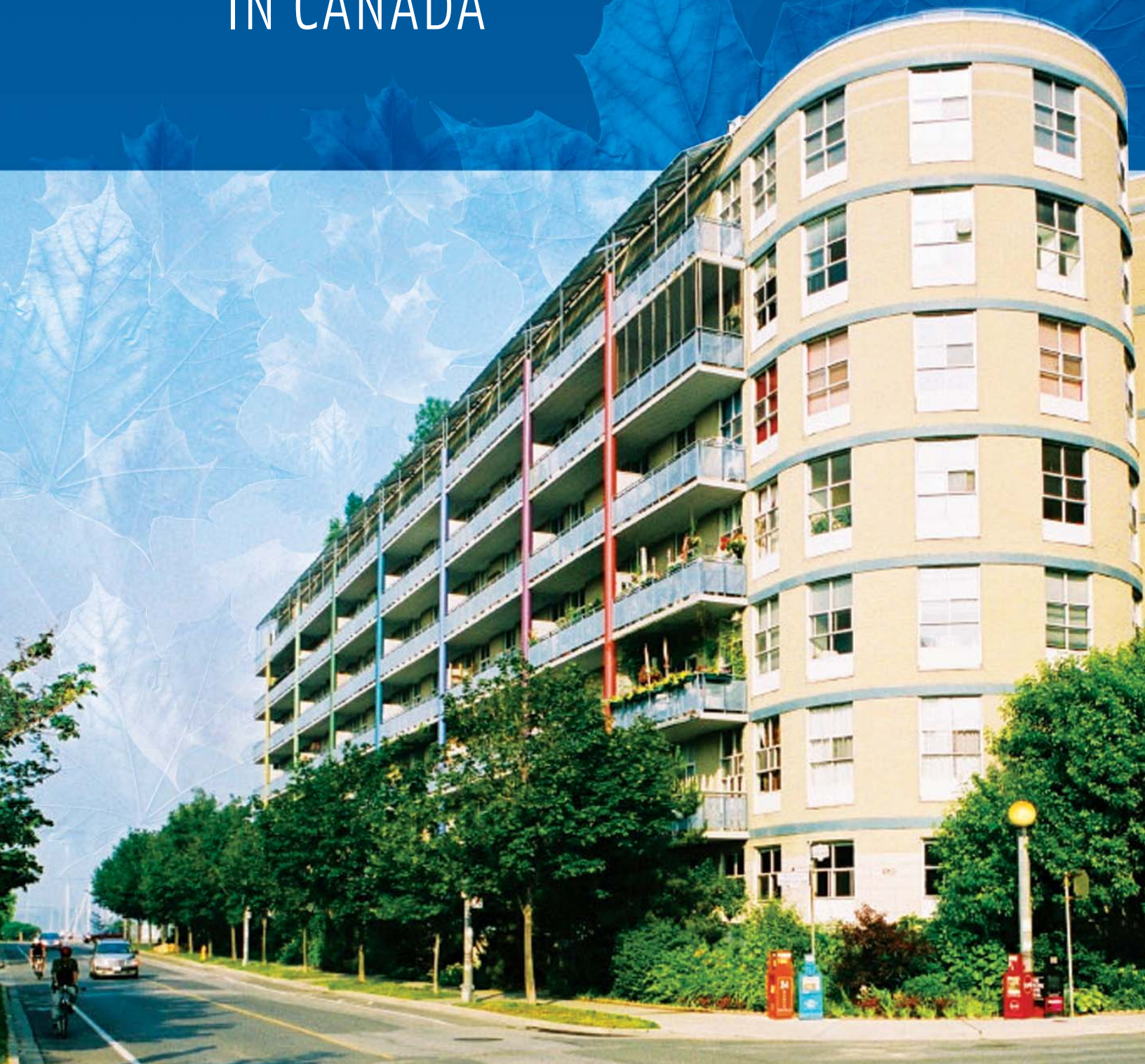


CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING FEDERATION OF CANADA



CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING IN CANADA



Co-operative housing is a Canadian success story. For more than 40 years, housing co-ops have been providing Canadians with good quality affordable community housing that inspires pride in their member-residents. Some 250,000 Canadians of all backgrounds, in every province and territory, make their home in a non-profit housing co-op.

Canada's largest housing co-op has 770 units, the smallest just five. Co-ops can be high-rise or low-rise apartment buildings, row housing, renovated older homes or industrial buildings, even detached homes. Housing co-ops are cost-efficient, providing housing that is less expensive to operate than other forms of community housing.

What is a Housing Co-op?

Housing co-ops offer a unique form of housing tenure. They are not-for-profit housing developments, jointly owned by the members who live in them. The members do not own equity in their housing – if they move, their home is returned to the co-op, to be offered to another family in need of an affordable home.

