Housing Policy and Practice in the Context of Poverty and Exclusion

Synthesis Report

August 2005

PRI Project
New Approaches for Addressing Poverty and Exclusion

Canada

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Introduction: Housing and Issues of Poverty and Exclusion

Over the past decade, the concept of poverty has evolved. No longer concerned exclusively with income shortfalls at particular points in an individual's life, today's conception of poverty incorporates myriad resources and situations over the life course that can contribute to a persistent lack of income or undermine the ability of the poor to participate in the mainstream economy and society.

With this more holistic perspective, social exclusion takes on increased relevance, establishing links with a number of other dimensions of well-being, such as the possession of human, social, and physical capital. Low levels of these resources can result in individuals being excluded from many areas of Canadian society or increased vulnerability to such exclusion. For example, access to goods and services, economic participation, and social interaction can all be put at risk without access to assets, such as savings and investments, which can act as buffers in times of financial distress. Decent earnings and labour market attachment are more difficult to secure if an individual has a shortage of marketable human capital skill sets. Social capital, or the resources available through one's social networks, can also influence the entry to, duration of, and exit from low income and exclusion.

Besides providing an expanded understanding of the challenges and daily experiences faced by the poor, an approach that incorporates an understanding of exclusion highlights additional barriers besides low income that must be addressed if escape from this disadvantaged state is to be possible. Once assets, skill sets, and relationships are eroded, individuals are often more vulnerable to the often minor but negative events (such as unanticipated expenses) experienced daily by most people within society. Whereas someone who is fairly well entrenched in society can typically adjust their activities and plans to integrate assets, family, friends, and community supports when they encounter difficulties, an excluded individual living in poverty facing the same challenges can be knocked off balance and forced to make undesirable trade-offs. To make matters worse, over time these trade-offs and lack of progress out of poverty and exclusion can instil despair and an aversion to risk that can only further degrade a person's ability to escape poverty and exclusion.[1]

Within this new interpretation, the provision of adequate housing (including the support of individual and collective forms of home-ownership) is increasingly viewed as a core issue to be addressed if poverty and exclusion are to be effectively reduced. Housing serves as a catalytic component that, besides providing benefits in and of itself, can facilitate and perhaps even magnify the

effectiveness of other supports. As a place that should offer a sense of stability and physical security, housing can provide an individual with the constancy required to establish and nurture key assets and relationships that are vital to avoiding marginalization. Housing can also serve as a valuable anchor point for a new start following situations of personal upheaval. Put most simply, a house is a home, a space that allows individuals to introduce a sense of order into their lives (Daly, 1996: 149).

Unfortunately, despite the extent to which scholars, activists, and policy analysts increasingly recognize this logic, a policy disconnect persists between those focussed on housing challenges and those working on issues of social policy more generally. This separation can reduce the effectiveness of individual housing policies, miss opportunities to address broader socio-economic priorities and complicate efforts to increase coordination or determine appropriate investments in this policy area.

The State of Housing Issues in Canada

Overall, the Canadian housing system effectively serves the needs of the vast majority of Canadians. In fact, average Canadian housing standards are generally considered equal to or better than those of any other nation (Hulchanski, 2002: 5).

Nonetheless, Canada's housing system does not address the needs of all Canadians. Almost one in six (15.8 percent) of Canadian households live in core housing need, that is, they live in conditions that are either unsafe, unsuitable, or carry an unreasonably burdensome cost (Subject Box 1). In 1996, the distribution of households living in unacceptable shelter across urban and rural areas was relatively even although below standard[2] housing was marginally more prevalent in urban areas (39 percent of households) than in rural and rural northern areas (31 and 33 percent, respectively). Most disturbing is the apparently

> **Subject Box 1**
> **Classifying Core Housing Need**
>
> A two-step test is used to gauge the state of housing for Canadians and determine how many live in core housing need. Three standards are considered in the initial needs assessment (Pomeroy, 2001: 2).
>
> - *Suitability*: National occupancy standards are used to determine if households have a sufficient number of bedrooms based on family composition (effectively a crowding measure).
> - *Adequacy*: This is a measure of housing condition to determine if the dwelling is safe, has basic plumbing, and is in a reasonable and habitable state of repair.
> - *Affordability*: This standard is based on a ratio of housing expenditures to total household income; a household paying more than 30 percent of its before-tax income for housing is considered in need.
>
> The second part of the test determines whether households with one or more of these problems have access to affordable alternatives in the same community. If not, they are considered to be in core housing need.
>
> This method of measuring core housing need has its limitations. Both the suitability and adequacy measures are somewhat subjective, meaning that significant signs of housing strain, such as families "doubling up," are not captured unless crowding occurs. Additionally, these measures assume a relatively high level of mobility, which may not be the case for families highly dependent on services, such as public transit. Nevertheless, this method of measuring housing strain provides a useful base on which research and policy can be effectively constructed.
>
> Source: Engeland and Lewis (nd) p. 27.

entrenched nature of housing challenges in Canada today. In recent years, rates of core housing need have declined since their high in 1996, though levels in 2001 remained stubbornly above 1991 levels despite strong economic growth (Figure 1). It would appear that while Canada's housing market performs well for most Canadians, there remains room for improvement.

Figure 1: Percentage of Households in Core Housing Need in Canada, 1991 to 2001
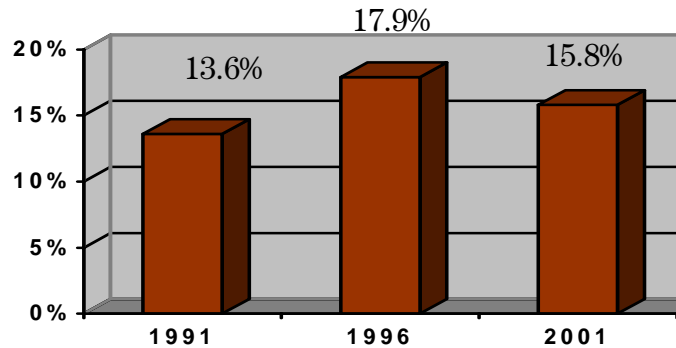
Source: CMHCb (2004).

A deeper examination of the issue suggests where such improvement may be needed. Most households (84.2 percent) classified as being in core housing need fall below only one of the three housing standards used by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). At the national level, three in four households (75.3 percent) in core housing need are in this state solely for reasons of affordability. Shortfalls in the suitability and adequacy measures accounted for 2.5 and 6.3 percent of all households in core housing need respectively.

National figures, however, fail to reflect significant differences in the causes of core housing need between urban and non-urban areas. Both affordability and suitability figure prominently in predominately urban areas. In areas typically adjacent to urban areas (intermediate and rural metro-adjacent regions[3]), however, affordability is the main concern. Northern rural areas, in contrast, experience suitability challenges far more frequently than issues of affordability (Rupnik et al., 2001).

These diverse geographical challenges indicate that policy responses by federal and provincial governments should be flexible and responsive to local needs. This position is further reinforced by an exploration of the ultimate form of housing exclusion, homelessness.

Homelessness: An Extreme Form of Housing Exclusion

The relationship between housing and homelessness is complex. As Hulchanski (2002: 7) noted, although "homelessness is not *only* a housing problem, it is *always* a housing problem." This succinct statement accurately describes how the

operations of the housing market and the challenges faced by those outside of the market are viewed as both related and distinct.

Perhaps the best example of how this view has been reflected in policy is that housing issues and homelessness have, until very recently, been the responsibility of two separate ministers. Under the old regime, although CMHC and the National Secretariat on Homelessness (NSH) recognized connections between their respective responsibilities and pursued joint policy activities, the two organizations generally operated their respective programs separately.[4] Even now, under a single minister, an administrative divide remains. From the perspective of poverty and exclusion, however, the distinction between these two agencies is less relevant, as homelessness becomes the ultimate expression of housing strain. Specifically, homelessness is viewed as a state of instability and exclusion from physical capital that can be a product of persistent poverty and that accentuates the negative effects of that socio-economic situation.

