

Draft Call to Action

We call on the Prime Minister and the Minister of Housing to act on their legal obligation to fulfill the human right to housing by:

- **Investing in adding a minimum of 30,000 net new social housing units annually over 10 years where rents are no more than 30% of household income in perpetuity, starting in Budget 2024/25.**
- **Investing in the acquisition, construction, operation, and maintenance of new and existing public, non-profit, and cooperative-owned housing that meets the unique and varied requirements of people experiencing core housing need.**

FAQs

What do we mean by “social housing” and why is that the focus?

Social housing is housing that has been removed from the market (so it cannot be used for speculation or to generate wealth) and that costs less than 25-30% of household income or equivalent to social assistance housing allowances. It can be owned by public, non-profit or co-operative housing providers. Agreements between governments and the housing provider limit how the property can be used, and provide subsidies to ensure that housing providers offer rents that are geared to income.

Since 1993, very few new units of social housing have been built, and old funding agreements are expiring. The 2017 National Housing Strategy, which was intended to address housing need across the housing spectrum, is producing very little social housing. As a result, there is a large demand for good quality, non-market housing with rents that are geared to income.

There are many strategies that need to be implemented simultaneously to meet housing need, including demand-side strategies like rental assistance, rent regulations, and investments in wrap-around supports and services for tenants. Expanding social housing supply, while preserving the existing supply, is one critical strategy for which there is currently no focused campaign at the national level.

Why 30,000 units annually over 10 years?

The federal government has projected the need to expand overall supply by building 3.5 million homes over the next decade (350,000 per year). Ideally one third should be rental (115,000 annually). Approximately one quarter of renters are in core housing need so a minimum of 28,875 (round up to 30,000) units should be at rent geared to income rates. This nearly doubles the target in the National Housing Strategy (NHS) to build 160,000 affordable homes and redirects the NHS focus from modest affordability to deeply affordable at 30% of household income.

Why “net new” social housing units?

Canada is losing social housing units as a result of expiring operating agreements and inadequate investments in the maintenance of existing properties, among other factors. We must maintain what we already have if new units are going to increase the overall stock of social housing. By calling for “net new social housing units” we are also calling for measures to protect the existing stock.

Why are investments needed in the “acquisition, construction, operation, and maintenance” of units?

New social housing supply requires capital investments for construction so that new housing can be built, and for acquisition so existing properties can be purchased and re-purposed/renovated as needed. New (and existing) social housing supply also requires investments in ongoing subsidies to support the costs of operating the housing while charging rent geared to income (RGI) rents. Operating costs may include services and programs that support tenants who live within the property. Finally social housing requires ongoing capital investments for the purpose of maintaining the quality of housing and preserving the stock.

What is “core housing need”?

A household is in core housing need when their housing does not meet one or more of the following standards: adequacy (not in need of major repairs), suitability (enough bedrooms for the size of the household) and affordability (housing costs are less than 30 percent of before-tax household income). In addition, the household would have to spend 30 percent or more of its before-tax income to access housing that meets all three of the above standards. Some groups, including women-led single parent households, racialized and immigrant families, people with disabilities, and Indigenous, Metis, and Inuit households are all over-represented in core housing need.

What about other levels of government?

The expansion and preservation of social housing across Canada will require a significant funding commitment from the federal government. This call to action is focused on achieving that commitment. It provides a concrete goal targeting one level of government that individuals and groups from across the country can mobilize around through a coordinated national campaign. Provincial, territorial, and municipal levels of government all have important roles to play in the expansion and preservation of social housing. Individuals and organizations at the local level will need to come together to implement strategies/campaigns targeting local levels of government that complement the work happening at the national level.