and housing challenges, and that a new Canadian Housing Framework needs to allow each community the flexibility to address its own unique situation.***

Participants illustrated the importance of flexibility by pointing out the diversity of profiles and needs of people in housing need and of those at risk of homelessness, including single people and families, youth and the elderly, people with disabilities, people with mental illness, refugees and immigrants, people recently released from institutions, and the working poor. They also highlighted the unique needs of specific groups or communities, including those living in rural and urban, large cities and small towns, the North, and Aboriginal communities, whether on or off reserve, in large urban centres or in remote northern areas.

Another aspect of flexibility was discussed at many of the sessions, namely the question of the balance between supply and demand measures to address housing and homelessness. In some areas, participants said, the scarcity of housing (i.e., the supply) is the greatest challenge. In other areas, the problem is that demand does not match the supply: that is, housing is plentiful but it is either unaffordable or unsuitable for those in housing need. There was agreement that there is a need for a range of solutions that are short-term (i.e., rent supplements and shelter allowances) and long-term (i.e., bricks and mortar and support services), and they said that all actions need to be undertaken with long-term outcomes in mind.

There was significant discussion at many of the sessions on whether homelessness and lack of housing affordability is an income problem, or a housing supply problem. For example, in some cases housing units, like basement suites, exist in great number but are considered illegal because of various municipal and/or provincial regulations. In other cases, certain homeless people are being turned away from shelters because provincial regulations forbid shelters from accepting those who have not registered for social assistance.

Participants had mixed views on the root of the problem, and therefore had different ideas about whether solutions should be focused on increasing supply or doing more to help alleviate income problems of those in housing need. They said that it was important that the challenge of housing affordability be addressed as more than simply a financial question. They said that any solutions need to preserve choices for beneficiaries,

including the type of housing they select, the location of the housing, and the point on the continuum at which they choose to address their housing need.

While they agreed that there was still a need for shelters for homeless people, participants said that the goal should not be to simply get people off the streets: it should be to help them move along the housing continuum and into affordable, supportive housing that restores their dignity and provides a necessary base from which to rebuild their lives and to make progress towards self-reliance.

Participants across the country saw value in sharing best practices among communities, but stressed that because no two communities are exactly alike, flexibility is critical. They asked that housing and homelessness programming be flexible enough to accommodate the diversity of communities. In general, however, the focus of interventions was on rental housing, because there are few levers to address home ownership for people in housing need. Having said that, participants indicated that in some locations, facilitating home ownership may be more feasible, and that in other locations, options such as housing shares (neither purely ownership nor purely rental) could be promising.

## ***Simplicity***

*At virtually every session, participants asked that action be taken to reduce the complexity of federal programs in order to decrease what was seen as an excessive administrative burden on already stretched local resources.*

Participants said that because of the heavy reliance on volunteers at the community level, the real cost of excessive administrative work is hidden. They also pointed out that administrative work drains the resources that communities should be spending on clients in housing need. They called for a simpler process to replace the existing Request for Proposals (RFP) process used for the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), for example, which was described by various participants as cumbersome, political, frustrating and “crazy-making”. An example was provided to illustrate the costs and benefits of processes: to secure \$12,000 for a project, a community organization spent 40 hours on the application and two people were flown in to evaluate the application. In another case, the complexity of the process led community groups in St. John’s, Newfoundland to pool their resources and hire an advisor to assist in the preparation of the applications.

Participants were concerned about the lengthy delays in the approval process, and the number of years that it takes to transfer government lands into the hands of housing developers. Many participants said that having to deal with multiple orders of government introduces additional problems and delays. They were concerned by what they saw as a lack of coordination between federal and provincial governments, which in



their experience often required community groups to dedicate significant resources to responding to different requirements from each level of government.