Although definitions of homelessness vary, it is generally agreed that this state of being is not a "characteristic of an individual but is rather a life situation that may be temporary, periodic, or more or less permanent" (Begin et al., 1999: 7). Three forms of homelessness have been identified. The first, chronic homelessness, is the most drastic, faced by people who live on the periphery of society, often with problems of drug or alcohol abuse, or mental illness. The second form, cyclical homelessness, affects those who have lost their dwelling as a result of some change in their situation, such as loss of a job, a move, a prison term or hospital stay. The last form, temporary homelessness, captures those who are homeless as a result of a disaster or significant change of personal situation, such as a separation. Usually this group is excluded from research due to the often transitory nature of this change of status (Begin et al., 1999: 8).

These classifications effectively capture the various challenges faced by the homeless. From a policy perspective, however, it is useful to consider homelessness both in "at risk" and in "absolute" terms, as these lenses recast the issue as a process that can be acted upon rather than as a socio-economic state to which policies respond.

Individuals at Risk of Homelessness

Identifying those at risk of becoming homeless, defined loosely as families and individuals with formal shelter but in precarious circumstances (Pomeroy, 2001: 3), is problematic due to the complexity of the process of becoming homeless. Consisting of many stages, the process of becoming homeless is neither linear nor predictable. At each stage, a variety of factors, such as personal levels of human and social capital, mental health, macro-economic trends, the accessibility of community-level supports, and government policies, can accelerate or avert the trajectory towards homelessness.

Despite these complexities, the affordability of housing is of fundamental importance within this process. If a household is directing a large percentage of

its income to housing, vulnerability to other socio-economic setbacks that can trigger an episode of homelessness is increased. Subsequently, a high shelter cost to income ratio (STIR) can serve as a crude but useful indicator of vulnerability. Using this measure, CMHC determined that in 2001, 590,100 households in core housing need were paying 50 percent or more of their income on shelter. Average shelter cost to income ratios for these households was a staggering 67 percent (CMHC, 2004g). These expenditure levels would be very difficult to sustain, particularly in the face of additional socio-economic stresses.

Reflecting housing need in general, the spatial distribution of households at risk of homelessness is highly mixed. Studies of Canada's 11 major census metropolitan areas (CMAs) confirm conventional thinking that the risk of homelessness is greatest in the inner city. In terms of total numbers of households at risk, however, the problem of homelessness is greatest in the suburbs, most predominantly in the inner suburbs. Research also indicates that important differences in the risk of homelessness exist across location and household type; despite some notable differences between metropolitan areas and family structure, at-risk family households (both single-family and lone-parent) are most likely to be found in the suburbs, whereas non-family households at risk (both single-person and multi-person) are concentrated in the inner city. Reflecting these diverse situations, challenges vary significantly within CMAs, raising questions regarding the distribution of important social services, such as food banks, and shelters (Bunting et al., 2003).

Absolute Homelessness

Absolute homelessness (or more typically referred to as homelessness) is also difficult to measure. Loosely defined as people living without a roof, four walls, or a door they can lock to create personal space with privacy and security, the transient nature of this group creates a number of definitional and methodological challenges to be overcome if counts are to be accurately determined. As recently as 1999, disputes over whom to classify as homeless and how to best collect information on this group resulted in official national data on homelessness being virtually non-existent. So dire was this situation, it was highlighted by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as a data gap warranting immediate attention (Begin et al., 1999: 12).

Today, although debate and disagreement persist on the causes and solutions to homelessness and official national data on homelessness remain scarce, a consensus is beginning to emerge. A study conducted by the Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia (SPRC) for CMHC, lists several primary causes of family homelessness:

- a lack of good-quality affordable housing;
- increasing poverty arising from inadequate income-assistance rates and low minimum wages;
- inadequate funding for support programs;
- discrimination; and

- family violence.

A study by CCSD for the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) arrived at similar conclusions (CMHC, 2003).

Beyond these high-level observations, however, an emerging body of research by local group and municipal governments indicates that the challenges faced by the homeless can differ significantly across communities. For example, the needs of Aboriginal people figure much more prominently within Vancouver's homeless population than in Toronto or Ottawa (Vancouver, 2002: vii). Toronto, in contrast, has expressed concern about the increasing prevalence of family and refugee use of shelters (Toronto, 2001: 4).

Greater and more in-depth research is required to identify specific challenges and possible mechanisms through which to support greater inclusion. Recent research in Ottawa provides a glimpse of the form such expanded research activities could take (Subject Box 2). It is evident, however, that like housing issues in general the challenges faced by the homeless differ substantially from place to place.

Panel Study of Homeless in Ottawa

The panel study of homelessness in Ottawa is the first of its kind in Canada. Focused on examining pathways out of homelessness by tracking persons who are homeless over time, at least two community-based groups are conducting research on Ottawa's homeless population.

A joint initiative of the University of Ottawa, Carleton University, St. Paul University, the City of Ottawa, and the Alliance to End Homelessness is endeavouring to identify subgroups among Ottawa's homeless population based on health status. This research has found that the homeless population is made up of distinct subgroups differing according to the level of severity of health and substance abuse problems. The research has confirmed that many homeless individuals are in poor health or face substance abuse problems that will likely require extensive social supports and counselling. However, the study has also found that a large percentage of this group are homeless primarily for economic reasons with relatively few debilitating health ailments. As a result, it is becoming clear that many can be assisted through basic social supports (e.g., social housing, rent subsidies, income support) and would likely become self-sufficient with improved economic conditions and greater access to jobs. This distinction has significant targeting and resource allocation implications.

Another group of researchers from Carleton University and the University of Ottawa is conducting a study of the foreign-born homeless population in Ottawa. This study has found that, in the Ottawa area, financial factors dominate the reasons for homelessness for all homeless individuals, followed closely by spousal abuse and family conflict. This would seem to suggest that similar supports would benefit both groups. But such an assumption would overlook the fact that the incidences of substance abuse are lower among the foreign-born population and that foreign-born people appear to access government services less frequently than their Canadian-born counterparts. This finding has significant implications for the design of program supports and outreach initiatives.

To date, researchers have determined that in Ottawa a majority of homeless people are without housing primarily for economic reasons. However, this work has also determined that there are significant health and substance abuse challenges among the remaining homeless population and that the foreign-born population of Ottawa has proven more difficult to reach through traditional support programs and mechanisms. These findings suggest that improvements to local economic and employment conditions, combined with tightly targeted supports for those who are homeless for social or health reasons, could go a long way in reducing homelessness in Ottawa.

Sources: Aubrey et al. (2004); Klodawsky et al. (2004).

The Emerging Picture

From this brief examination a picture of the housing situation in Canada begins to emerge.

At the national level, initiatives to address affordability could effectively reduce the overall incidence of core housing need. Nevertheless, diverse local conditions regarding the causes of housing exclusion suggest that policy responses tailored to specific community needs may also be needed. This is particularly true when targeting the challenges faced by those who are homeless. Homeless people face a range of personal and social challenges, such as income, mental and physical

health, and family circumstances that vary significantly among individuals and from place to place.

Effective policy responses require a broad, horizontal approach responsive to the array of housing challenges present in individual communities. The scope and design of these policy responses, however, must effectively target the causes of housing stress and assist those who are most vulnerable.

