
**National Housing and Homelessness Network
Toronto Disaster Relief Committee**

**Dying for a place to call home:
Women and homelessness
in Toronto and Canada**

A submission to the United Nations Regional Consultation
on Women and the Right to Housing in North America with
UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Miloon Kothari

Submitted by:

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Homelessness is deadly for women

The National Housing and Homelessness Network, a network of groups and individuals from Vancouver to St. John's, and the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, a community-based housing and homelessness group, are making this joint organizational submission to the United Nations Regional Consultation on Women and the Right to Housing. Canada faces a national affordable housing crisis and homelessness disaster that is touching cities and towns, along with rural, remote and Northern areas. Homelessness among women has been on the increase. The TDRC, along with the Church of the Holy Trinity, maintains the Homeless Memorial in downtown Toronto, which lists homeless people who are known to have died on the streets of Toronto. There are 69 women listed – eight of them only as “Jane Doe” because no one has been able to determine their name. Behind every name is a powerful story. Here are two:

Drina Joubert, died December 17, 1985

Drina moved to Toronto from South Africa, where she was a fashion model. Through a series of life circumstances, Drina lost employment and became homeless. She was unable to find assisted housing and, on a cold winter night in December, she was refused entry to the main hostel for women. That night, Drina climbed into a truck to find minimal shelter. She was found dead the next morning. Homeless advocates rallied around her death and demanded that a Coroner's Inquest be convened. The Coroner's Jury made several recommendations. A new street-level outreach program for women with mental health concerns was created (the Hostel Outreach Program continues, though its funding is not adequate to meet the needs of homeless women and men in Toronto); and a modest new provincial social housing program was funded (funding for this, and all other provincial housing programs, was ended in 1995).

Jennifer Caldwell, died March 6, 2000

Jennifer moved to Toronto from Western Canada to find work. She was unable to find a decent-paying job or housing. She lived in a makeshift structure in a valley near downtown Toronto. There are at least 40 similar encampments in this river valley (a flood in the summer of 2005 washed away several shelters) and countless more squatter settlements under bridges, in parks and abandoned buildings throughout the city. In early spring, a fire consumed Jennifer's shelter of twigs and paper. The fire was likely caused by a candle used for heating and light. Jennifer died from injuries sustained in the fire. In her memory, advocates took charred pieces of her sleeping bag to the Prime Minister of Canada, and the Premier of Ontario, to demand affordable homes.

Root cause of homelessness: Government decisions

Growing homelessness, and the underlying affordable housing crisis, has been triggered by a series of specific government decisions, along with general economic and social factors that have led to increased poverty. Women have been disproportionately affected both the specific governmental decisions, and also systemic factors. Four key federal decisions:

1. Starting in 1984, and over the next decade, the federal government **cut almost \$2 billion from housing programs**. The cuts continued at a slower pace (there was less to cut) after 1993, with cuts estimated at almost \$20 million. These cuts came as the population of Canada and the need for new affordable homes was also increasing.
2. In 1993, the federal government cancelled **all new affordable housing spending**.
3. In 1996, the federal government launched plans to **transfer existing federal housing programs to the provinces and territories**, which made Canada one of the only countries in the world without a national housing program.
4. In 1998, as part of a government-wide commercialization initiative, the federal government changed the *National Housing Act*, **eroding the role of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation** in developing new affordable housing and turning it into a “profit centre” by increasing mortgage insurance fees and cutting programs.

The federal actions were mirrored with similar cuts and downloading in most provinces and territories. For instance, in the largest (and richest) province of Ontario:

1. In 1995, the provincial government **cancelled 17,000 social housing units** approved for development and stopped all new spending for new homes.
2. In 1995, the provincial government **cut by almost one-quarter the shelter allowance payments** to welfare recipients, which left many of them with little or no money to pay rent, food, energy and other necessities. Economic evictions increased.
3. In 1998, the provincial government **downloaded housing programs to municipalities** (including the federal programs that had been downloaded, starting in 1996). Municipal governments in Canada have a limited tax base and generally cannot support income-distributive programs such as social housing.
4. In the 1990s, Ontario **cut more \$303 million from its housing programs** (more than one-quarter of its housing budget). Nine other provinces and territories made significant housing cuts in the 1990s. The total estimated cuts at the provincial / territorial level in the 1990s was \$464 million – more than one-fifth of housing spending.

