



Office of the
Federal Housing
Advocate

Bureau du
défenseur fédéral
du logement

How Human Rights Standards for Supportive Housing Can Tackle Homelessness and Uphold Dignity

Advice to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure

May 2026

© His Majesty the King in Right of Canada,
as represented by the Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2026.

Cat. No.: HR4-141/2026E-PDF
ISBN: 978-0-662-35289-1

Overview

The recent launch of Build Canada Homes (BCH) and the pending renewal of the National Housing Strategy (NHS) in 2027 present critical opportunities for the federal government to take a leadership role in recalibrating key partnerships with provincial, territorial, municipal, and Indigenous governments to end homelessness and housing need as quickly as possible.

Despite recent trends, homelessness and housing need are neither inevitable nor unsolvable. In fact, Canada has already committed to an international framework under the National Housing Strategy Act that is tailor-made to end the housing and homelessness crisis: a human rights-based approach to housing. In addition to being a moral imperative rooted in human dignity and international law, a human rights-based approach to housing is also a proven, cost-effective method that can reduce and prevent homelessness. For example, investments in safe, affordable, and adequate housing save public dollars in healthcare, justice, and other costly public services, while providing stability and security¹.

Supportive housing has the potential to offer a human rights-based approach to housing and can help tackle homelessness and housing need. In addition to providing permanent, affordable housing with wraparound supports, supportive housing can also help uphold individuals' dignity and autonomy and improve their health, wellbeing, and other quality of life and socioeconomic factors. However, to effectively address homelessness and housing need, supportive housing must meet strong, consistent human rights standards, grounded in security of tenure, stability, and dignity.

¹ http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/mhcc_at_home_report_national_cross-site_eng_2_0.pdf?_gl=1*t3jy11*_ga*MTQ5OTUyNTE0OS4xNzczNjg2ODcx*_ga_0X7SS473K6*czE3NzM2ODY4NzAkzbEkZzEkdDE3NzM2ODY4OTIkajM4JGwwJGgw; <https://www.canada.ca/en/housing-infrastructure-communities/news/2026/01/canada-ontario-and-toronto-work-together-with-build-canada-homes-to-invest-in-dunn-house-20-to-provide-supportive-housing-in-toronto.html>

In 2025-2026, the Federal Housing Advocate commissioned research and advice from the Canadian Centre for Housing Rights to build on their advice to government on human rights standards for the Renters' Bill of Rights and expand it to supportive housing and transitional accommodation. The paper will be publicly released later in 2026. It outlines how the upcoming renewal of the NHS and rollout of BCH present key opportunities to tackle homelessness and uphold dignity by:

- **Establishing a clear, consistent definition of supportive housing** within and across jurisdictions.
- **Developing human rights-based standards for supportive housing** in line with the right to adequate housing.
- **Aligning housing with the continuum of care** to meet a range of diverse housing, health and other care needs.
- **Delivering coordinated human rights-based intergovernmental action and investments** under the renewed National Housing Strategy and associated agreements.

Canada has the legal, policy, and fiscal levers to end homelessness and housing need. As the federal government begins to envision the next NHS, it is obligated to take a human rights-based approach to housing, and ensure all other levels of government are doing the same. It is the morally and fiscally responsible path to tackle homelessness and uphold dignity for all.

Considerations

For decades, the federal government withdrew from its role in building and protecting affordable housing, including supportive housing. Despite the government's reengagement in affordable housing through the launch of the first NHS in 2017, recent investments have been insufficient and poorly coordinated with other levels of government. This has led to a lack of affordable, adequate options that meet the needs of groups most impacted by the housing and homelessness crisis.

At the same time, supportive housing policies and programs have failed to meaningfully reduce and prevent homelessness. This is because supportive housing lacks clear definitions and standards, with different approaches used across and within jurisdictions. This makes it very difficult to track the outcomes of supportive housing investments and policy decisions, calling into question whether public dollars are being spent effectively and efficiently. It also means that many people living in supportive housing are excluded from key renter protections, including against evictions, discrimination, and harassment, with some jurisdictions actively eroding existing protections for supportive housing renters.