Determinants of Housing Exclusion

Housing exclusion is the complex result of a variety of experiences. Frequently the cost of shelter is blamed for the number of people living in below-standard housing or the incidence of homelessness. This position holds some merit, as general affordability is closely linked to scarcity in urban housing markets, a situation that can have detrimental effects on individuals at the low end of the income scale. In this way, it can be argued that housing exclusion is a reflection of poor or inadequate urban planning and policies that, despite good intentions, can result in unintended outcomes.

Such explanations, however, are relatively superficial and overlook a gamut of other processes that factor into individual housing outcomes. While insufficient financial resources figure prominently in the development of housing stress, a lack of these resources alone are not what triggers exclusion from acceptable housing, nor do they by themselves trap people in a state of poverty and exclusion. Other issues must be considered.
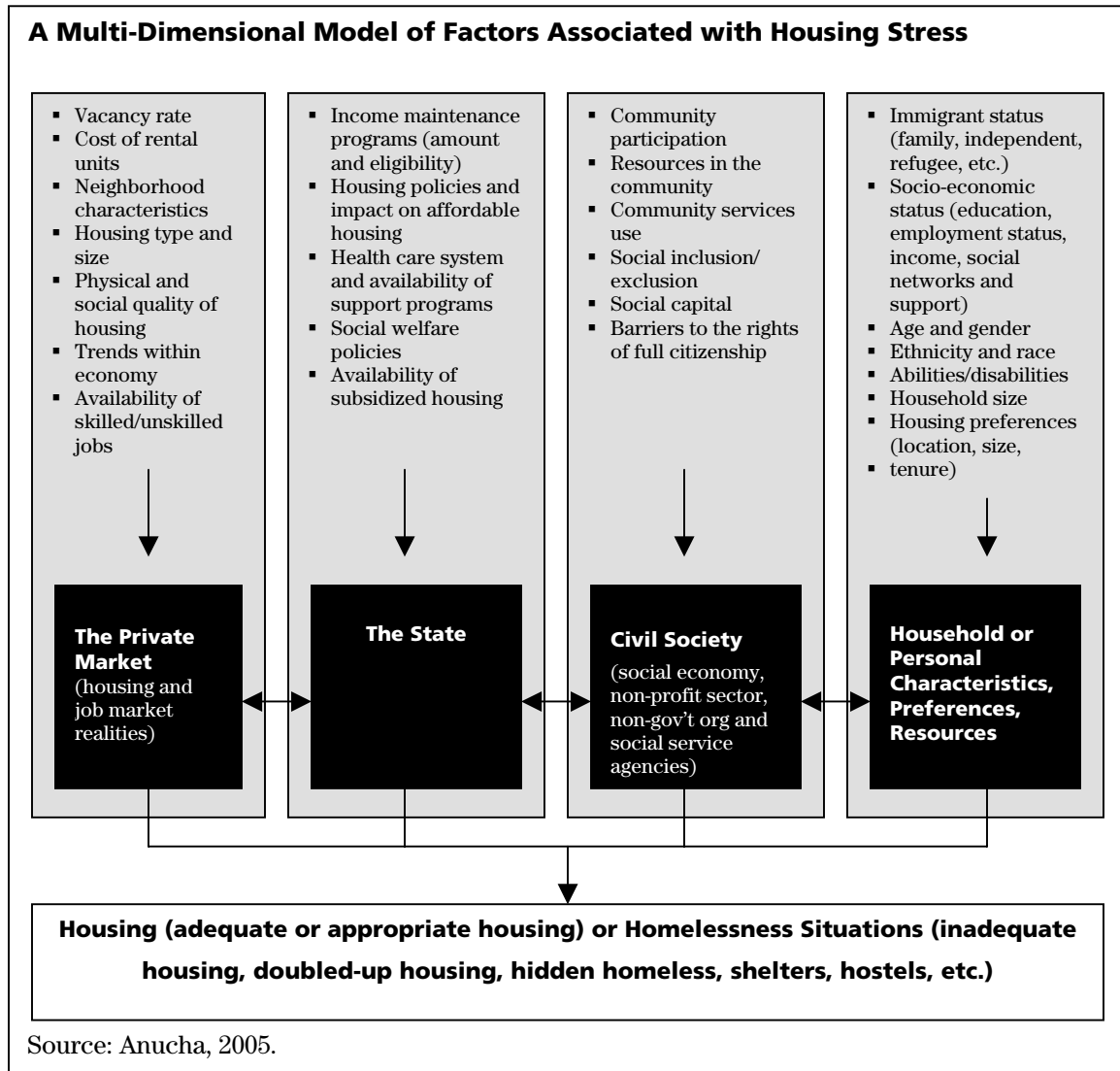
In an attempt to clarify the processes associated with episodic homelessness, Anucha (2005) developed a multi-dimensional model that incorporates the various factors and impacts on homelessness into a framework. While homelessness is the focus of this analytical framework, the model put forward by Anucha is useful for explaining housing challenges in general from the perspective of poverty and exclusion.

In Anucha's model, homelessness is recognized as a dynamic process characterized by multiple transitions, role exits, and role entries. Specifically, the model considers four dimensions within which multiple factors interact. These dimensions are the private market, the state, civil society, and household/individual characteristics.

The private market accounts for micro- and macro-economic realities (e.g., employment and housing markets). The state dimension brings in policies for social welfare and housing (such as rent control and the regulations of onerous barriers and practices[5]) and considers the availability and nature of support programs (e.g., income maintenance, the health care system). Civil society, through the social economy, and non-profit and non-governmental organizations, is an important social service provider and serves as a catalyst through which resources in the community (including social capital) can be mobilized. These organizations often play an important role for individuals in housing need. Finally,

the model considers relevant household/individual characteristics, that include socio-economic status, disabilities, ethnicity, migration status, and age. Stocks of individual social capital and other assets can also be considered here. All these factors have been found to play varying roles in the housing trajectories of individuals (Anucha, 2005).

Figure 2

A Multi-Dimensional Model of Factors Associated with Housing Stress

▪ Vacancy rate ▪ Cost of rental units ▪ Neighborhood characteristics ▪ Housing type and size ▪ Physical and social quality of housing ▪ Trends within economy ▪ Availability of skilled/unskilled jobs	▪ Income maintenance programs (amount and eligibility) ▪ Housing policies and impact on affordable housing ▪ Health care system and availability of support programs ▪ Social welfare policies ▪ Availability of subsidized housing	▪ Community participation ▪ Resources in the community ▪ Community services use ▪ Social inclusion/ exclusion ▪ Social capital ▪ Barriers to the rights of full citizenship	▪ Immigrant status (family, independent, refugee, etc.) ▪ Socio-economic status (education, employment status, income, social networks and support) ▪ Age and gender ▪ Ethnicity and race ▪ Abilities/disabilities ▪ Household size ▪ Housing preferences (location, size, ▪ tenure)
The Private Market (housing and job market realities)	**The State**	**Civil Society** (social economy, non-profit sector, non-gov't org and social service agencies)	**Household or Personal Characteristics, Preferences, Resources**

Housing (adequate or appropriate housing) or Homelessness Situations (inadequate housing, doubled-up housing, hidden homeless, shelters, hostels, etc.)

Source: Anucha, 2005.

Within this model, exits and returns to homelessness and housing need are not determined by factors within one sector of society or dimension but by all (Anucha, 2005). Anucha is not the only one to make this argument. Recent work by Hay for the Canadian Policy Research Networks made a similar argument by noting that housing issues are what many researchers term a "wicked problem, that results not just from a variety of different social and economic issues, but also from interactions between those issues (Hay, 2005: 4-5).