## ***Sustainability***

***Community leaders at both the expert roundtables and in community fora said they have grave concerns about sustainability of their efforts over the long term. They also said that steps needed to be taken urgently to prevent the erosion of the current stock of housing.***

Despite all efforts and progress made to date, participants said that in their experience, homelessness and core housing needs in Canada are growing because the needs are greater than the resources available to address them. Two main concerns on sustainability emerged: the erosion of existing stock, and the ongoing operating costs of supported housing. The latter, said participants, increases the burden on the non-profit and volunteer sector, on which the current system relies very heavily.

Participants across the country were adamant about the need to ensure that affordable housing is built to last and properly maintained. Suggestions in this respect varied from ensuring all new housing conforms to a designated set of national standards, to building more accountability into the co-op housing model for maintenance of physical stock, to banning rooming houses. They also stressed that housing built with public funds must remain in the public domain over the long term. They suggested that cost-effectiveness needs to be a key consideration in developing solutions, and that the focus should be on determining what measures work for each population and have been demonstrated to be cost-effective.

Community groups working to deliver housing and homelessness programs made it clear that they will not be able to sustain their level of effort without operating costs being funded to some degree. They said that sustainability of local action on housing and homelessness was of particular concern in jurisdictions in which the provincial or territorial government is less engaged, as well as in isolated areas and in smaller communities. Participants also said that the year-over-year funding approach of programs such as SCPI threatens the ability of service providers to continue to operate or plan ahead with any degree of certainty. Some participants argued that there was a real risk of important programs in their communities disappearing because of unstable or discontinued funding.

Participants also made a number of comments on the sustainability requirements of the SCPI program, which require the community to think ahead about how they would eventually manage without government support. Although these were seen as necessary

and valuable by some, many also said that the requirements were too restrictive and resulted in good proposals not being approved.

## **Community Leadership**

*Participants said that leadership at the local level – by the community, for the community – is essential to creating and implementing effective, sustainable solutions.*

There was near unanimity in all the consultations that although the SCPI approach requiring a community plan is at times difficult, it successfully pushed communities to work together to deal with their housing and homelessness problems. Participants cited many examples of successful community initiatives driven at the local level, and said that a lasting benefit of SCPI is that it has build capacity in communities to tackle cross-cutting socio-economic challenges. They said that whatever solutions or programs are proposed, they need to be tested with beneficiaries and partners, the latter in particular for “partnership programs”.

Participants in many sessions made the point that cultural sensitivity is another reason that action needs to be driven at the local level. They stressed in particular that Aboriginal people and organizations are best placed to design and deliver housing and homelessness programming for Aboriginal people through an integrated approach.

At the same time, some participants were quick to caution that the community planning process must be inclusive. These participants said that in their experience, the SCPI process had become politically charged, with some special interest groups excluding others and ill will developing in the community.

While local leadership was seen as critical to success, a large number of participants also identified a need for capacity building at the community level, to ensure that local leaders and organizations have all the skills and tools required to address housing and homelessness needs. Participants stressed that dedicated support for capacity building would be an investment in the future of communities, because it would help community groups build and sustain broad partnerships to develop and implement sustainable solutions at a local level. Participants suggested that one way to build capacity may be for non-profit organizations involved in housing to include on their Boards of Directors people who have building and financial expertise.

## **Holistic Approach**

***There was consensus that homelessness and housing affordability is not purely an issue of bricks and mortar, and that a holistic approach that addresses the needs of the whole person is required to help clients achieve a stable housing situation.***

Participants said that housing need must be viewed as only one aspect of the full range of needs – both at the level of the individual, who is often experiencing a number of needs at the same time, and at the community level, to keep communities whole and avoid creating ghettos.

Participants backed up their call for a “whole needs” approach to individual clients by saying that in their experience, homelessness and housing need is often associated with other social and psychological challenges such as domestic violence, health problems, substance abuse, sexual exploitation and mental illness. They also said these challenges manifest themselves differently depending on the community situation and on the individual. Participants said that certain populations, such as Northern residents and Aboriginal people, face systemic problems, well beyond the issue of income, that are at the root of their heavy housing needs.