Prof. Jean Wolfe of McGill University has written:

“It is only in Canada that the national government has, except for CMHC loans, withdrawn from social housing. The rush to get out of managing existing projects and building new, low-income housing has taken advocates by surprise. It was never imagined that a system that had taken 50 years to build-up could be dismantled so rapidly. Social housing policy in Canada now consists of a checker-board of 12 provincial and territorial policies, and innumerable local policies. It is truly post-modern.”

UN has criticized Canada for its homelessness disaster

Dr. David Hulchanski of the Centre for Urban and Community Studies at the University of Toronto, has compiled excerpts from recent UN Human Rights Committee and UN Ecosoc Committee observations on Canada's homelessness disaster and housing crisis:



**International Covenant
on Civil and
Political Rights**

Concluding Observations of the UN Human Rights Committee on Canada, April 7, 1999.

Canada's promise to the UN to hold Parliamentary hearings on its human rights violations – never kept

3. The Committee welcomes the delegation's commitment to take action to ensure effective follow-up in Canada of the Committee's concluding observations and to further develop and improve mechanisms for ongoing review of compliance of the State party with the provisions of the Covenant. In particular, the Committee welcomes the delegation's commitment to inform public opinion in Canada about the Committee's concerns and recommendations, to distribute the Committee's concluding observations to all members of Parliament and to ensure that a parliamentary committee will hold hearings of issues arising from the Committee's observations.

Homelessness: death on the streets of Canada

12. The Committee is concerned that homelessness has led to serious health problems and even to death. The Committee recommends that the State party take positive measures required by article 6 to address this serious problem.



**Economic and Social
Council**

UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON
ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Canada, December 10, 1998.

Homelessness declared a national disaster – but no action

24. The Committee is gravely concerned that such a wealthy country as Canada has allowed the problem of homelessness and inadequate housing to grow to such proportions that the mayors of Canada's 10 largest cities have now declared homelessness a national disaster.

Government policy decisions fail to protect women from violence

28. The Committee is concerned that the significant reductions in provincial social assistance programmes, the unavailability of affordable and appropriate housing and widespread discrimination with respect to housing create obstacles to women escaping domestic violence. Many women are forced, as a result of those obstacles, to choose between returning to or staying in a violent situation, on the one hand, or homelessness and inadequate food and clothing for themselves and their children, on the other.

Federal and provincial policies have 'exacerbated poverty and homelessness' since 1993

34. The Committee is concerned that the State Party did not take into account the Committee's 1993 major concerns and recommendations when it adopted policies at federal, provincial and territorial levels which exacerbated poverty and homelessness among vulnerable groups during a time of strong economic growth and increasing affluence.

Dramatic increase in poverty and homelessness among youth and young families

35. The Committee is concerned at the crisis level of homelessness among youth and young families. According to information received from the National Council of Welfare, over 90 per cent of single mothers under 25 live in poverty. Unemployment and under-employment rates are also significantly higher among youth than among the general population.

UN wants social housing and social assistance programs reinstated and a national strategy to reduce poverty and homelessness

46. The Committee recommends that the federal, provincial and territorial governments address homelessness and inadequate housing as a national emergency by reinstating or increasing, as the case may be, social housing programmes for those in need, improving and properly enforcing anti-discrimination legislation in the field of housing, increasing shelter allowances and social assistance rates to realistic levels, providing adequate support services for persons with disabilities, improving protection of security of tenure for tenants and improving protection of affordable rental housing stock from conversion to other uses. The Committee urges the State party to implement a national strategy for the reduction of homelessness and poverty.