Again, while a lack of financial resources frequently serves as a gateway to housing stress and can serve as a crude measure of vulnerability, a multitude of other social factors play a vital role in individuals actually being excluded from acceptable housing. These social factors may also be the underlying causes for a lack of financial resources that increase vulnerability to housing stress. This reinforces links to the broader social policy agenda and illustrates why horizontal policy approaches are required to effectively address the needs of those facing housing exclusion.

Vulnerable Groups

The above model makes evident that certain conditions could leave virtually anybody at risk of poor housing. Stressful transitions out of institutional care appear particularly noteworthy. It has beenobserved that those discharged from institutions focused on mental health and rehabilitation, the prison system, and the child welfare system are significantly more likely to be at risk of homelessness or without shelter than the general population (NHI, 2003; City of Toronto, 1999).

Such difficult institutional transitions aside, however, certain groups appear disproportionately represented among the vulnerable. Research at CMHC has identified four distinct groups that stand out, because their members are disproportionately represented among the ranks of those living in housing stress, and they are so often identified as vulnerable to other socio-economic challenges. These four groups are Aboriginal peoples, single-parent families, senior renters, and recent immigrants.

Aboriginal Peoples
It is well documented that Aboriginal households are at higher risk of experiencing a wide variety of social challenges and exclusion, including housing. While the most recent census data indicate that between 1996 and 2001 improvements to Canada's housing conditions were most concentrated among members of this group, vulnerability persists. In 2001, Aboriginal households were 1.6 times more likely than non-Aboriginal households to be in core housing need.

In addition to the social challenges this situation likely reinforces, population concentrations in specific communities again highlight how housing need varies from place to place. Two in five Aboriginal households renting their accommodations in Regina, Saskatoon, Vancouver, and Winnipeg were in core housing need in 2001, a situation which undoubtedly feeds demands from these cities for the transfer of financial resources (CMHC, 2004d).

Non-Aboriginal Lone Parents

Non-Aboriginal lone-parent households are also vulnerable to core housing need. Despite a 6.5 percent decline in the incidence of core housing need among members of this group between 1996 and 2001, roughly three in ten members of this group remained in core housing need in 2001 (CMHC, 2004d). In 2001, the situation was even more dire for those living in rental accommodations, with

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almost half of all non-Aboriginal lone parents with children under the age of 18 living in core housing need (CMHC, 2004e).

Senior Renters
While poverty rates for seniors are among the lowest in the western world, senior Canadians who have not succeeded in acquiring or keeping a home are highly vulnerable. In 2001, senior renters were among the groups most likely to be living in inadequate housing. About 43 percent of seniors renting in Canada were in core housing need in that year, a significant increase from 36 percent in 1991. This vulnerability was particularly acute in certain urban centres, particularly in Toronto where more than one half of renting seniors were in core housing need (Statistics Canada, 2005).

Recent Immigrants
Housing exclusion also makes the social and labour market integration of recent immigrants more difficult. In 2001, following five years of improved labour market outcomes, earnings of recent immigrants (those living in Canada for five years or less at the time of the census) in core housing need appeared quite favourable relative to those of all non-Aboriginal households in core housing need. Nevertheless, despite these earnings, recent immigrant households had an incidence of core housing need that was, on average, 4.7 percent higher than non-immigrant households. Additionally, rising average incomes did not reduce the depth of core housing need faced by this group between 1996 and 2001; in both Census years, recent immigrants in core need were directing, on average, at least half of their incomes toward shelter. As already noted, when 50 percent or more of income is spent on rent, it is generally agreed that the risk of homelessness greatly increases (CMHC, 2004g; Rose, 2004a).

Reasons for these high levels of stress have not been confirmed. However, the fact that more than 94 percent of recent immigrant households were in large urban centres in 2001 (80 percent of which were in Montréal, Toronto, or Vancouver) (CMHC, 2004f) suggests that the affordability challenges faced by recent immigrants may be a reflection of higher housing costs in major census metropolitan areas to which recent immigrants gravitate. This vulnerability could be further increased by a number of non-market factors, such as a heightened need for easy access to settlement services and public transit, and a desire to be near family or other members of one's ethnic community (Rose, 2004b). These needs and desires may restrict the viability of more affordable housing options, thus forcing immigrant households to pay more for shelter than would otherwise be necessary.

Already it is clear that many recent immigrants are in a highly unstable housing situation. Missing from this picture, however, is an understanding that a number of issues not captured in the core housing measure may make immigrants even more vulnerable than the numbers suggest. As noted above, the mobility of immigrants within the broader housing market may be restricted for a number of social reasons; subsequently, basic assumptions within the core housing measure

regarding the ability of recent immigrants in housing stress to move around to find more affordable shelter may be less accurate than with many others in core housing need.

In addition, the measure of core housing need assumes that non-shelter expenses are relatively stable between households within a community. Recent immigrants, however, can have other expenses, such as remittances to kin in their country of origin or the costs of credential recognition, which effectively reduce household income (Rose, 2004b). Such added expenses would only make the housing stress experienced by members of this group more acute.

Implications for Policy

A number of policy implications emerge from this review of the housing situation in Canada. As depicted by Anucha's model, a multitude of factors can contribute to individuals being excluded from acceptable housing. These social and economic forces disproportionately affect the groups discussed above, which often face other social and economic integration challenges.

This suggests that housing policy should not be formulated in a vacuum, isolated from other social and economic policies targeting long-term poverty. In fact, a reciprocal relationship between housing and the broader social policy agenda is apparent. To begin with, housing stress can potentially undermine social and labour market programming aimed at assisting specific target groups. Efforts to improve the social and economic integration of immigrants and Aboriginal peoples, as well as reduce the incidence of poverty among children and the elderly, will clearly be affected.

Beyond this, the effects of housing stress are also being felt within a number of high profile social policy issues. For example, the concentration of Aboriginal and recent immigrant housing stress in specific urban centres has added another layer of complexity to the social and economic challenges being faced by many of Canada's cities. Efforts to establish a national child care system must also be responsive to the needs of children in such vulnerable households if it is to serve as an effective launching pad for the pursuit of lifelong learning.

At the same time, because housing stress is a product of not only income but also a wide variety of social stresses, it is apparent that social supports can contribute to efforts to house Canadians. It stands to reason that if negative socio-economic transitions that frequently trigger housing stress are avoided, individuals may be able to retain adequate shelter.

In short, housing policy has a contributory role in a number of different policy challenges related not only to poverty and exclusion, but a number of other social and economic files. The self-reinforcing nature of these connections also suggests that housing policy can be made more effective if social supports are incorporated into housing policy. As a result, identifying effective approaches for addressing

housing stress and exclusion is vital if progress is to be made on an array of socio-economic policy issues and returns on housing investments are to be maximized.

New and Effective Approaches for Addressing Housing and Homelessness Issues

Housing policies in Canada are generally restricted to influencing the operation of the housing market by either seeking to increase the quantity of acceptable housing units in the market (supply side approaches) or addressing the barriers households face in obtaining suitable housing (demand side approaches). Homelessness is also frequently addressed through these mechanisms, but take a slightly different form due to the fact that these efforts target a socio-economic state as well as the operations of the market. Reflecting the social dimensions of homelessness (i.e., addiction and chronic mental and physical health challenges), social supports, such as counselling and life-skills training, are also often necessary (NHI, 2004a).

On the market side, both housing supply initiatives and targeted individual supports have their advantages and disadvantages. While all the different approaches discussed below have proven effective in certain circumstances, it is now generally understood that the wide variety of housing challenges and situations faced by individuals demands policy responses that are responsive to community needs. In some situations, supply side initiatives will be appropriate; in others, demand supports. Increasingly, however, research indicates that initiatives that combine both sides of the market equation are often most effective. The merits of this more holistic approach are discussed below.

