

***Ensuring Safe, Affordable, and Adequate
Housing for All:
A National Housing Strategy for Canada***

Submission to the National Housing Strategy Team

October 2016

CITIZENS FOR
PUBLIC JUSTICE



Citizens for Public Justice seeks human flourishing and the integrity of creation as our faithful response to God's call for love and justice.

We envision a world in which individuals, communities, societal institutions, and governments all contribute to and benefit from the common good.

Our mission is to promote public justice in Canada by shaping key public policy debates through research and analysis, publishing, and public dialogue. CPJ encourages citizens, leaders in society, and governments to support policies and practices which reflect God's call for love, justice, and the flourishing of Creation.

Executive Summary

Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) is a national organization of members inspired by faith to act for justice in Canadian public policy. CPJ is supported by a broad, ecumenical membership across Canada and overseen by a national board of directors.

We believe that the federal government has a moral obligation to develop policy that is grounded in the common good, giving priority to addressing the needs of the most vulnerable in Canadian society and ensuring that Canada contributes to the well-being of people and the planet.

The urgent need for a long-term, well funded National Housing Strategy is clear. Over 1 in 4 households¹ (27% in 2010) spend between 30-50% of after tax income on housing. 235,000 people² in Canada experience homelessness each year, less than 20% of whom end up on the street, while the rest are part of the “hidden homeless.” The current stock of affordable and social housing is in disrepair and new affordable housing is desperately needed.

As the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development begins to plan consultations to develop and implement a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy, we believe that a National Housing Strategy must align with this larger plan.

Through *Dignity for All: the campaign for a poverty-free Canada*, CPJ has outlined how a national anti-poverty plan can include a National Housing Strategy, as well as a wide range of policy recommendations, in the model *National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada*.³

The National Housing Strategy, as part of a larger national poverty reduction strategy, must reflect the voices and complex needs of those most vulnerable, particularly Indigenous people.

CPJ recommends that the National Housing Strategy:

- 1. Set clear goals, timelines, and monitoring provisions, and be supported by legislation and funding of \$2 billion per year, at minimum, in new funding (matched by provinces and territories).**
- 2. Be developed in partnership with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit governments and organizations to include focused Indigenous infrastructure development strategies.**

¹ The Homeless Hub; <http://homelesshub.ca/solutions/housing-accommodation-and-supports/affordable-housing>

² Raising the Roof: Long Term Solutions for Canada’s Homeless; <http://www.raisingtheroof.org/about-homelessness/what-is-homelessness/>

³ *Dignity for All: A National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada*; http://www.dignityforall.ca/sites/default/files/docs/DignityForAll_Report-English-FINAL.pdf

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The National Housing Strategy must have clear goals, timelines, and monitoring provisions, and be supported by legislation and funding of \$2 billion per year, at minimum, in new funding (matched by provinces and territories).

Increasing numbers of people in Canada are spending up to and above 50% of their income on housing,⁴ while many others are experiencing periods of homelessness or housing precarity. This impacts the ability for people to fully participate in the community. People who are already vulnerable, such as those who are unemployed, low-waged, disabled, newcomers, female-led single parent families, Indigenous peoples, or seniors, are often those most affected.

CPJ is particularly concerned that refugees and refugee claimants are housed in adequate and affordable housing, providing stability as they face the multiple challenges of the settlement process.

CPJ and Dignity for All have called for the development of a National Housing Strategy as part of a comprehensive national anti-poverty plan. This should be developed through broad and meaningful consultation, particularly with groups representing those who are homeless or precariously housed, and include commitments to focused infrastructure development for Indigenous communities (Recommendation 2 below).

In order to minimize energy costs – and GHG emissions – this strategy should also include provisions for improving energy efficiency and retrofits for low income home owners and affordable housing developments. It should also ensure that new affordable housing units are energy efficient and offer incentives for renewable energy options, such as geothermal and solar installations.

The federal government has committed to an investment in affordable housing of \$2.3 billion over two years.⁵ However, the budget commitments largely are playing catch up with the neglect of affordable and social housing and infrastructure needs that has gone on for decades. It is possible that a well-developed and well-funded national housing strategy could take us further on the path to adequate and affordable housing for everyone in Canada, but it cannot do so without a broader vision and adequate funding backed by legislation.

⁴ See the Housing Rental Index; <http://rentalhousingindex.ca/> and Raising the Roof, Beyond Housing First: A Holistic Response to Homelessness in Canada; http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/2015_HousingFirstReport_EN-WEB.pdf

⁵ Growing the Middle Class: Budget 2016; <http://www.budget.gc.ca/2016/docs/plan/budget2016-en.pdf>

Recommendation 2

The National Housing Strategy must be developed in partnership with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit governments and organizations to include focused Indigenous infrastructure development strategies that are responsive to the unique needs of Indigenous communities (on and off reserve and in Inuit and northern contexts).

Focused Indigenous infrastructure development strategies are needed in partnership with Indigenous leaders and organizations to address urgent and immediate needs for investments in housing on and off reserve and in Inuit and northern communities. This would require individualized strategies addressing the particular needs of the communities.

The federal government has made a commitment to invest \$8.37 billion over five years in Indigenous communities through funding for education and training, as well as funding to address immediate housing needs and improving water quality. It is essential that this funding is delivered immediately, and not at the end of the five-year period, which would be after the next federal election, given that the funding situation might change significantly in that time, leaving less revenue to follow through on funding that is urgently needed.

CPJ further recommends that the federal government invest \$250 million per year over five years in ecosystems that function as natural infrastructure⁶ and provide an additional \$514 million per year over five years to Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) for First Nations green infrastructure.⁷

Conclusion

A responsive and effective National Housing Strategy must be part of a broader national poverty reduction plan. It also must ensure that those with lived experience and those who work on social policy and service provision in the area of housing and homelessness are partners in the consultation process. Further, it is essential that the varied and dire needs of Indigenous communities, in particular First Nations, Inuit, and Northern communities, are represented through consultation partnerships and that the process and actions are consistent with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action.

A process driven by these voices of experience, along with social policy and service providers, will recognize the need for a long-term and comprehensive vision that can include an effective strategy for safe, affordable, and adequate housing for everyone.

⁶ [Green Budget Coalition, "Recommendations for Budget 2016: Infrastructure and Climate Change Adaptation," 2016.](#)

⁷ [Green Budget Coalition, "Recommendations for Budget 2016: Green Infrastructure for First Nations Communities," 2016](http://greenbudget.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/GBC-FN-Infra.pdf) (<http://greenbudget.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/GBC-FN-Infra.pdf>).

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