National, sub-national response: Political spin but not enough homes

The National Housing and Homelessness Network, in its latest national housing report card (which was delivered to federal, provincial and territorial housing ministers at their national housing meeting on September 21, 2005) noted:

“Too much political spin, not enough truly affordable housing”: That’s the verdict in the latest national housing report card released by the National Housing and Homelessness Network on the eve of the federal, provincial, territorial housing ministers’ meeting on September 22 and 23. The ministers are meeting at a remote, luxury resort in rural Nova Scotia as more than 1.7 million Canadians are suffering in a nation-wide affordable housing crisis and homelessness disaster. Exactly four years ago (September 19, 2000), federal, provincial and territorial housing ministers emerged from a national housing summit to proclaim, in the words of then-federal housing minister **Alfonso Gagliano**, “we have a working plan” to create more desperately-needed new affordable homes. Six weeks later, federal Liberals promised to fund up to 120,000 new affordable homes over four years. Four years on, Canada has **no comprehensive national housing**

strategy – just a loose patchwork of funding and programs that has delivered just 10% of the new homes that were promised.

336 housing announcements, few new homes

“Federal, provincial and territorial housing ministers made an impressive 336 announcements since they signed the Affordable Housing Framework Agreement in 2001 and agreed to invest \$1.36 billion over five years,” says Michael Shapcott of the National Housing and Homelessness Network. “That’s a lot of political spin, but it hasn’t produced many new homes. Ministers have made promises, signed agreements, issued announcements and called press conferences. But they have failed to build new homes. That’s why the **National Housing and Homelessness Network has graded federal housing efforts over the past four years as a failure.**”

There is always **an uptick in the number of media releases** leading up to a housing ministers’ meeting. There have been 45 announcements in the three months leading up to the Nova Scotia meeting. There were a record 71 announcements in the three months leading up to the last housing ministers’ meeting in Gatineau in November of 2004. Bilateral housing deals signed by the federal, provincial and territorial governments require an annual audited financial statement and performance report, but almost no reliable information has been released. The best estimate from the National Housing and Homelessness Network is that less than 12,000 new homes – or 10% of the total promised – have actually been committed.

Ontario promised 46,332 new homes, but delivered only 63

The only province that has released independent information is Ontario, which issued three years of audited financial statements. Comparing audit numbers with announcements is revealing:

<i>Fiscal year ending</i>	Ontario promised: <i>(number of new homes announced by federal and Ontario governments)</i>	Ontario actually delivered: <i>(number of new homes committed as reported in audited statements)</i>
2002	9,800	22
2003	13,912	23
2004	22,620	18
Total	46,332	63

There are several reasons why Ontario has promised so much and delivered so little:

- federal and Ontario politicians have a habit of **re-announcing the same units again and again and again**. For instance, on August 31, 2005, the federal and Ontario governments signed an affordable housing memorandum. It was the 11th major announcement

involving the same units, the third written agreement between the two levels of government on the same units and the second regional allocation of the same units.

- federal and Ontario politicians **confuse regional allocations with unit commitments**. A regional allocation means some units are assigned to regions. But it will be months or years before those units are tied to a particular project and construction can begin.
- Ontario politicians, like their counterparts in other parts of Canada, are **reluctant to commit matching provincial dollars**, which means that the federal funds have been stalled. Ontario will announce unit allocations, then wait to assign the dollars to support those units to future budget years. That delays project commitment and construction.

Entire sections of the country, including Ontario (the most populous province and the one with the largest homelessness disaster and affordable housing crisis) and the Atlantic provinces, have been left behind, with relatively few new homes built. Other parts of the country – notably British Columbia and Alberta – have seen the provinces cut their own housing spending and replace it with federal dollars. **Only Quebec has been able to achieve close to its target.**

A record of inaction on housing and homelessness

Effective political action by housing advocates has generated a political response at the federal level, and in many provinces and territories. Elected officials have promised more funding for homelessness initiatives, and for housing, but have failed to deliver. Here is a brief summary of recent promises, and an assessment of action:

Federal homelessness strategy (including the Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative): Announced in December of 1999, the federal homeless strategy was renewed in 2003 for another three years. The program is in the final year of its funding cycle. This initiative provides \$135 million annually for everything from services for the homeless to transitional (temporary) housing and shelters. Originally, the money was designated for 10 communities in Canada, but after a protest, the same pot of money was distributed more thinly across the country. Advocates say that there is not enough money to meet the needs of the homeless, that the lack of core funding presents administrative challenges to agencies serving the homeless and Aboriginal advocates say that the limited funding designated for First Nations people is not adequate. The federal government has promised to renew its homelessness funding, but there was no new money in the last federal budget. Unless there is new funding in the next few months, then agencies will have to shut down services and lay off staff as the current funding cycle expires. In the transition from SCPI I to SCPI II in 2003, hundreds of staff were laid off and important services were denied to homeless people while the transition funding was being allocated.

