

*WORKSHOP RECAP :*

# Claiming the Right to Housing in the Prairies

**THROUGH THE  
NATIONAL  
HOUSING  
STRATEGY  
ACT**



# Who, what, where when...

On April 15, 2021, 98 participants gathered from Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta to identify systemic housing barriers and how to claim the right to housing through the National Housing Strategy Act.

This event was part of a regional workshop series hosted by the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, the National Right to Housing Network, and the Social Rights Advocacy Centre.

## **In partnership with:**

Canadian Poverty Institute  
Community Legal Assistance Services for Saskatoon Inner City  
End Poverty Edmonton  
Public Interest Law Centre - Legal Aid Manitoba  
Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnerships  
Vibrant Communities Calgary



An aerial photograph of a city, likely Montreal, showing a dense urban landscape with numerous buildings and trees. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue rectangle in the upper half, which contains white text. The background image has a warm, golden-yellow tint.

**We heard about the right  
to housing in Canada...**

# The right to housing in Canada

Canada has recognized the right to housing under international human rights law by ratifying the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and other human rights treaties.

Canada has agreed that the Covenant obligations apply to all levels of government – municipal, provincial and federal.

Under the ICESCR, States are committed to:



"achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized in the Covenant, to the maximum of its available resources ... by all appropriate means, including particularly the adoption of legislative measures."



# The National Housing Strategy Act

The National Housing Strategy Act (NHSA) is Canada's housing policy.

It includes the key principles of a human rights-based approach to housing and recognizes that:

**the right to  
adequate housing  
is a fundamental  
human right**

**housing is  
essential to the  
inherent dignity  
and wellbeing  
of a person**

**Canada  
is obliged to  
progressively  
realize the right  
to housing**

# 3 key mechanisms under the NHSA

Three key mechanisms have been created under the NHSA to hold the federal government accountable to implement the right to housing.







# **Federal Housing Advocate**

The Federal Housing Advocate is responsible to receive and review submissions brought forward by communities who are impacted by systemic housing issues.

Its role is to promote and ensure compliance with the federal government's policy to progressively realize the right to housing over time through various mechanisms and processes.

After reviewing submissions, the Advocate submits its findings and recommendations for the federal government to address the issues, and the government is obliged to respond within a set period of time.

The Office of the Federal Housing Advocate is located within the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

A large teal circle with a slight drop shadow, containing the text 'National Housing Council' in bold black font.

# **National Housing Council**

The National Housing Council advises the Minister responsible for housing issues in Canada about the effectiveness of Canada's National Housing Strategy and to ensure consistency of the Strategy with the right to housing (as articulated in the National Housing Strategy Act).

The Council is also responsible to promote the participation and inclusion of vulnerable groups and people with lived experience of housing need or homelessness, in housing policy development.

The Council consists of 15 appointed members, both individuals and government representatives. The NHSA requires that its membership include representation from people who are impacted by housing issues, as well as people with human rights expertise.





## **Review Panel**

The Review Panel hears selected cases of systemic housing issues that are identified by the Federal Housing Advocate.

The Panel is responsible for holding hearings to review systemic housing issues, with participation from people who are affected by the issue, as well as organizations with expertise in the right to housing.

Once a hearing has concluded, the Panel will submit a report with its recommendations to address the issues to the responsible Minister.

The Minister must then respond within 120 days, outlining the measures that will be taken to resolve the issues raised by the impacted groups.

Click below to learn more about the NHSA:

## **National Housing Strategy Act** **- A Primer -**





# We heard about the key systemic housing issues in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba



What we heard...

# Systemic housing issues in the Prairies

Participants at the workshop met in small groups to discuss the systemic housing issues in Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. There were strong threads between the small groups, and all of them identified these key issues...

**NIMBYism**

**Discrimination** **LACK OF SUPPORTIVE HOUSING**

**Inadequate rent protections** **Unaffordable housing**

**Inadequate supports for people experiencing homelessness**

**LACK OF SOCIAL HOUSING** **Lack of transitional housing**

**Challenges for Indigenous communities**

**Financialization of housing**

**ABLEISM AND INACCESSIBLE HOUSING**



What we heard...