Moreover, supportive housing is often conflated with "transitional housing," making it even more difficult to track outcomes and ensure critical protections are in place. In practice,

“transitional housing” is more akin to shelter than housing, as it provides temporary accommodation, rather than permanent, secure, adequate housing. While transitional and other forms of temporary accommodation are essential stopgap measures to help prevent and reduce homelessness, they must be understood as distinct from supportive housing. Nevertheless, they must still adhere to other human rights standards and principles, with the goal of supporting access to permanent, adequate housing.

The launch of BCH (including \$1 billion for “supportive and transitional housing”), alongside investments from other levels of government, signals a promising, renewed commitment to meeting the needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. In the lead-up to the second iteration of the NHS, all levels of government must advance human rights-based standards for supportive housing to ensure public funds and decisions are made with clarity, transparency, accountability, and purpose. This must include meaningful engagement with groups most impacted by housing insecurity and homelessness to ensure people are involved in decision-making related to their housing and are empowered to make choices that are best for them.

Taking a human rights-based approach to housing will ensure government investments are focused on building and protecting truly secure, affordable, and adequate housing with a diversity of supports for those in need. These are foundational requirements to end homelessness and housing need across the country, and entirely within reach.

Solutions

To inform the renewal of the NHS and its multilateral partnership agreement, alongside the rollout of BCH, the federal government should engage with Indigenous, provincial, territorial, municipal, civil society, and other partners on the following advice to align government action and investments around a human rights-based approach to housing:

- 1. Establish and adopt clear, consistent definitions in the renewed NHS and BCH**
 - a. Establish a clear definition of supportive housing.** This should highlight it as a priority due to its permanent nature and consider a wide range of support services that address the complex needs of groups most impacted by housing insecurity and homelessness.
 - b. Establish a clear definition of transitional accommodation.** This should highlight its temporary nature and identify its key goal as supporting individuals in attaining permanent housing.

- c. Ensure definitions of supportive housing and transitional accommodation are distinct, clear, and applied consistently.** This should include distinct, clear, and consistent definitions across and within all jurisdictions (including self-determined Indigenous definitions) for the purpose of data collection, monitoring and evaluating outcomes, and conditional funding agreements.
- 2. Develop and adopt human rights-based standards for supportive housing in the renewed National Housing Strategy and Build Canada Homes**
 - a. Establish minimum standards for supportive housing that align with the right to adequate housing and the Blueprint for a Renters' Bill of Rights.** Supportive housing must protect human dignity and human rights principles should be embedded in all supportive housing-related laws, policies, and programs (and those related to rental housing more broadly), and included as minimum requirements for funding allocation.
 - b. Uphold security of tenure as an essential element of supportive housing.** Supportive housing should be regulated through provincial/territorial rental housing legislation and clearly distinguished from transitional and other temporary accommodation. All jurisdictions should take measures to prevent arbitrary evictions from supportive housing². This should include tenants signing a standardized lease which outlines the rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants. Tenants should be provided with accompaniment and support to understand and navigate access to justice and these mechanisms should in turn be adequately funded so hearings and decisions can be rendered in a timely manner.

All jurisdictions should also ensure that any policies related to guests, building safety, and wellness checks respect renter privacy and security, and prevent harassment and discrimination.

² There needs to be recognition that not all forms of supportive housing will be a good fit for everyone. When this occurs, the person must be supported and accommodated to move into a better suited home with supports that will meet their needs as a matter of urgency and priority. Eviction must be used as a measure of last resort, and only by a legally recognized judicial body rather than an arbitrary decision of the housing provider.