Federal housing rehabilitation program (Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program): Also at the end of a three-year funding cycle, this program provides \$128 million annually for the repair and renovation of substandard and abandoned housing, including the conversion of abandoned buildings into affordable housing. The SCPI grants are so small that they need to be combined with other funding in order to create

viable housing projects. The federal government has promised to renew RRAP, but there was no funding in the last federal budget.

Federal Affordable Housing Program: Announced during the federal election of 2000, the program was supposed to generate up to 120,000 new affordable homes with a federal contribution of \$680 million over four years, and a matching provincial / territorial contribution. In November 2001, the Affordable Housing Framework Agreement was signed by the federal government and all the provinces and territories, implementing the Affordable Housing Program. The federal government topped up its contribution with an additional \$320 million in 2003, bringing the total federal contribution to \$1 billion. A significant number of new affordable homes have been built in Quebec, and a smaller number in several other provinces (including Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia). In Alberta and British Columbia, provincial governments cut provincial housing spending and replaced with federal housing dollars, which reduced the net new amount of housing. In Ontario and the Atlantic provinces, very little new housing has been built. The federal government has refused to release audited financial statements or performance reports, which are required to be submitted annually for this program. Advocates estimate that the program has delivered about 12,000 new homes since 2001 – about ten percent of the numbers promised in the year 2000. Advocates have called on the federal government to use the accountability framework in bilateral housing agreements to bypass provinces and territories that are unwilling or unable to deliver, but the federal government has refused. The affordability definition under this program is seriously flawed, which means that new homes are not truly affordable.

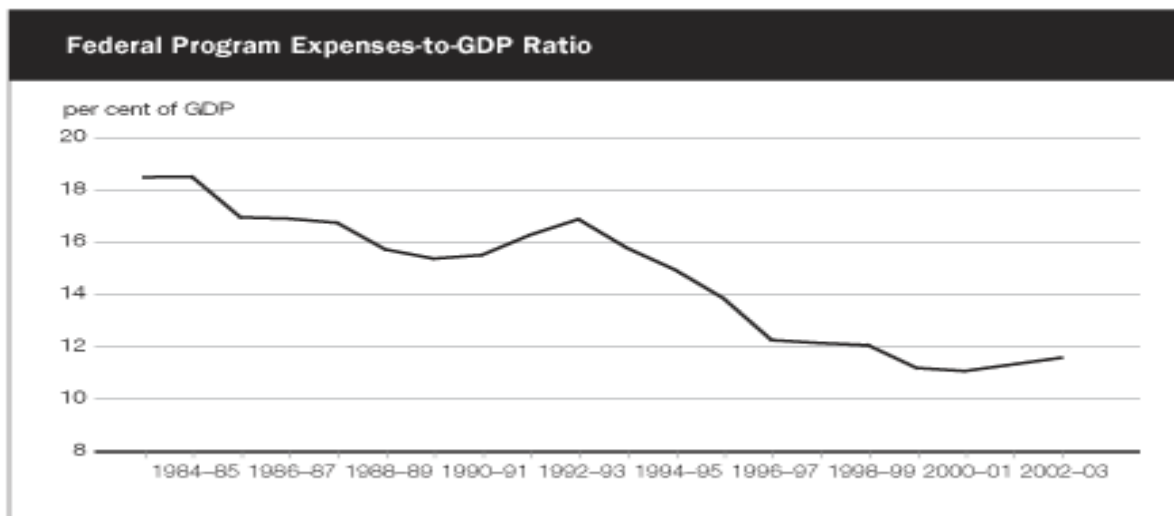
Bill C-48 new housing dollars: The most recent federal budget contained no new funding for affordable housing. However, the fourth political party (the New Democratic Party) was able to take advantage of the minority Parliament to press the federal government to commit new dollars for housing. Bill C-48, proposed by the NDP, was authorized by Parliament and received Royal Assent in June of 2005. It commits \$1.6 billion over two years for new affordable housing, and an additional \$100 million for energy efficiency for low-income housing. This is the single biggest new spending commitment for housing in more than a decade. The agreement negotiated between the NDP and the governing Liberal Party called for the new housing dollars to flow directly to community-based housing developers or willing municipalities if a province was unable or unwilling to participate in the program. However, the federal government – at the most recent federal, provincial, territorial housing ministers’ meeting – has decided to start a series of bilateral housing negotiations on the Bill C-48 dollars, which could delay the roll-out of the new funding for months or years.