# Systemic housing issues in Alberta

## From panelists:

- Marginalized or vulnerable groups face barriers to fully realizing the right to housing.
- Housing remains unaffordable for many Albertans, particularly for renter households, Indigenous persons and those belonging to racialized groups.
- Housing options are reduced due to discrimination and systemic racism.
- People living with disabilities have difficulty accessing adequate housing.
- There are no housing considerations for people going into or coming out of prison.

## From participants:

- There is a lack of access to housing for people of colour who are incarcerated after they are released.
- Victims of crime and domestic violence are often forced to live around the people who are threatening them.
- Many property owners do not follow the applicable privacy legislation. For example, a list of 'bad tenants' is maintained by property owner groups.
- Many neighbourhoods do not want affordable housing in their communities as a result of discriminatory attitudes (ie., NIMBYism - Not In My Backyard).
- There is a lack of social housing.
- Marginalized communities face discrimination when trying to access housing.

What we heard...

# Systemic housing issues in Saskatchewan

## From panelists:

- There are high levels of housing need across the province.
- There are high levels of affordable housing need.
- Women, Indigenous and racialized people often face discrimination and human rights violations in their housing.
- Vulnerable people are being evicted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## From participants:

- There is an overrepresentation of people living with disabilities in the homeless population, and women over 50 years old in need of housing.
- There are no housing considerations for people going into or coming out of prison. Upon arrest and detention, many lose their housing. Then, upon release, they are not supported in accessing housing.
- There are regressive housing policies imposed by the province. For example, reducing the notice period on eviction notices from 14 days to 7 days and taking away rent incentives.
- There is a lack of permanent supportive housing options.
- There is a lack of wheelchair accessible units.
- Affordable housing is disproportionately distributed across the province.
- Rural communities have a unique set of housing issues such as issues related to transportation.
- Many property owners do not follow the applicable privacy legislation.
- Landlords often refuse to rent to tenants who are receiving Income Supports.
- There is a lack of accountability of private housing providers.

What we heard...

# Systemic housing issues in Manitoba

## From panelists:

- On-reserve housing is underfunded, causing issues around accessibility, maintenance and overcrowding.
- Indigenous people are more broadly represented amongst those experiencing homelessness around the province.
- Youth aging out of foster care - who are predominantly First Nations - are vulnerable to homelessness and face obstacles in securing housing.
- Members of the LGBTQIA2S+ community are overrepresented amongst people who are vulnerable to experiencing homelessness.
- There is a shortage of affordable and social housing due to increasing privatization and funding cuts to housing.

## From participants:

- There is a lack of affordable housing due to the financialization of housing.
- There is a lack of support for tenants with mental health concerns.
- There is a lack of ongoing rent subsidies, and new housing developments claim to be “affordable” yet they don’t meet community needs.
- People experiencing homelessness, couch-surfing, or staying with friends don’t qualify for affordable housing unless they are more visibly vulnerable.
- There are barriers to access housing, like the need for a co-signor and guarantor, or language barriers.
- The conversion of apartments into condominiums has taken more affordable options out of the financial reach of seniors on a fixed income.

What we heard...

# How does the right to housing apply to these issues?

1

The complaint process requires individual tenants to make a complaint against landlords based on violations of their rights under the Landlord and Tenant Act. This puts their housing security at risk. The right to housing can be used to change this process to allow for “group complaints” to address ongoing issues that affect many tenants.

2

Use the right to housing to provide more resources to landlords dealing with vulnerable tenants, such as individuals with mental health concerns or those who have no access to resources to address their concerns.

3

The right to housing can be utilized to control astronomical rent increases and above guideline rent increases.

4

Provincial governments must recognize the importance of the right to housing, commit resources to realizing that right, and have a dedicated Ministry to monitor the implementation of the right to housing.



What we heard...

# How can the NHSA be used to address these issues?

1

The Federal Housing Advocate could set up regional exchanges with housing advocacy groups in various provinces, and work with them to envision solutions.

2

Sharing data between organizations in different provinces so that they can collaborate and better manage statistics on housing issues. Provincial governments can use the information collected to support systemic changes in housing policy.

3

A right to housing coalition in Manitoba has already been established. The group's advocacy could be enhanced using the National Housing Strategy Act.

4

All levels of government must be held accountable to ensure that they are addressing homelessness.

5

The Federal government must be responsible to cost-share provincial housing programs.

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