



A call to action – Canada must strengthen the human right to housing

As the Federal Housing Advocate embarks on a new three-year mandate, she reflects on the need to address the housing crisis as one of the most pressing social and economic challenges facing the country

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I'm honoured to have been re-appointed to a second mandate as Canada's Federal Housing Advocate until 2028. The first 30 days of my new mandate have reaffirmed the urgency of advancing the human right to adequate housing.

The housing crisis remains one of the most pressing social and economic challenges facing the country, requiring immediate and coordinated government action. My office continues to engage with rights holders, amplify the voices of people with lived experience, and push for meaningful accountability mechanisms to ensure that governments uphold their human rights obligations.

The affordability of housing is becoming increasingly uncertain, exacerbated by inflation and rising costs of living. In addition, ongoing trade tensions introduce further economic instability, making it harder for individuals and families to maintain housing security. These challenges underscore the need for future governments to take proactive interventions and long-term solutions that prioritize affordability, stability, and human rights in housing policies.

The federal government must prioritize a human rights-based approach to housing and homelessness. The path forward must not only address the immediate needs of those in housing precarity but also create a sustainable, long-term strategy to ensure that every person in Canada has access to adequate housing. The housing and homelessness crisis is solvable, but only if policy decisions reflect the urgency and scale of the challenge. The government must be committed to a human rights-based approach, in alignment with the National Housing Strategy Act, that moves beyond temporary measures and short-term funding cycles.

While progress has been made, systemic barriers persist. The federal government's recent commitment of \$250 million for human rights-based encampment responses is a step forward. We know that more must be done to ensure sustainable funding, policy coordination, and accountability mechanisms that protect the rights of those most affected by housing insecurity.

Reinforcing accountability mechanisms under the National Housing Strategy Act (NHTSA)

The federal government must strengthen its engagement with the accountability structures established under the NHTSA and ensure they have long-term, sustainable funding. This includes actively responding to the recommendations of the Federal Housing Advocate, National Housing Council and review panels, implementing an action plan to address the financialization of purpose-built rental housing, and developing a National Encampments Response Plan that includes all levels of government, Indigenous leadership, and people with lived experience.

Encampments remain one of the most visible and urgent manifestations of the housing crisis. A national approach must ensure that all encampment responses are grounded in human rights principles, with clear commitments to preventing forced evictions, providing access to adequate services, and ensuring meaningful engagement with encampment residents.

The federal government must monitor the implementation of human rights-based community action plans funded through the Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampments Initiative (UHEI), document lessons learned, and scale up successful interventions. Additionally, federal lands must be included in this framework, with a clear ban on forced evictions and commitments to providing housing alternatives for those living in encampments. Ultimately, encampment residents must be provided options for permanent and adequate housing.

Furthermore, participatory processes under NHTSA must be reinforced to enable the ongoing engagement of civil society and those with lived experience in shaping housing policy.

Implementing a Whole-of-Government Approach to housing as a human right

Strong federal leadership is needed to ensure a human rights-based approach is incorporated in all housing policies. This requires a commitment to using human rights language in public communications, avoiding stigmatization of people experiencing homelessness, and ensuring that all housing and homelessness policy officials receive training in human rights, Indigenous rights, gender-based analysis, and trauma and violence informed approaches.

Public education on the right to adequate housing must be expanded, leveraging resources from the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, civil society, and statutory human rights agencies. Additionally, the federal government must adopt human rights-based outcome indicators to assess the effectiveness of housing policies and programs, ensuring that data collection reflects the housing experiences of all individuals, particularly those most vulnerable to systemic barriers.

Federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal legislative, policy, and funding efforts must be aligned to ensure seamless coordination in the building, operation, and maintenance of housing. This must also mean reinforcing links with other areas that affect people's access to adequate housing – including

respect for Indigenous rights, access to health and mental health care, and adequate social support services, among many others. A cohesive policy approach that centers on the most disadvantaged populations is essential to eliminating barriers and ensuring that housing solutions meet the needs of those most affected by the crisis.

Investing in First Nations, Inuit, and Métis housing

The inherent housing rights of Indigenous peoples must be upheld as articulated under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UNDA).

Urban Indigenous populations face distinct housing challenges, including inadequate access to culturally appropriate services, systemic barriers to affordable housing, and overrepresentation in encampments. Federal, provincial, and municipal policies must explicitly address these issues and ensure targeted funding for Indigenous-led organizations, such as Friendship Centres, to lead housing and encampment response efforts. Establishing dedicated financial mechanisms will help bridge jurisdictional gaps and provide long-term, sustainable housing solutions for urban Indigenous communities.