Supply Side Approaches

Many argue that the supply of housing should be left alone, because market dynamics will find the equilibrium point to best allocate supply, demand, and price. Unfortunately, while the market typically functions well for those above a certain income level, few adjustments occur naturally to address the needs of the poor.As a result, some form of intervention to address market failure is often necessary, even if agreement regarding the form of that intervention is not always forthcoming.

Large-Scale Construction Projects

In the past, supply side initiatives often took the form of large-scale government construction initiatives to create affordable housing units (typically in the form of rent-geared-to-income units). Designed and driven primarily from a single blueprint or concept of how the development should be constructed and laid out, these "projects" generally standout as monolithic neighbourhood blocks surrounded by mixed-use residential communities. For better or for worse, these characteristics have contributed greatly to drawing attention to the plight of the poor.

A number of challenges have been associated with this approach. Surrounding communities have often been hostile to the concentrated presence of so many low-income individuals and the services and supports they require.[6] The highly geographically defined nature of these large-scale projects can also lead to the stigmatization of those within, which can only further augment the social exclusion they face (Regent Park Collaborative Team, 2002: 21).

Additionally, if incorrect design assumptions were made, or if surrounding communities evolved in a manner that was not compatible with the project's basic design premise, the negative aspects of this approach could be emphasized. For example, the first of these projects in Canada was the Regent Park complex in Toronto, Ontario, which is today home to roughly 7,500 people (Toronto Community Housing, nd: 1). Although a strong sense of community has been observed in this community, the dated urban design premises of Regent Park, which focused on creating large green spaces and pedestrian traffic within the development rather than travel to other neighbouring communities, served to isolate low-income people within the project from the outside world. Coupled with a lack of commercial development within the community, this has had a number of negative consequences, such as reduced job prospects and restricted social networks outside of the development (Regent Park Collaborative Team, 2002: 79-88).

Challenges such as these have resulted in large-scale housing projects largely falling out of favour. Without knowing what the future holds, policy makers are understandably hesitant to direct resources toward the development of large-scale projects that may not positively integrate with surrounding communities. As a result, new ways to influence the supply side of the housing market have been sought.

Community Enhancement Initiatives

Today, initiatives targeting the supply of affordable housing tend to be driven more from the bottom up (i.e., local-level design, often with federal/provincial resources) and endeavour to integrate those facing housing challenges into established communities. This approach is more responsive to inherent strengths and assets that already exist within the community, an important development when considering housing issues within the broader context of poverty and exclusion. For example, the Government of Canada has put in place the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Programs (RRAP) to provide financial resources to individuals who propose renovation plans of existing sub-standard housing stocks (CMHC, 2005a).

Municipalities also foster the development of new affordable housing stocks through urban planning activities that sometimes require the inclusion of affordable housing units in new developments or offer incentives to do so. Coupled with communication and outreach activities to the private sector, such a regulations can be quite effective and need not be confrontational, as demonstrated by the Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP, see below).

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However, co-operation may not be forthcoming in cities experiencing land shortages, high construction costs, and an inflationary housing market. In such communities, real-estate developers may prove more resistant to initiatives that might lower returns on investment. This does not mean that community enhancement initiatives are not possible in these situations. It does, however, decrease the amount of capital available to private investors for investment and increases the risk of conflict between public and private sector actors.In these situations municipal governments may have to bring additional resources or incentives to the table to pique the interest of developers. This can affect the cost effectiveness of this approach, making alternative mechanisms to address housing challenges appear preferable.

Innovative Dwelling Forms

Some argue that more fundamental reform of housing stocks is required. It was noted at a recent PRI/SSHRC roundtable on housing issues that, unlike other countries, such as the United Kingdom, the Canadian housing system's regulatory and financial support structures favour certain forms of dwellings (single family detached) at the expense of others. This focus has resulted in the underdevelopment of alternative forms of housing construction and dwelling types that may be more affordable for many Canadians.

Habitat for Humanity identified a number of non-traditional housing forms that may be conducive to the creation of less-expensive housing (Subject Box 3). By lowering costs, such reforms could significantly increase production of affordable housing, particularly in situations like that described above, where property development is already quite costly. In many cases, however, for such innovation to take place existing income support and construction financing programs, as well as zoning by-laws, would have to be made more flexible. Engaging a wide variety of actors, such changes would require careful co-ordination among governments.

Demand Side Approaches

On the demand side, numerous policy approaches endeavour to increase the purchasing power of individuals. In part, social assistance benefits are supposed to consider housing costs as part of the calculation of amounts. However, in spite of frequently rising housing costs, the support levels and coverage of this assistance have often been frozen or reduced, making this support inadequate to meet the basic needs for which it is intended (Pomeroy, 2001: 5).

Housing Allowances

Beyond social assistance, one of the best known ways for boosting individual purchasing power is a housing subsidy for people meeting certain means tests. British Columbia, Manitoba, and Quebec have instituted allowance schemes, whereby people meeting certain criteria are directly given a cash allowance intended for housing. Other programs are also in place, but the effectiveness of this approach is highly dependent on program design specifics. In some instances, vouchers go directly to the landlord, which may help foster stigmatization and discrimination by associating the renter with social disadvantage. Ultimately, combined with preconceived attitudes regarding poverty in general or the individual's personal characteristics (in the form of racism, etc.), such a linkage can result in discrimination, making housing more difficult to secure and further undermine social inclusion. However, the City of Toronto's Emergency Homeless Pilot Project has provided recent evidence that such vouchers can be effective and stigmatization overcome within a housing market with a sufficient supply of rental units (Subject Box 4).

The effectiveness of programs based on housing allowances is often highly dependent on prevailing market conditions. In a loose housing market (where vacancy rates are high), landlords appear more responsive to these programs and may even welcome the income security government supports offer their tenants.

In a tight market, on the other hand, landlords can become much more selective and use criteria, such as letters of reference, a minimum income criteria or rent-to-income ratio, to screen prospective tenants. This effectively discriminates against those seeking affordable accommodation. Certain groups, such as the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA) in Ontario, have made significant inroads on these and other forms of discrimination on a case-by-case basis using human rights codes and provincial housing regulations (The Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, nd). Nevertheless, enforcement challenges and the potentially bad will that could emanate from prosecution make such barriers difficult to overcome.

Further restricting the effectiveness of housing allowances within a tight market is the fact that, as rents increase, subsidy levels may also have to increase to maintain their relevance. This can undermine the cost effectiveness of this approach, particularly in light of the fact that these resources do not directly result in structural adjustments to the market, such as the construction of new rental units. These challenges indicate that housing allowances should largely be restricted to housing markets where vacancy rates are relatively high and there is a good supply of affordable housing.

Subject Box 4
City of Toronto's Emergency Homeless Pilot Project

Tent City was Toronto's first major squatter settlement in recent history. Formed in 1998 by a small group of homeless individuals on an abandoned industrial lot owned by a big-box outlet chain, the settlement grew to include a number of scratch built shelters. Populated by individuals often described as "hard to house" (many had mental health and addiction issues), numerous efforts to resettle the occupants of this small community failed. On September 24, 2002, inhabitants of the settlement were evicted and many lost what few possessions they had.

The Emergency Homeless Pilot Project was an effort to respond to the sudden displacement of these individuals. The Project demonstrated that in a moderately loose housing market a rent subsidy program, accompanied by social supports (such as counselling and advocacy), can effectively house individuals who are otherwise considered hard to house. Evaluations of the program have been highly encouraging. Most participants displayed a high degree of housing stability after securing their first rental home. Additionally, shelter has served as a facilitator for improved life quality and the pursuit of personal development activities, such as education and attending addiction treatment and rehabilitation.

