

# Human Rights-based National Housing Strategy for Canada

## SUMMARY

Submission to the Government of Canada,  
“Let’s Talk Housing” consultation to develop a National  
Housing Strategy

## WHO WE ARE

The Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO) is a community legal clinic, funded by Legal Aid Ontario, with a province-wide mandate. We work for the advancement of human rights and social justice in housing for low-income Ontarians through legal advice and representation, law reform, community organizing, and education and training.

For a number of years, ACTO has been advocating for the establishment in legislation of a rights-based National Housing Strategy (NHS), along with the allocation of adequate, stable, and long-term funding.

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY

ACTO’s recommendations are informed by the concluding observations of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), which we fully support. Our recommendations are further informed through our experience as the legal representatives of low-income tenants and those experiencing homelessness in Ontario whose housing needs we have come to understand through years of working closely with them to enforce their right to a decent home.

## A comprehensive and well-integrated plan

- The existing patchwork of federal and provincial programs and inadequate, short-term funding envelopes needs to be replaced with a comprehensive and well-integrated national plan.
- All three levels of government in Canada must ensure access to adequate, affordable and accessible housing for all, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalized communities.
- In addition, a National Housing Strategy must have a distinct strategy to address the unique challenges facing Canada's Indigenous Peoples.
- Municipalities require a strategic federal response that addresses the underlying structural causes of poverty, precarious housing and homelessness, provides a framework for coordination and policy alignment with provincial/territorial governments and across government ministries, and which dedicates new, long-term funding at the levels required to end homelessness in Canada.

## Rights-based, incorporating three types of obligations

- **Immediate Obligations** – These apply to all existing programs and policies and include obligations to administer programs without discrimination and meet basic and emergency needs.
- **Short-term Commitments and Targets** – These are obligations to meet agreed upon targets with established timelines – for example, to increase levels of social assistance or minimum wage by a particular percentage or to put in place a new program for community living within a year. Short-term commitments should be concrete and realistic and based on firm government policy. Commitments should be regularly updated.
- **Longer Term Goals** – The central long-term goal should be an expressed commitment by the government to eliminate homelessness as a violation of human rights, and not as a matter of policy. This commitment should be incorporated into a national housing and homelessness strategy. It should be achieved without unreasonable delay, and should be based on an established timeline that is realistic in light of available resources and other challenges.

## A Multiplicity of Solutions

- In regions across Canada, the reality of diverse Indigenous communities and various groups with specific housing needs calls for flexible and diverse

housing options and solutions.

- Solutions include a mix of new purpose-built truly affordable social housing units; adequate resources to ensure housing quality and sustainability; rent supplements/housing allowances in the private rental sector; supports for those who need services and programs to live independently and with dignity; barrier-free accessible building and housing unit design, and homelessness/eviction prevention.
- Truly affordable housing means tenants are paying rents that are less than 30% of household before-tax income.

### Integration with Poverty Reduction Strategies

- An estimated 4.8 million Canadians live in poverty and struggle to meet their most basic needs every day.
- A national housing strategy must be developed in conjunction with income security issues such as inadequate social assistance and minimum wage rates, and access to employment insurance.

Please refer to ACTO's full submission for our detailed NHS recommendations directed at the federal government, Ontario government and municipalities.