



National Housing Collaborative  
Collectif pancanadien pour le logement

## **National Housing Collaborative**

**Montreal discussion: October 4, 2016**

**Hosted by: National Housing Collaborative, Centraide du Grand Montréal**

**In attendance:** Jean-Pierre Racette, SHAPEM; Christian Perron, APAGM; Stéphan Corriveau, RQOH; Nathalie Forest, SHDM; Hans Brouillette, CORPIQ; Marcel Pedneault, FECHIMM; Louis Bériaud, Inter-Loge; Pierre Gaudreau, RAPSIM; Edith Cyr, Batir son quartier; Alan Tassé, Groupe CDH; Robert Cohen, RQOH; James McGregor, MMFIM

### **Key messages:**

- Significant investments need to be made into repair and expansion of social housing
- Social housing provides stable housing, lasting public assets, and serves as an important bulwark of affordability in areas of gentrification
- It is the responsibility of government to develop policy holistically, considering broad economic trends, social needs, and community impact

### **Summary:**

The meeting began with introductions and an overview of the Collaborative's work and process to date. After a presentation of the NHC's policy development areas—direct assistance to tenants, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, attracting capital to new and existing rental supply, and social housing at the end of operating agreements—the group discussed the NHC's priorities from a Quebec perspective.

The group discussed the role of social housing. The group agreed that while social housing serves a primary role as provider of affordable housing, it also serves a secondary but equally important role in urban renewal and community building. Participants noted that community housing has the capacity to revitalize neighbourhoods by providing safe, stable housing and enabling communities to create jobs.

Some participants pointed to the potential for well-funded social housing to contribute to the government's aims of social inclusion and innovation. They referenced social housing projects of the 1980s that served as exemplars of community revitalization, and emphasized the need for the government, through the national housing strategy, to return to funding levels that enabled social housing leadership and innovation.



Other participants noted that the past 20 years has seen a decline in the proportion of total housing stock made up of social housing. Still others added that conditions for the poorest 20% of the population have also been in decline over that period. Participants agreed that by renovating and expanding the inventory of social housing properties to approximately 8% of the total market, housing supply could respond to meet population need.

One participant observed the Federation of Canadian Municipalities agrees significant expansion of social housing is required. Another noted that Quebec has invested \$5 billion in recent years in public housing. They compared this to the federal total support for social housing, and proposed the federal government has the capacity to significantly increase investment in social housing.

The group was wary of demand-side mechanisms, such as the NHC's proposed portable rental assistance. Some stressed that demand-side mechanisms encouraging home ownership have been in place for some time. They stated these have contributed to the rise of condominium development, but have not improved affordability. Others expressed concern that a portable rental assistance program would lead to rent inflation, or have the unintended effect of encouraging people to leave their community. The group emphasized that public funds and incentives should be directed to assist those in greatest need, for the benefit of the whole community.

The group discussed the need for government investment in order to produce and expand affordable housing. Some noted the average cost to repair existing rental stock ranges from \$7,000-\$10,000 per unit. Others added the cost of construction has also increased faster than rents—or incomes—have risen. They observed the market effects of cost pressures, remarking there are currently 1,500 fewer rental buildings in Montreal than a decade ago. With renewed government investment, innovative models could reverse the trend. The group pointed to models of innovation, providing the example of a single Montreal project that resulted in the creation of 4,700 new units.

The group preferred a variety of approaches to address and prevent homelessness, rather than Housing First. They expressed the need for municipalities and provinces to build capacity to develop their own responses tailored to local need. Many forwarded that federal funding to address homelessness would be better aimed at identifying and targeting the root causes of homelessness. Other added increased funding for social housing can serve to prevent economic homelessness.



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While the group recognized the federal government has a role to play in supporting affordable housing, provincial jurisdiction and distinctions must be recognized in order to develop differentiated, responsive approaches to housing need. Participants noted housing is experienced locally, and responses must be tailored to the local level: the same solution will not work equally in Montreal, Vancouver and Toronto. The group expressed desire for the national housing strategy to assert a federal role to support and reinforce communities in locally directed urban planning and community building.

The group emphasized that community should be at the centre of housing policy development. This entails analyzing the community within its broader context—the group cited the magnet-city effect of globalization, and the increasing need for cities to differentiate, leaving some sectors and people behind in the process. It also entails developing policy with a focus on the community, not the individual. One participant offered the example of participation in cooperative housing projects encouraging and enabling tenants to contribute to community life.

The group proposed the national housing strategy is an opportunity for the federal government to make bold reinvestments in the rehabilitation and expansion of social housing. Participants suggested the NHC's policy development should take an expansive, community-focused lens, and place a greater emphasis on the development of social housing as a key mechanism to combat social exclusion and to build healthy, mixed-income communities.