To help people move to more stable housing situations, participants said that support services have to be provided to address the full range of the individual’s needs. Ideally, according to participants, these services should be on site, integrated with housing services. The types of services mentioned by participants as being important to those in housing need included food banks and soup kitchens, clothing drop-offs, outreach programs, child care, adapted transportation, counselling, education and skills development programs, work placement, and emergency aid (including financial assistance, advocacy and referrals).

Many participants said that integrated neighbourhoods had a number of benefits. They gave examples of how diversity in the composition of a community is helpful in teaching social skills and in facilitating integration. Examples were also given of existing mixed housing projects which have helped revitalize communities in distress. Participants said that in their view, an integrated neighbourhood approach was effective in helping move people out of shelters and temporary housing into stable, affordable housing, and in keeping them housed. Some also said that it is important to avoid designating units in mixed housing developments, but instead to find ways to make them “invisible” so as not to identify low-income versus market rent units.

A holistic approach also applies to raising awareness and building capacity. Many participants suggested training: employment readiness training for youth at risk of being homeless; property management training for Aboriginal people; training in the

development of affordable housing projects for city planners; and financial planning seminars for potential low-income home buyers.

## **Federal Leadership**

***Participants wanted to see the federal government take leadership in the development of a new national vision for housing. They said that active leadership by the Government of Canada is required to successfully address persistent housing and homelessness challenges.***

Participants said that the federal government should take the lead in bringing all three levels of government together to ensure a more coordinated approach and to eliminate conflicting policies and requirements among the various programs. Many said that in the past, federal programs have offered much-needed help, but that in their experience, the effectiveness of programming is hampered by the lack of integration, be it horizontally within the federal government or vertically between the federal, provincial or territorial and municipal levels. Illustrating the problem further, some participants indicated that they have found it difficult to get the three levels of government to work together, and that some groups have found themselves having to act as intermediaries between the federal and provincial governments.

As a first step towards integration, participants said that HRSDC and CMHC should provide federal leadership in the areas of housing and homelessness and encouraged them to bring the following federal departments to the table: Health Canada, the Department of Justice Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Some said that these departments should be part of the plan to raise awareness of the economic and social costs of housing need, because they are all departments that would benefit from a strong housing policy in terms of delivering on their respective mandates.

Participants made a number of other specific suggestions for federal leadership that would facilitate integration and horizontal effort across government, ranging from ensuring that provincial and territorial governments are at the table from the beginning, to leading the way with federal tax reforms in support of affordable housing goals.

In addition to integration, participants said that the federal government needs to show leadership in providing more funding, over a longer time period, for housing and homelessness programs. The need for Canada to fulfill its Kyoto obligations – and to integrate energy conservation into home renovation programs – was also a concern.

## **Need for Broad Engagement**

***Participants called for efforts to inform and engage citizens and the business community in eradicating housing and homelessness problems and in creating an inclusive society.***

Many participants said that based on their experience, there is little understanding among the Canadian public of how housing problems affect our society and undermine Canada's economic and social standing. Although they said that awareness of housing challenges is improving in some areas, largely due to efforts driven by non-profit organizations, many cited examples of situations in which general public perceptions regarding the homeless has caused problems on various projects. Many participants shared their experiences in dealing with a "not in my back yard" attitude that had led to campaigns opposing shelters and low-income housing projects. They suggested that more research was required to understand how affordable housing needs will play out in the future, to allow for the development of solutions that will be sustainable over the longer term.

Participants also said they saw many opportunities to raise private sector awareness of housing and homelessness problems and to promote the involvement of the sector in the development of solutions. A large number of participants said that promoting the benefits of engagement to private sector partners would help bring them to the table, which in turn would help offset the increasing cost of land, materials, services and energy. Participants said that further work was required to determine what measures would need to be in place to interest the private sector, including the financial services industry, builders and developers, in becoming partners in developing and implementing housing and homelessness solutions. Representatives from the private sector at the sessions indicated there would be interest in working to address affordable housing issues, if it were (and were seen to be) economically viable.