Re-invest CMHC profits: As noted above, Canada’s national housing agency was turned into a “profit centre” for the federal government as a result of amendments to the National Housing Act in 1998. Mortgage insurance fees were increased and spending was cut. In its most recent fiscal year, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation reported equity of \$3.4 billion and net income after taxes of \$950 million. CMHC projects that its equity will grow to \$8.3 billion by 2009 and net income will be \$1.2 billion. While prudent risk management dictates that some of the equity be maintained against possible

future contingencies, advocates say that CMHC should reinvest a substantial portion of its profits into new social housing and other housing priorities.

The One Percent Solution: Working towards an end to homelessness

For the past two decades, the federal government in Canada has cut funding and downloaded its responsibilities for housing to sub-national governments (provincial, territorial and municipal). The national government continues to deny its responsibility, under various international treaties and obligations, to make sure that all of its residents are properly housed through a comprehensive and fully-funded national housing program. Federal spending relative to GDP has dropped substantially in Canada over the past decade, largely as a result of cuts to housing and other social spending. In recent years, the federal government has recorded significant annual surpluses, but these surpluses have not been reinvested in desperately-needed new social housing.



Source: Department of Finance, Canada

Housing advocates in Canada have developed what they call the One Percent Solution - \$2 billion annually for new social housing and services from the federal government, and a matching \$2 billion from the provinces and territories. This is based on a calculation that senior levels of government will need to spend an additional one percent to achieve this goal.

Advocates have proposed a four-part agenda to move towards that goal:

1. **Fully and immediately commit the \$1 billion in federal housing dollars** in the federal-provincial-territorial Affordable Housing Program.
2. **Fully and immediately commit the \$1.6 billion in new housing dollars and the \$100 million in energy retrofits** promised in Bill C-48.

3. Implement the last Throne Speech promise to **“extend and enhance” the federal homelessness strategy, Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative and the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program.**
4. Commit **\$2 billion annually for new social housing** – the One Percent Solution.

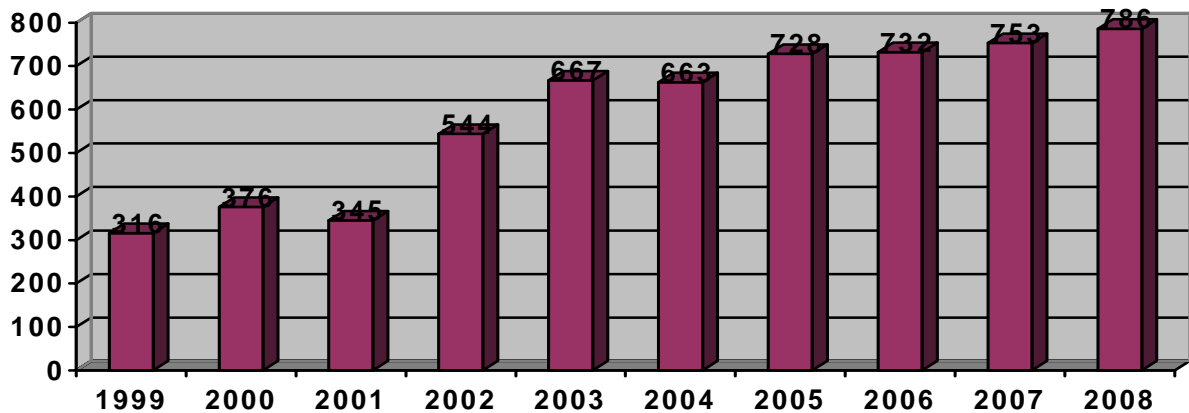
To support this new spending, the federal government can draw on three sources:

1. **Reinvest the annual surplus** of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the federal government’s national housing agency, in new social housing and related programs.
2. Allocate a significant portion of the **annual federal surplus** to new national social housing and homelessness programs.
3. Draw additional funds from the **general revenues** of the Government of Canada.