Perhaps most promising is the fact that this holistic approach has proven less costly per diem than traditional approaches to addressing homelessness, such as shelters. Attempts or proposals to expand operations have been unsuccessful, however, due to frequently rigid funding mechanisms. While funding for innovative approaches is available for small-scale experiments or pilot projects, funding mechanisms appropriate to larger scale initiatives typically favour traditional approaches, such as the expansion of shelters. This issue warrants further examination by all levels of government.

Source: City of Toronto (2004).

For the so-called "best-off of the worst-off," home ownership incentive schemes are another demand side option, and CMHC has been developing these with new financing and borrowing regulations for first-time homeowners. In addition, more innovative initiatives have surfaced, such as asset-based programs that encourage individuals to save resources toward the goal of home ownership. An example of such a program is Home$ave, an initiative of CMHC designed and administered by the Social Enterprise and Development Innovations (SEDI) (Subject Box 5).

Subject Box 5
Home$ave – An Experiment in Asset-Based Approaches

From an asset-based perspective, a home is more than a place to live; it's also a cornerstone of financial security and provides significant stability for children. For the working poor, owning a home often seems impossible. Existing government home buyer and tax credit programs are out of reach for low-income earners, and in major cities like Toronto where home prices are high, there is not nearly enough affordable housing to meet the demand.

In May 2004, Social Enterprise and Development Innovations (SEDI) was contracted by CMHC to begin the design phase of the Home$ave pilot project. The project is intended to support low-income Canadians in their efforts to set money aside in an individual development account (IDA). Participants are able to build their personal savings and earn a credit for a matching amount. Over time, the goal is for these savings to support a down payment for a house.

Source: SEDI (2004).

Mixed Approaches

Recent research and experience has indicated that using both supply and demand side approaches can be highly effective. For example, the Saskatoon Housing Initiative Partnership combined supply side initiatives that engaged private sector resources within a forward looking urban plan, with demand side supports in the area of consumer financing, to restructure effectively the bottom end of Saskatoon's housing market (Subject Box 6). Such fundamental change is unlikely to result from initiatives that target only one side of the housing market.

The Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP)

The Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership facilitates social and economic investments in the community by engaging private sector resources and actors in the construction of low-income, community-based housing.

Using a systematic approach that targets all aspects of the housing system (financing, construction, social supports, regulations, urban planning, etc.), this program has effectively addressed both supply and demand side issues to support the entry of low-income buyers into the market. Particularly innovative have been efforts to engage builders through outreach initiatives emphasizing untapped market opportunities and strict and explicit construction targets for affordable housing in urban plans.

The overall effect of these efforts has been a transformation of the housing market in Saskatoon. Where once the bottom fifth of income earners were poorly served, today housing that is affordable to families earning $33,000 or less is being constructed by the private sector. This success is worthy of further study and, potentially, wider replication.

Source: Mawby (2004).

Lessons Learned and Remaining Gaps

Experience has increased our understanding of when and how certain forms of support are effective. In certain circumstances, supply side approaches work best. In others, demand side approaches appear promising. Most promising, however, are the potential benefits of a multi-faceted approach. As indicated by the Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership, if implemented in a manner responsive to specific community needs, such an integrated approach is capable of fundamentally adjusting the parameters within which a housing market operates. The full benefits of policy approaches incorporating both supply and demand side supports has yet to be fully explored, but its ability to effect such change indicates that it is a powerful approach that could, under the right conditions, be highly effective.

Remaining to be more fully exploited, however, are approaches that effectively link efforts aimed at the housing market with more general forms of social support. Given the intricate linkages that exist between housing issues and other socio-economic challenges, this separation constitutes a significant gap that must be closed.

In part, this disconnect has been bridged when addressing issues of homelessness. As already stated, homelessness is not only the result of housing market operations, but also of a wide variety of social challenges, such as addiction and poor mental and physical health. The National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) is structured to respond to these challenges. However, apart from this initiative and a few programs from CMHC (such as the Shelter Enhancement Program for victims of family violence) there are few notable cases of integration between housing policy and the broader social policy agenda.Outside the federal

government, the story is similar, although again there are exceptions, such as the Regent Park Revitalization Plan (Subject Box 7).

Subject Box 7
The Regent Park Revitalization Plan

To help address the entrenched poverty and integration challenges experienced by residents of the Regent Park area, an expansive revitalization plan has been developed. Identified as primary objectives for this plan are:

- new modern housing construction;
- mixed residential use (cost-geared-to-income housing mixed with non-subsidized and affordable, privately owned units);
- improved common spaces;
- increased economic and social integration with surrounding communities; and
- expanded education and job opportunities within the community.

At the most fundamental level, this initiative is based on two premises. The first is a belief that an urban design that encourages social integration with surrounding communities (as opposed to the isolated island approach it represents now) will help reduce poverty and improve inclusion. The second is a philosophy of individual empowerment through significant public consultations, which is hoped will maintain and deepen community involvement.

Planned to cost $450 million and be completed in 10 years, it is expected this community-based initiative will help address a number of socio-economic challenges, such as immigrant integration.

Sources: Regent Park Collaborative Team (2002); Toronto Community Housing (nd).

This social policy disconnect can reduce the effectiveness of housing policies and programs, and undermine the role housing policy can play in support of other social and labour market objectives. As demonstrated by the Co-Abode program in California, there are significant opportunities to address a wide variety of socio-economic challenges with such an approach (Subject Box 8). At present, however, such opportunities are typically unexplored.

Subject Box 8
Co-Abode Single Mothers House Sharing

Co-Abode is an initiative of a not-for-profit organization in California. The goal of the program is to provide single mothers with the resources needed to connect and create rewarding lives for themselves and their families. This is accomplished by facilitating joint residence in a single dwelling, which results in costs being reduced and the establishment of broader support networks.

Co-Abode demonstrates the benefits of a joint residence arrangement for certain vulnerable groups. The objective is to provide a place where individuals can re-establish order into their lives. This is further supported by efforts to find co-habitants who can provide meaningful social support. While promising, duplicating such an approach in Canada would often require revised zoning regulations, indicating again why an integrated approach incorporating all social actors is required.

Source: Co-Abode (nd).

Such approaches are not just holistic, combining supply and demand side supports, however; they are horizontal in scope, engaging various departments and orders of government to pursue mutually reinforcing objectives. This makes issues of governance highly relevant.

Governance Models

Constitutionally, housing is widely regarded as a provincial responsibility. Nevertheless, the dependence of multiple federal policy and program objectives and outcomes on housing has created a more complex and ambiguous situation. Through a number of initiatives over the past half-century, the Government of Canada has continuously been engaged in this policy area. This has resulted in a number of arrangements focusing on, at various times, both demand side initiatives (mortgage supports, rent vouchers, etc.) and supply side focused programs (typically in the form of both large and small-scale social housing construction projects).

The Current System

The current system evolved out of a series of decisions made by the federal and provincial governments over the last decade. By the mid-1980s, federal support for housing focused primarily on housing supply, particularly the construction of social housing. Towards this end, the federal government was engaged as a primary funder for the initiation of new projects involving all levels of government as well as non-profits and cooperatives. This involvement began to decline, however, with the end of deficit financing of social programs and the re-emergence of pressure from provinces for federal withdrawal from many areas that were technically under their jurisdiction, such as housing and homelessness. In 1996, through the completion of nine devolution agreements with most provinces, these pressures culminated in the Government of Canada transferring administration and responsibility for most social housing programming to the provinces (Carter, 2000: 1-6).