- c. Ensure service continuity when individuals move from transitional accommodation to supportive or other forms of permanent housing.** This should be done at the onset, through an assessment of the level and breadth of support services needed until housing is stabilized. Services should also be readily and immediately available if needed in the future.
 - d. Align transitional accommodation policies and programs with the UNDRIP Act and self-determined approaches, trauma-informed approaches, GBA Plus, Accessible Canada Act, the Anti-Racism Strategy, the 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan, and other relevant federal frameworks.**
- 4. Align housing with the continuum of care**
- a. Dedicate funding to explore and scale up innovative supportive housing models.** This should include bringing supports to existing housing and increasing the capacity of healthcare providers to meet complex care needs where people live (like Dunn House³).
 - b. Support coordinated responses between housing, healthcare, and other service providers to prevent discharges from institutions into homelessness.** This should include providing adequate and sustained/bridged healthcare supports for individuals transitioning from institutions into supportive or other permanent housing.
 - c. Establish a continuum of care aligned with an equity-focused housing continuum.** This should include ensuring a diversity of supports are available in supportive housing and developing dedicated targets and outcomes based on community needs, including self-determined Indigenous models of healing, health, and wellbeing.

³ <https://uhnfoundation.ca/impact-report-2025/meeting-an-urgent-need-a-canada-first-social-medicine-housing-initiative/>

5. Coordinate human rights-based intergovernmental action and investments under the renewed NHS and BCH

- a. Embed human rights principles and standards as conditions for other levels of government to access federal funding.** These should include the PANEL principles⁴, UNDRIP principles⁵, right to adequate housing standards⁶, and supportive housing and transitional accommodation standards outlined above.
- b. Tie federal funding to measurable human rights-based housing outcomes.** This should include restricting funding to housing plans and programs that commit to taking a human rights-based approach to housing. This could be accomplished in part by embedding the Blueprint for the Renters' Bill of Rights in the renewed NHS and associated agreements.
- c. Explicitly recognize the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination and obligations under UNDRIP.** This should include providing sustainable funding for the development of Indigenous-led supportive housing, transitional accommodation, and other deeply affordable housing, in addition to respect for Indigenous data sovereignty and co-developed data sharing agreements.
- d. Prioritize and maximize funding for the development and preservation of permanent supportive housing.** This should include dedicating funding for new development, repairs/upgrades, acquisitions, and repurposing of existing properties, alongside public land transfers.
- e. Provide sufficient, sustainable funding to meet the needs of groups most impacted by housing insecurity and homelessness.** This should include investments that prioritize the development and maintenance of supportive housing, transitional accommodation, and deeply affordable housing more broadly, alongside investments to uphold the human rights of encampment residents.

⁴ Participation, accountability, non-discrimination and equality, empowerment, legality

⁵ Including self-determination, self-governance, sovereignty, free, prior and informed consent, access to justice

⁶ Security of tenure, affordability, habitability, availability of services, accessibility, cultural adequacy, location

- f. **Set clear targets and timelines to build and preserve supportive housing, transitional accommodation, and deeply affordable housing more broadly.** This should include commitments to end homelessness by 2040 by building at least 100,000 net new deeply affordable non-market homes per year over 10 years, including 50,000 dedicated supportive housing units (with sub-targets to meet the needs of groups most impacted by housing insecurity and homelessness).
- g. **Implement comprehensive monitoring, evaluation, and enforcement mechanisms.** This should include gathering comprehensive, disaggregated data on housing insecurity and homelessness, providing regular, transparent reporting on progress in reducing housing insecurity and homelessness, providing opportunities for meaningful engagement with people with lived experience of housing insecurity and homelessness and other experts, and withholding or redirecting federal funding if human rights standards and principles are not upheld by other orders of government.

Next Steps

As the government begins engagement on the development of the next National Housing Strategy, the Federal Housing Advocate would welcome a meeting with the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, leadership from Build Canada Homes, and Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, and the Co-Chair of the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Housing Forum to discuss how to put these recommendations into practice and advance human rights-based standards for supportive housing, tackle homelessness, and uphold dignity for all.