Reinvest CMHC surplus / step-out

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the federal government’s national housing agency, is generating a substantial annual surplus. CMHC ran a surplus last year (income after taxes) of \$667 million. This surplus is projected to grow (according to CMHC’s own calculations) to more than three-quarters of a billion dollars by the year 2008. One important source of revenue for a new national social housing program is to ensure that the **surplus from CMHC is reinvested in new social housing supply and rent supplements.**

CMHC surplus (net income after taxes) in millions of dollars



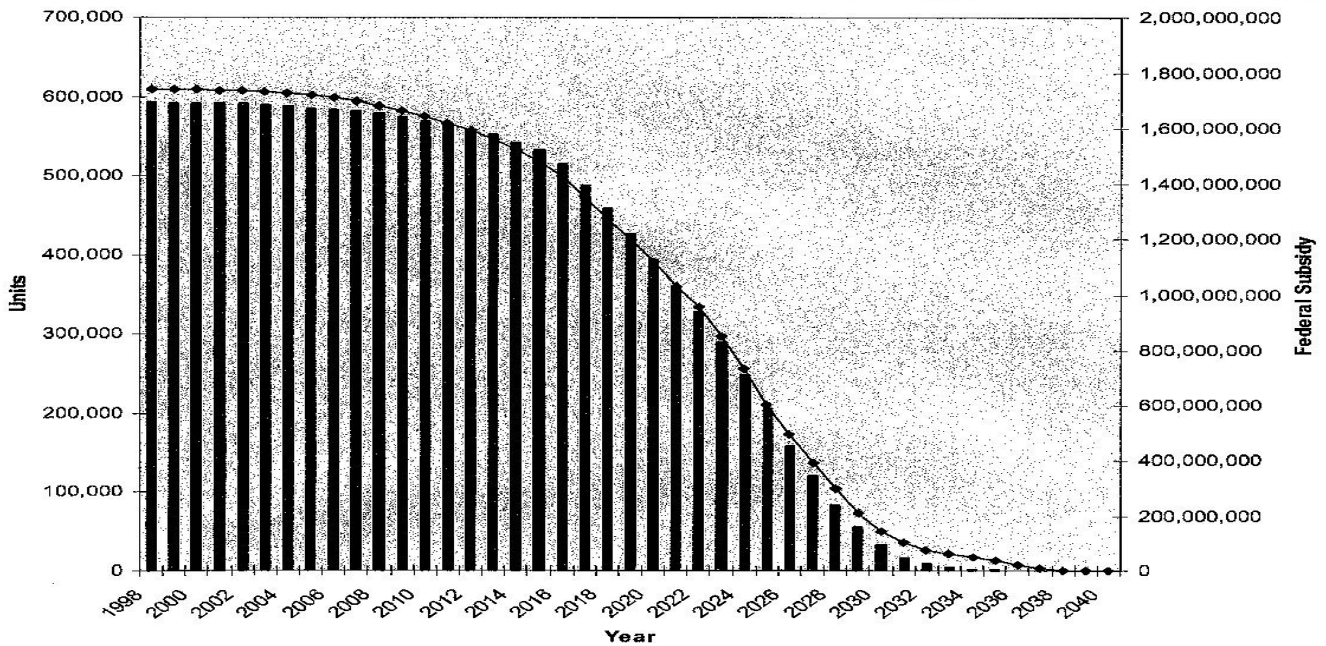
Source: CMHC

In addition, the federal funding agreements covering hundreds of thousands of social housing units funded from 1973 to 1993 are due to expire over the next two decades. As these agreements step-out, there will be substantial housing dollars freed for re-investment in new social housing.

The financial design of the federal social housing programs from the 1970s to the 1990s allows for a gradual “step-out” of federal financing as the projects mature. This step-out will increase dramatically as more projects near the typical 35-year life of their operating agreements.

Advocates say that the funding that is freed as the existing **social housing agreements step-out should be reinvested in new social housing supply and rent supplements.**

Annual step-out of federal social housing programs



Source: Canadian Housing and Renewal Association

All of which is respectfully submitted,

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