### III. Recommendations

In this section, key recommendations<sup>4</sup> from participants have been divided into four categories: program; policy; funding; and partnerships.

#### ***Program***

Although positive comments were made about various existing federal programs to address housing and homelessness needs, participants called on the federal government to take a more integrated approach to housing policy and build on successes to date with **community-based models**.

Participants asked that the federal government “trust its staff at the local level and partners in the trenches”, and design the **Canadian Housing Framework as a toolkit** that provides multiple options along the entire housing continuum, giving communities the latitude and the authority to decide which programs best fit their needs at any given time. They said that with a single, broad program offering a variety of options, community plans could be broadened to include affordable housing in addition to homelessness.

Participants suggested that the Framework include **financial tools for individuals**, such as rent supplements, portable housing allowances, subsidies, “share-save” programs that allow individuals to build equity, affordable mortgage programs, and low-interest loans. They also said that a range of **financial tools, including low-interest loans, should be made available to local housing proponents** for the purchase or construction of buildings. They stressed that having a range of tools available would ensure that there is flexibility to fund all sizes of projects that may be right for communities, from the small renovation to very large multi-unit constructions. They also asked that particular attention be given to measures to facilitate land acquisition, especially in central locations near other needed services.

Participants also said that **all programming should be accessible throughout Canada**, with the needs of small, rural and northern communities recognized as being different from those of the large southern communities. They said that accessibility to programming should be equal for all Canadians, regardless of the level of participation and partnership from other levels of government.

They requested that **requirements for the preparation of proposals and reporting become simpler, more streamlined and coordinated**, while ensuring appropriate accounting and social auditing mechanisms are in place to ensure accountability. More

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that not all recommendations from all participants could be included in this summary report. The detailed event reports from each session, which can be found at [www.homelessness.gc.ca](http://www.homelessness.gc.ca), contain all recommendations.

tools and support are needed, such as templates and formats for calls for proposals, a handbook that explains what is needed at each step, or consultants who can coach through the process and provide explanations.

Specific **suggestions were made to streamline administrative processes**, including: reducing the number of approvals required; using best practices from the banking industry; simplifying the accountability system and using audited financial statements; adapting the language to the average user; making requirements for small grants less stringent; reducing the time it takes to approve an application; allowing fast-tracking of projects by experienced developers; shortening the mortgage insurance underwriting process; and concentrating on the value of reporting rather than on volume.

Some participants suggest the Government **revisit the requirement for a large capital investment** by funding recipients, and the sustainability requirements under SCPI.

Community groups said that the **federal government should be more involved in public education and awareness** about homelessness, through media campaigns for example, to help the public understand the savings related to the costs. Among the issues raised on this subject, participants identified the need to coordinate information more effectively, to help paint a global picture of the situation across the country and to help make connections among service providers.

There were also recommendations that the **federal government promote business awareness of and involvement in affordable housing programs**, perhaps using a strategy similar to the Rick Mercer ads for the one-tonne challenge; for example, putting out a “one-unit challenge” to developers. They suggested more work needs to be done to tap the creativity and innovation of the private sector for cost-effective and economically viable housing projects.

Participants requested **better access to data and a framework for measuring outcomes**. It was suggested that funding be more closely tied to meeting assessed housing needs, and that formal quality control and quality assurance be required for the design and construction of funded units. A few participants expressed concern that a current measure of success is the number of shelter beds created, and that the real measure of success should be the number of people moving into long-term, stable, independent housing. A number of different research initiatives were suggested, including developing better information about the North and its population, research into the causes and underlying dynamics of affordable housing problems, demographic projections to assess future housing needs, strategies to effectively address the “Not in my Backyard” attitude, and mobility patterns of individuals at high risk of homelessness or housing need.

