




THE NATIONAL  
**RIGHT TO HOUSING**  
NETWORK

**2024**

# **HOLIDAY GUIDE**

**CONVERSATION CUES FOR  
TALKING ABOUT THE  
RIGHT TO HOUSING**





The holiday season brings joy and cheer,  
But tough conversations may appear.  
When housing's the topic, tensions may rise,  
So here's a guide to keep you wise.  
At NRHN, we've crafted a way,  
To help you navigate what to say.  
With answers clear, thoughtful, and bright,  
You'll share your message with insight and might.

# 1. What does the right to housing mean?

The right to housing is more than just having a roof over your head.

**It's a legally recognized human right** that ensures everyone has access to safe, affordable, and adequate housing, free from discrimination or barriers.

In 2019, the government passed the ***National Housing Strategy Act (NHSA)***, bringing home Canada's commitments to the right to housing under international law, when we signed the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights back in 1976.

## The human right to housing means:

- **Security:** Feeling safe in your home, without fear of eviction or harassment.
- **Affordability:** Housing that doesn't force you to sacrifice essentials like food or medications.
- **Dignity:** Living in conditions that respect your autonomy as a human.

In the United Nation's definition, there are [seven elements](#) of the right to housing including: security of tenure (protection from eviction, harassment, or other threats), affordability, habitability, access to basic services, location, accessibility, and culturally appropriateness.

By recognizing housing as a human right, we focus on **people's needs** rather than treating housing solely as a commodity or investment.

## 2. How does the National Housing Strategy Act (NHSA) make a difference in the housing crisis?

The 2019 **National Housing Strategy Act (NHSA)** was a historic step for Canada. The legislation commits the federal government to recognizing housing as a human right and sets the foundation for justice and accountability.

- **Recognition:** The NHSA requires that Canada's housing policies further the right to adequate housing (i.e., prioritizing those in greatest housing need, setting clear goals and timelines to end homelessness, etc.) as reflected in international human rights law.
- **Accountability:** The NHSA introduced mechanisms like the **Federal Housing Advocate** and the **National Housing Council**, which requires meaningful engagement with people with lived/living experience of homelessness and inadequate housing. These engagements identify the systemic barriers preventing people from accessing safe, affordable, and accessible housing, and recommend solutions to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure, and Communities Canada (Minister Sean Fraser).
- **Equality and Non-Discrimination Focused:** The Act ensures that decisions in housing policy consider the needs of those who face the greatest housing challenges, for example Indigenous persons, women and gender-diverse people, racialized communities, and people with disabilities.

While it's not a silver bullet, the NHSA provides tools to demand action and hold governments accountable for their commitments to the right to housing.

### 3. Why do we need to talk about housing as a human right? Don't we just need more houses built?

Building more homes is crucial, *but it's not the whole solution.*

#### Here's why:

- **Who benefits?** Many new homes built today are still priced out of reach for those most in need. The right to housing ensures policies prioritize creating housing that is affordable and accessible, especially to those in greatest housing need.
- **Beyond doors in the ground:** The housing crisis isn't just about availability—it is driven by factors like under-investment in non-market housing (like social, non-profit, and cooperative housing), inadequate income support programs, and a severe lack of protections for renters experiencing renoventions, discrimination, unreasonable rent hikes and more.
- **The right to housing works:** We can see a direct line between recent federal government policies and the submissions made through human rights processes lead by the Federal Housing Advocate and Review Panels (which resulted in the recent \$250 million encampment response fund and a Renter Bill of Rights).

Talking about the right to housing shifts the conversation from “housing as a market” to **housing as a fundamental human right**. It challenges us to ensure solutions are inclusive, effective, and sustainable for the most marginalized.



## Tips for Productive Conversations

- **Start with shared values:** Most people in Canada agree that everyone deserves a safe place to live.
- **Bring stories to life:** Share examples of how housing challenges impact real people and communities.
- **Keep it hopeful:** Most people in Canada are feeling the pinch of the affordability crisis, and generally, people are feeling disillusioned. Highlighting hope and progress made through the mechanisms created by the NHSA is important to combat apathy—while emphasizing that we can all push for stronger action.

By understanding and sharing these key ideas, you can help build awareness and inspire action—one conversation at a time.

*Happy Holidays!*

— The NRHN Team