



CCPA
 CANADIAN CENTRE
 for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
 MANITOBA OFFICE

RESEARCH • ANALYSIS • SOLUTIONS

FAST FACTS

April 20, 2011

Electing to house Canadians - or not?

Little has been said by the political parties about housing in the lead up to the federal election on May 2. This is surprising, considering that approximately 1.27 million households (or 12.4 percent of Canadian households) live in housing that requires major repairs, is overcrowded, and/or costs more than 30 percent of household income. Although housing may not be top of mind according to the polls, for these Canadians, access to safe, affordable housing is an urgent necessity.

The Red Tent Campaign, a coalition of housing advocacy organisations and individuals, organised actions on April 19, 2011, in cities across Canada to draw attention to the urgency of housing issues. Winnipeg’s March for Housing raised questions about the lack of funding and programming to address housing and related issues, including homelessness, precarious housing and poverty.

Why is housing important? We all win when Canadians have good housing. Housing provides stability and a base from which we can access services and employment. Our health is better, and children do better in school when we have stable housing. Housing construction creates jobs, and contributes to the local economy.

Having a safe and affordable place to live can be a stepping stone out of poverty – and poverty is

expensive for society as a whole, not just those who live in it. One study estimated that addressing the symptoms of poverty – increased healthcare costs, policing and criminal justice costs, and other social services – as well as the resulting loss of potential income, low educational outcomes, and reduced productivity and tax revenue cost Canada between \$24 and \$36 billion each year.

For many decades, Canada had a comprehensive strategy to address housing. In 1993, however, the Government of Canada withdrew its support for housing, following a decade of increasing cuts to federal housing programs. This is not surprising given the general trend away from collective state solutions to a social and economic model that relies solely on the “the market” for services including shelter. It also represents a shift away from seeing housing as a home, to seeing housing as an investment.

The problem with this approach is that the market will only provide housing to those who can pay for it – in other words, lower- and moderate income people who cannot afford market price for homeownership or, increasingly, for rental housing are priced out of the market. If the gap between the rich and the poor continues to increase as it has since 1980, housing issues will continue to be a concern.



CCPA
 CANADIAN CENTRE
 for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
 MANITOBA OFFICE

309 - 323 Portage Avenue
 Winnipeg, MB R3B 2C1
 T 204.927.3200 F 204.927.3201
 ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca
 www.policyalternatives.ca

The *Fast Facts* are produced and distributed free via email. They can be reproduced as an OpEd or opinion piece without obtaining further permission, provided they are not edited, and full credit is given to both the author and the source, CCPA-MB. Please contact CCPA-MB today to begin your free subscription.

FAST FACTS continued ...

Developing a national strategy to address housing concerns – one that includes dedicated funding, solid targets, clear regulations and private sector incentives – is the first step to ensuring that all Canadians have safe, affordable housing. Ensuring that the lowest-earning 40 percent of individuals and families in Canada have access to quality housing must be a priority.

But where do the political parties stand on housing?

Despite the growing need for safe, affordable housing, housing has not yet emerged as an issue in this election. Although each party mentions housing in their platforms, there has been no serious discussion of housing issues in the debates or in the media.

The Conservative Party platform offers no strategies to address homelessness or housing; only grants for homeowners for one more year of the Eco-Energy Retrofit program are mentioned.

The NDP would develop legislation to ensure secure and affordable housing for Canadians, and would “provide significant new funding for affordable and social housing”. The NDP platform also extends the existing Affordable Housing Initiative and affordable housing renovation program, makes the Eco-Energy Retrofit program permanent, and establishes a home heating tax rebate.

The Green Party’s platform includes a National Affordable Housing Plan, which includes funding for construction and renovation of 30,000 units of affordable housing per year for the next ten years, as well as investment in social housing and energy efficient retrofits. It would also meet Canada’s commitments to eradicate poverty.

The Bloc Québécois will work to manage CMHC’s surplus and to add \$2 billion dollars per year for social and affordable housing. It will work to renew operating agreements for social housing, keep social housing public, and integrate housing and homelessness programs into comprehensive

social strategies. The Bloc also notes that Québec should receive its fair share of the funding and be able to work in its own way to address housing issues.

The Liberal Party would develop a Poverty Reduction Plan, which would include an Affordable Housing Framework. This Framework would work to build and renovate affordable housing and reduce homelessness. Until the Framework is in place, the Liberals would extend the Affordable Housing Initiative and affordable housing renovation programs, and would increase the funding available for these by \$275 million dollars per year.

Although four of the five political parties have identified the actions they would take to address housing if elected, the silence in the campaigns on this issue is surprising. Investing in affordable housing is an investment that benefits everyone in the long term. The parties should speak up, not only for the 1.27 million households who are currently poorly housed, but for us all.

Sarah Cooper is the Housing and Community Development Researcher for CCPA-MB.



CCPA

CANADIAN CENTRE
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
MANITOBA OFFICE

309 - 323 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3B 2C1
T 204.927.3200 F 204.927.3201
ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca
www.policyalternatives.ca

The *Fast Facts* are produced and distributed free via email. They can be reproduced as an OpEd or opinion piece without obtaining further permission, provided they are not edited, and full credit is given to both the author and the source, CCPA-MB. Please contact CCPA-MB today to begin your free subscription.