## ***Policy***

Participants provided a wide variety of recommendations on the policy principles that should guide the development of the new Canadian Housing Framework, and the goals

that should be set out. Here again, the call for an **integrated approach** was heard consistently – i.e., integration of policy-making across jurisdictions, integration of housing and homelessness policies and programming across the housing continuum, and incorporation in broader economic and social policy-making of housing and homelessness considerations.

The Government of Canada was asked to **develop policies that incorporate and acknowledge individuals' rights and find ways to ensure people are aware of them**. It was suggested that a successful Canadian Housing Framework must recognize that housing is a fundamental human right, and that there is an associated cost to maintaining these rights for our most vulnerable citizens.

A call was made for a Canadian Housing Framework to **address housing needs within the broader context of income insufficiency**. Many participants emphasized that the programs should focus in the first instance on those in greatest need. A number of participants stated that the goal should be to end homelessness, not simply to reduce it. In this context, homeless shelters were seen as a necessary but not sufficient investment: participants called for action to help those in housing need get out of shelters and into affordable, appropriate housing, where they can begin to rebuild their lives and take steps towards self-reliance. Specific suggestions made by participants in this regard included: making capital investments in social housing; increasing the portion of the federal budget spent on housing by an additional 1%; providing portable rent supplements (for example, the Tent City project); and offering portable shelter and housing allowances, which have been used in Quebec and Manitoba as well as in other countries.

Many participants advocated that **CMHC's mandate be revised** to once again include social housing. They said that CMHC had an important policy and programming role to play in addressing housing and homelessness problems.

There were numerous requests to **review the tax system and regulations** to ensure they provide incentives (or at least do not serve as disincentives) for potential investors and do not create barriers for low-income earners seeking suitable housing. Participants stressed that there should be changes in the tax environment to make investments in increasing the supply of rental housing more attractive.

A number of participants also asked that the federal government **review the formulas used for allocating housing and homelessness funding across the country**. They stated that occupancy rates do not tell the whole story, and that other criteria should be considered such as the low-income cut-off rate, the age of the housing stock, and the concentration of low-income earners. Participants from northern and rural communities also asked that the Government **not rely solely on a per capita formula**, since this would not provide them with the minimum funding required to make a difference.



## **Funding**

One of the recommendations made most often was to ensure a new Canadian Housing Framework provides **funding for both services and operations** rather than just capital funding. In addition to requesting more funding, community groups indicated that access to **multi-year operating funds as well as program funds** is necessary to ensure that they have the required stability to offer continuous service. Participants also said the federal government should support enhanced sharing of expertise across the country by **funding national fora and other vehicles and tools for sharing and for building capacity at a local level**, to allow community groups to share best practices and lessons learned and to identify opportunities for collaboration.

Participants requested that **funding rules be amended to make it easier to bring funding partners to the table**, rather than restricting the options for collaboration.

They put forward a multitude of suggestions for **funding mechanisms and financial tools**. Specific financial measures proposed included changing requirements around asset bases and cash flow for groups with fewer resources; allowing organizations to leverage their current asset base to raise more funding; using CMHC surpluses; sponsoring housing and/or land trusts; introducing a national housing foundation; developing standardized frameworks and other working tools for partners involved in a land acquisition or land transfer for affordable housing; creating a national revolving housing fund; extending chattel loan amortization to 30 years; long-term takeovers of surplus federal lands; long-term land leases; and assistance for the conversion of existing building and brownfields into land to be used for affordable housing projects. Other specific recommendations related to funding included access to a market development fund for feasibility studies to support proposals, an emergency contingency funding base for unpredictable events in communities; and funding to close the gap between what individuals can pay and the market rate for affordable housing.