Immediately following this, the Government of Canada's presence within the area of social housing was largely curtailed. Remaining directly under federal auspices were housing initiatives on Aboriginal reserves and targeted supports and initiatives for select groups, such as persons with disabilities, seniors and victims of family violence. Co-op housing and programs that provided limited start-up financing for the construction of social housing by community groups also remained with the federal government. Additionally, the Government of Canada committed itself to the continued funding of initiatives launched prior to the agreements, although this funding would not be renewed when the agreements expired (Carter, 5-6; Carter and Polevychok, 3-4; Privy Council Office, 2004; CMHC, 2004c; NHI, 2004; CMHC, 2005d). In aggregate, these arrangements resulted in the Government of Canada largely being isolated from the policy levers required to actively participate in social housing policy at the national level.

This situation satisfied few. The federal government was uncomfortable with an arrangement that saw it largely excluded from such an important social policy file.

At the same time, provinces and territories, along with housing activists, missed the resources the Government of Canada had historically brought to the table to fund new initiatives. As a result, in 1999, the Government of Canada began to re-enter the field of social housing and homelessness, although in a significantly different capacity than in the past. The construction of affordable housing was the primary focus of this new thrust. Additionally, reflecting the spirit of the devolution agreements signed in the 1990s, the planning and implementation of housing policy remained under provincial jurisdiction. The federal government's NHI (introduced 1999) and the Affordable Housing Program (AHP) focused on facilitating and establishing partnerships and leveraging investments to support such activities (Subject Box 9).

Subject Box 9
The Government of Canada's Affordable Housing Program

On November 30, 2001, the federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for housing agreed on a framework to increase the supply of affordable housing across Canada. With this agreement over the following few years, the Government of Canada negotiated individual agreements with every province and territory to fund the creation of affordable housing throughout the country through either new construction or rehabilitation.

Defined by a cost-sharing approach, the Government of Canada's initial commitment to the program was $680 million. A subsequent top-up of $320 million has brought the total federal investment in the Affordable Housing Program to $1 billion by the end of 2007-08. Provincial and territorial cost matching contributions can take a variety of forms (i.e., they can be capital or non-capital in nature, or be cash or in kind). Provincial/territorial contributions may be made by the province/territory or by a third party.

Source: CMHC (2005b).

These financial resources, coupled with the devolution agreements of the late 1990s, fundamentally altered how the Government of Canada is involved in supply side housing policy. In delivery, the NHI and CMHC's AHP are fundamentally different, with the former being community based and the latter based on a formal federal-provincial/territorial framework and bilateral administrative agreements. In principle, however, both initiatives use a cash-matching approach, which permits the federal government to influence overall investment levels across the country while moving away from top-down governance that does not always produce the desired results. Provinces and territories retain formal control over the design and delivery of both supply and demand side housing policies, an authority they can devote to municipalities to facilitate community-based design.

On the surface, this would seem to be a practical governance model, as local control over both supply and demand side housing programs would seem to align with the more effective, community-based local solutions that emanate from a bottom-up approach to policy development. The success of both the Saskatoon Housing Initiative Partnership and the City of Toronto's Emergency Homeless Pilot Project support the logic of this position. Nevertheless, these programs stand

out as exceptional cases, and housing activists continue to describe the current system as one in which there is much talk but little action.

The Ultimate Cost of the Housing / Social Policy Disconnect

Typically, to address shortcomings within Canada's current housing system, increased resources are called for, particularly for municipalities and community-based groups so they can better fulfill the responsibilities given to them by the provinces. There is likely some truth in this assessment; without consistent funding for housing, municipalities likely have found it difficult to take substantive action over the past 10 years.

Nevertheless, through CMHC, the Government of Canada already commits approximately $2 billion annually to address the housing needs of lower-income Canadians living in some 636,000 units of existing housing stock. The Government of Canada has committed itself to investing $1.8 billion by 2008 to address the increased need for affordable housing, housing services for the homeless, and renovation of existing housing stock (CMHC, 2005c). This has been further augmented recently by Bill C-48, which set aside an additional $1.6 billion in funding for affordable houding. Both CMHC and the NSH also provide human resources and research support for the establishment of community-based partnerships concerned with housing stress and exclusion challenges. Additional investments of varying size by provinces and territories addressing both housing supply and affordability further augment these investments. Perhaps, as some argue, more resources may be required, but current commitments indicate that governments have recognized the need for action and in response have dedicated significant human and financial capital.

Instead, charges of neglect and under-funding focus on the symptoms of a deeper flaw in Canadian housing policy that makes widespread co-ordinated policy responses difficult to articulate and implement. Despite the increasing presence of the word "horizontality" in policy discussions at all levels, there remains a conceptual disconnect between those focusing on issues of housing and those concerned with issues of social policy more generally (Vaillancourt and Ducharme, 2001: p. 7-8). As already noted, this disconnect has reduced the effectiveness of individual initiatives to address housing challenges. It is at the level of governance, however, where the full effect of this division is felt, as it has undermined efforts to better co-ordinate the investments of governments, the non-profit sector, and other partners.

This is an underlying systemic challenge that must be addressed. Efforts to address social policy issues within Canada's complex federal system are much more likely to succeed within a shared understanding of what the challenges are and how they relate to other policy issues. This is particularly true with housing, a policy area that has always been, in practice, a source of jurisdictional ambiguity and a policy file that affects a number of other socio-economic issues.

Possible Governance Arrangements

As put by Carter, "if housing challenges are to be effectively addressed then the return on current investments must be maximized through an approach that packages housing as part of a broader suit of social and economic development initiatives intended to address the range of needs of individuals and their communities" (Carter, 2000: 21). Reflecting the horizontal policy approach advocated in this paper, a governance framework built within this new understanding would be highly horizontal in scope. Following the establishment of concrete objectives, capacities could be developed and best practices identified. Responsibilities could then be assigned based on who is best positioned to do what given our current understanding of the housing situation across Canada. From this perspective, the ideal governance model may not be far from what we have now, as many elements of the current system appear fundamentally correct.

Current Supply Side Governance Structures Appear Adequate

At present, all three levels of government are, to varying degrees, engaged in the funding, design, and delivery of supply side initiatives, and each appears to be involved in ways that play to their strengths. Through the provision of financial resources, the Government of Canada can address the varying resource needs of different jurisdictions and help establish an investment floor across Canada that would ensure all Canadians have access to suitable housing. Provinces and territories are ideally equipped and positioned to address diverse challenges within their borders and serve in an oversight capacity vis-à-vis municipalities. Lastly, as design and implementation are often left to the municipal level, facilitating the development of bottom-up approaches that are responsive to the diverse housing challenges faced by different communities is made much simpler. At the highest level, this mix of roles and responsibilities appears appropriate, but affordable housing shortages will likely persist so long as the strengths of these arrangements are not fully exploited by all governments and integration with supports targeting the individual remains incomplete.

Demand Side Governance Structures Require Greater Definition

Governance structures for individually targeted supports are much more varied. While there are undoubtedly a variety of reasons for this, the lower immediate cost of these supports, relative to the large capital outlays typically required for housing construction, likely permits greater variety. Additionally, recent federal detachment from this issue (aside from home ownership supports), coupled with experimentation by provinces, municipalities, the non-profit sector, and others, has permitted a variety of different programs and regimes to be put in place.

This complex array of income supports would seem, on the surface, to be an impediment to integrating supply and demand side approaches for addressing housing policy and aligning these supports to broader social policy objectives. It potentially creates a situation in which the type and extent of support available to individuals can vary from place to place. Even if supports do not vary, service providers and administrative structures underpinning programs may differ,

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creating further challenges to integration. As a result of this complexity, efforts to improve coordination of supply and demand supports towards the objectives of improving program efficiency and effectiveness may be complicated.