A formal governance and accountability structure for Indigenous housing must be maintained, including mechanisms for long-term funding and policy coordination. Métis, Inuit, and First Nations governments must be supported in managing and implementing housing solutions that reflect self-governance and community-specific needs.

Responding to the needs identified in the Advocate's reports

- **Inuit Housing – Nunatsiavut:** The federal and provincial governments must coordinate with the Nunatsiavut Government to ensure sustained investment in Inuit housing solutions. This includes formal governance structures to oversee commitments and long-term operational funding to maintain housing affordability and quality.
- **Inuit Housing – Nunavut:** The federal government must honor its commitments under NTI's Angirratsaliulauqta – Nunavut Inuit Housing Action Plan by ensuring a long-term, well-funded strategy that meets the unique housing needs of Inuit communities. Political engagement between Nunavut leadership, NTI, and federal representatives is crucial to advancing these commitments.
- **Métis Housing Conditions:** Funding for Métis housing must align with self-government agreements and long-term financial commitments, moving away from short-term proposal-based funding models. The federal government must support Métis Nation–Saskatchewan in developing sustainable housing solutions that reflect their governance structures and community priorities.

Immediate steps are required to translate these commitments into tangible actions, removing systemic and financial barriers that prevent Indigenous-led housing initiatives from succeeding. In my next term, I intend to do a human-rights based examination of First Nations housing with the appropriate rightsholders and representative organizations.

Strengthening the National Housing Strategy and Canada's Housing Plan

To strengthen existing investments in the National Housing Strategy and Canada's Housing Plan, the federal government must prioritize non-market housing and targeted supports for those experiencing homelessness and housing precarity. A national goal should be established to ensure that at least 20% of rental stock consists of non-market housing, with a shorter-term benchmark of reaching 7% as quickly as possible.

Income supports must be indexed to inflation and designed also to ensure housing stability. In addition, the Renter's Bill of Rights must be strengthened and made more comprehensive by incorporating rental assistance programs, eviction protections, and strong enforcement mechanisms to hold landlords accountable.

Adaptable housing principles must be embedded into all housing strategies, requiring an expansion of accessibility standards in the National Building Code.

The federal government must also take immediate action, in collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, to prevent youth evictions. In the coming year, my office will work alongside civil society and youth organizations to conduct a review examining policies and investments that can strengthen youth security of tenure and prevent evictions that lead to homelessness. This review will help identify systemic gaps and inform concrete policy actions for governments to uphold housing as a fundamental human right for young people.

Shaping the next National Housing Strategy

An engagement process must be launched before the end of 2025–2026 to inform the development of the next National Housing Strategy beyond 2028. This process must ensure meaningful participation from civil society, people with lived experience, and key stakeholders. Lessons learned from the current strategy and Canada's Housing Plan must be documented, and future housing strategies must explicitly recognize obligations under UNDRIP and UNDA.

A structured triennial evaluation cycle must be implemented with input from the Federal Housing Advocate, the National Housing Council and disadvantaged groups, as per the NHSA, to continuously assess and improve housing policies. The Federal Housing Advocate must have a seat at intergovernmental housing discussions to ensure that the provincial, territorial, and municipal governments are supported to uphold their human rights obligations and that future federal-provincial agreements continue to reflect housing as a fundamental right.

Urgent need for sustainable funding

The work of the Federal Housing Advocate is at risk due to a drastic funding reduction. The 2024 federal Budget resulted in a funding reduction for the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate of over 50%. Despite the extension of the Advocate's mandate until 2028, current funding is set to expire in March 2026. Without adequate resources, the Advocate's ability to hold governments accountable, conduct independent reviews, and engage meaningfully with rights holders will be compromised.

A sustainable funding commitment is necessary to ensure that the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate can continue its essential work of monitoring and advancing the right to adequate housing and support the functions of review panels, as set out in Canadian law under the NHSA.

A call to action for future governments

As Canada moves forward in a more uncertain world, it must prioritize human-rights based approaches to housing and homelessness. The human right to adequate housing must be at the core of political decision-making, ensuring that future governments commit to sustainable, long-term solutions. The housing and homelessness crisis is solvable, and the path forward requires bold, rights-based policy choices that create lasting change.

A government that embraces these principles will not only uphold human rights but will also build a more just, equitable, resilient and prosperous society for all.