A wide variety of **financial incentives and tax measures** were also proposed. These included a national energy efficiency program; access to the Affordable Housing Initiative for improvements and renovations; “sweat equity for sweet rent”, a suggestion to have clients participate in the construction of their homes; “Home Save” matching savings for low-income first-time home buyers; tax amendments favouring affordable housing, such as the elimination of GST on construction materials associated with affordable housing programs or tax incentives for donation of land for affordable housing; waiving mortgage insurance for social housing providers; allowing partial tax and government registration/development fee rebates for low to moderate income developments; creating municipal property tax exemptions for public land being used for affordable housing; creating revolving equity funds; and providing interest-free loans to local proponents.

## **Partnerships**

Participants recommended that **partnership at all levels** be built into the design of a new Canadian Housing Framework. They stressed repeatedly during the consultations that addressing housing and homelessness challenges is complex, requiring a broad mix of players to be at the table.

Participants asked that the **three levels of government work together to provide a “single wicket” approach** to access funding. There were calls for clearer roles and responsibilities, better cooperation and elimination of duplication and overlaps among the various levels of government, but also within each level of government.

Some participants also requested that the federal government **require the same level of accountability from provincial and territorial governments for federal funds received** as they do from non-governmental organizations.

Some also suggested that municipalities could play an important partnership role in addressing housing and homelessness by **reviewing zoning practices and policies**, and a suggestion was made that they could help preserve existing rental stock by placing **levies on conversion of rental housing to condominiums** and directing funds to affordable housing.

Participants also recognized that partnerships are required at the project level, and that a **high degree of cooperation and collaboration between local communities, non-government organizations and the private sector** significantly increases the chances of a successful and sustainable housing project. Numerous examples were provided of partnerships that helped shape the success of specific initiatives. The Government was invited to ensure the new Canadian Housing Framework facilitates an increased role of the private sector in developing affordable housing solutions.

## IV. Conclusion

***“Good consultations don't guarantee good policy. But, by the end of the cross-country hearings, Housing Minister Joe Fontana will have a clear idea what's wrong with existing government programs, what more is needed and where public dollars will do the most good.”***

From a column by Carol Goar, Toronto Star, January 21, 2005,  
after attending a community forum in Toronto

Clearly, the consultations provided the Government of Canada with a great deal of insight into the challenges with existing programs, and the views of communities and experts in the field on priorities for future public investment in housing and homelessness.

The consultations revealed strong support for continued and even increased involvement of the Government of Canada in housing and homelessness programs. Participants also shared a strong sense of urgency - as one participant put it, *“stop studying it so much, just do something. It's time that we start to move ahead more rapidly on putting projects on the ground.”*

The consultations also demonstrated support for the vision that *“All levels of government and the private, voluntary, and non-profit sectors will work in partnership to ensure that Canada's housing continuum supports the needs of all individuals and families.”* Virtually all participants recognized that no single group or level of government can solve the problem alone, and expressed an interest in working in partnership with other groups.

The consultation results also suggest that existing programs, although useful in their way, have drawbacks that must be corrected, and that new concepts and approaches are needed. The consultations with Aboriginal people emphasized the need to move forward with an innovative and transformative approach empowering Aboriginal communities to address homelessness and housing needs. Integration and sustainability are key principles that must be reflected in any new programs: *“What's really important is that there isn't just one way to address the issue, it's very complex, it's very expensive, but it's also long-term; you can't throw money short-term at a single piece and expect the problem to go away. Step back and look at the entire continuum.”*

Although program recommendations and priorities varied from one stakeholder group to the other and between communities and regions, there were some consistent themes that can be summarized as a **need for integrated programs** that **maximize autonomy and flexibility at the community level** while **minimizing administrative burden** for the non-government organizations that deliver them.

Finally, there was a clear expectation, throughout the consultations, that the Government of Canada will deliver the strategy: *“There has to be enough funding to make a difference; expectations are being raised through this process, you need to take action really fast.”*