Moving Toward Integration

A number of models have been put forward to integrate this array of supports. Some researchers, such as Kent, have advocated a disentanglement of federal and provincial supports for housing. Within this system, the federal government would direct resources to individuals through rent supplements delivered in the form of a refundable tax credit. The provinces/territories and municipalities would focus their efforts on the supply of social housing to meet local needs and the general health of the housing market. The roles envisaged for each actor within such a proposal are not without precedent in Canada's federal system; elements of Kent's model are reflected in a variety of governance structures for housing policy that have been used since World War II (Kent, 2002).[7]

Other researchers advocate extension and expansion of current arrangements. For example, in a paper recently completed for the Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN), Carter and Polevychok called for an increased role for the federal government in social housing construction, provincial support of local level initiatives to integrate housing with other socio-economic files and municipal efforts to build community capacity for local design and delivery. The roles and responsibilities envisaged in this system are quite close to what already exists. As indicated by the CPRN paper's authors, this structure would be conducive to horizontal partnerships (Carter and Polevychok, 2004: 30-38). Difficulties with the current system, however, suggest that the complex nature of intergovernmental relations within this governance structure could continue to impede action.

Proposals for governance reform in this policy area, such as the models described above, always have advantages and disadvantages. In general, shortcomings of most models can be overcome; there is rarely only one proper way to plan, pursue and oversee the implementation of policy. These activities are best accomplished, however, within an expanded and shared understanding of how housing fits into the broader social policy structure. What is the role of the federal government? What are the roles of the provinces? How should the private sector be engaged? How should government supports interact with the private rental market? There are no single right answers to these questions, but only with a shared understanding is it possible for governments, the private sector, community groups, and other social policy partners to identify existing gaps and where and when linkages should be established. With this shared understanding, actors and resources can be more readily mobilized regardless of the governance structure adopted.

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Subject Box 10
The Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI)

SCPI is an initiative of the NHI that was launched in 1999 in an attempt to create a more integrated and inclusive approach to homelessness in Canada. Along with providing financial support to communities, SCPI encourages them to work together with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments, and the private and voluntary sectors to strengthen existing capacity and develop new responses to homelessness.

SCPI aims to increase the availability and access to a range of services and facilities along the continuum from homelessness to self-sufficiency – emergency shelters – transitional/ supportive housing – prevention. Communities are allocated a maximum funding level that must be matched from other community sources (i.e., fund-raising, local sponsors, etc.) and requires communities to explain how their activities will continue once SCPI funding ends. Projects funded support priority areas identified through a community planning process.

To date, community feedback regarding the effectiveness of this approach has been generally positive. The basic approach of this program, intended not just to support individual initiatives but also the development of community independence and capacity, may be a model worthy of emulation in other housing programs.

Source: NHI (2004c).

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The necessity for such a holistic view of the role housing plays in the broader socio-economic policy environment was recognized in the CPRN's recent work (Carter and Polevychok, 2004: 40). However, establishing such an understanding requires more than research, demonstration projects, and a general dialogue. It requires an operational mechanism, perhaps based on the NHI's Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative (SCPI) model or on their new Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) initiative, through which governments, community groups, academics, and other social policy partners can actively engage each other on these issues and activities (Subject Boxes 10 and 11). Such joint efforts aim to establish the experience and knowledge required to implement a truly horizontal approach to housing and social policy. In addition, these initiatives seek to create and nurture the key relationships and the culture of co-operation required for this holistic approach to be integrated at all levels of the policy process. Only within such a policy environment can the effectiveness of an integrated governance approach be assured over the long term.

Conclusion

Fundamentally, the machinery for action to address housing challenges is largely in place. In some areas, such as Toronto and Saskatoon, it is apparent that housing issues are indeed being integrated within the broader social agenda and that the federal government, provinces/territories, and other social actors, particularly the private sector, are being effectively engaged. Evidently local governments and community actors need to be integrated into developing and delivering effective housing policy and practice in the context of poverty and exclusion..

Although the institutional foundations for a new multi-jurisdictional approach to housing challenges are in place, remaining to be fully defined and broadly accepted is a commonly accepted policy framework that can capitalize on these arrangements. Ideally, such a framework would conceptually link housing issues to broader issues of poverty and exclusion and help make the case for coordinated and appropriate investments that not only improved the housing situation in Canada but contributed to positive outcomes in other socio-economic policy areas as well. Once this investment case is established, possible new initiatives and the roles that should be played by the federal, provincial, and municipal governments, in concert with private and community actors, could be more effectively discussed.

The fall 2004 Speech from the Throne portrayed shelter as a key component of Canada's efforts to achieve its social objectives.. The speech also signalled increased funding for initiatives intended to support both community capacity and supply side issues (Subject Box 12). Most promising, however, is the launch of a policy development process intended to engage other levels of government, community groups, and the private sector in the development of common goals and objectives regarding housing. As part of these activities, the NSH and CMHC held a number of community forums, expert roundtables, and a forum on Aboriginal homelessness in early 2005. Focusing on the need for linkages to the broader social agenda, integrating social supports with market-based approaches, and possible partnership arrangements, these activities aim to establish a partnership-driven Canadian Housing Framework that will foster a broader consensus on these issues and help develop the fundamental relationships required for action and long-term sustainability.

Notes

[1] For a full discussion of these issues please refer to the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2004).

[2] The reason why the numbers quoted in this sentence appear much higher than those quoted earlier regarding core housing need is because the term "below standard" is a less strict criterion. As explained in Subject Box 1, CMHC estimates count a household as being in core housing need only if it falls below one of the standards of adequacy, suitability, and affordability, AND the cost of acceptable alternative housing in the same area would exceed 30 percent of a household's income. "Below standard" does not use this second test, as it focuses only on the nature of current shelter without regard to the presence of alternatives. Subsequently, because acceptable alternative shelter is frequently available, data sources indicate a lower share of households with core housing need compared with the share of households "below standard."

[3] The OECD (1994) defined a "predominantly rural region" as having more than 50 percent of the population living in rural communities where a "rural community" has a population density less than 150 persons per square kilometre. Census divisions are designated as "regions" to generate data consistent with the OECD definition. These rural regions, in turn, can be further divided into three types: those adjacent to metropolitan centres (rural metro-adjacent regions), those not adjacent to metropolitan centres (rural non-metro-adjacent regions), and rural northern regions (See Ehrensaft and Beeman, 1992: 193-224). Additionally, two urban regions are defined. An "intermediate" region, defined as where between 15 and 50 percent of its population lives in rural communities and "predominantly urban" regions, where less than 15 percent of the population resides in rural communities.

[4] An exception to this observation of separate operations is that when the NSH's National Homelessness Initiative was announced in 1999. The RRAP from CMHC constituted a significant funding tool within the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative.

[5] The state vis-à-vis potential access barriers to obtaining private rental housing is particularly relevant. Sometimes "onerous" practices with regards to "key money" (i.e., money that facilitates access to housing,

such as demands for large damage deposits) can serve as a significant barrier for exiting absolute or "hidden" homelessness (the last term referring to the involuntary sharing of accommodations).

[6] Concerns and objections expressed by communities are often not driven by blind malice towards the poor, but rather by safety and security concerns associated with the services and supports (such as safe injection sites, half-way houses and transitional housing) that often accompany large concentrations of poor people. Action 4 Balanced Communities Downtown East (A4BCDE) is an example of a community group expressing these concerns (The Garden District Residents Association: nd). This paper will not attempt to evaluate the validity of these beliefs and concerns. These concerns and fears do exist, however, and subsequently are a challenge to which policy must respond.

[7] Rent supplements from the Government of Canada are not unheard of in Canada. Immediately following World War II, the Government of Canada provided supports to Canadians for the purchase of homes. The only real difference between what has been proposed byKent and this older program is that it would be targeting renters rather than those buying homes.

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