Co-ops are governed by boards of directors that are democratically elected from among the members,

according to the co-operative principle of “one member, one vote”.

Member control is the foundation of housing co-ops' success. Co-op members are stakeholders in their co-op housing enterprises, directly affected by the decisions they collectively make. This has fostered a strong sense of belonging, and it has given members a sense of place within the wider community. Co-op members are proud of their role as “good neighbours” within safe and caring communities.

Canada's housing co-ops embrace the international co-operative principles, which underline the values of democracy, education, and community engagement.

Nearly all housing co-ops receive assistance for low-income members through government housing programs. Low-income households pay reduced charges for their housing, according to their income. Other households pay housing charges based on the actual costs of operating the co-op. Because co-ops charge their members only enough to cover costs, they can offer housing that is substantially more affordable than average private sector rental costs.



“Housing co-ops do more than just create affordable shelter. Along with new households they create a genuine community, with all the benefits of contact support and friendship that we look for in the best rural and urban neighbourhoods.”

**Bill McKnight,
Housing Minister, 1985**

“The co-operative housing movement is a vital component in the quest to ensure decent, affordable housing with security of tenure for all Canadians.”

The Task Force is convinced that this housing option works and provides low- and moderate-income Canadians with a tremendous alternative to traditional forms of social housing and the private market. The co-operative housing community truly represents one of the finest examples of Canadians working together to achieve common goals in the improvement of their own living conditions, those of their fellow citizens and indeed, of their communities.”

Paul Martin and Joe Fontana, Members of Parliament, National Liberal Task Force on Housing, 1990

“As Canadians we accept that citizenship brings with it certain duties and responsibilities to others. Co-operative living is the ultimate expression of this philosophy.”

**Adrienne Clarkson,
Governor General, 2004**

“Canadian housing co-ops are a huge success story. They have provided a model for community-based not-for-profit housing, based on the principle of mixed-income communities, community control and healthy neighbourhoods.”

**Libby Davies,
Member of Parliament,
Vancouver East, 2007**

The mixed-income nature of housing co-ops has contributed enormously to their reputation as healthy, diverse communities that foster the personal development of the members as productive, successful citizens.

Co-ops contribute not only to the housing needs of Canadians but also to safe and successful neighbourhoods, to the integration of newcomers to Canada, and to environmental sustainability.

A Unique Partnership with Government

Canada's 93,000 co-op homes are the product of a unique partnership between community-based housing groups and Canadian governments. Starting in the 1970s, governments invested in co-op housing programs through a variety of financial supports and enabling legislation. Housing co-ops have proved to be a remarkably effective and durable policy instrument. As they mature, they use less financial help from government, but provide an asset that can serve Canada's housing needs for generations.

Who Lives in Housing Co-ops?

Co-ops house Canadians of all backgrounds. In supplying affordable housing, co-ops serve families, seniors, people with disabilities, Aboriginal people, people living with HIV/AIDS and recent immigrants to Canada.

By the Numbers

Here's some of the numbers behind the story of co-op housing, taken from the Co-operative Housing Programs Evaluation conducted by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) in 2003:

- 58%** of residents are women
- half** of co-op households are female single person households or female single parents

- 11%** are members of visible minorities
- 20%** are immigrants
- 4%** are of Aboriginal ancestry
- 12%** of households include a person with long-term physical disability requiring special features such as wheelchair access

A Brief History of Canada's Housing Co-ops

Canada's first family housing co-operative, the 174-unit Willow Park complex in Winnipeg, opened its doors in 1966 as one of a set of seven federally-sponsored pilot projects. With their success confirmed by 1973, Canada's National Housing Act was amended to create the first national program for co-op housing development. From 1973 – 1978, about 7,700 co-op homes were created under this program.

Under the largest co-op program, from 1979 to 1985, co-op developers built 39,000 homes. This program provided assistance to co-ops through mortgage subsidy and financial assistance to low-income residents for their housing charges.

From 1986 – 1991, 14,500 co-op homes were developed through a third federal co-op program. This program featured the index-linked mortgage, first introduced in Europe and proposed to the Canadian government by the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada (CHF Canada).

Since the last federal program was cancelled in 1992, other co-ops have been developed through cost-shared federal/provincial programs or fully provincial programs, most notably in Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia. In Ontario, 250 housing co-ops – more than 14,000 units – were developed between 1985 and 1995. In recent years, the only significant co-op development has happened in Quebec, under a provincial program. Elsewhere only a



few new housing co-ops have been developed. However, some existing co-ops are now (2008) preparing to add units, using funding available through federal/provincial agreements.

The Future

Many Canadian housing co-ops are near the end of their financial agreements with government. The Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada is committed building a sustainable future for Canada's housing co-operatives, to make sure that the public's investment is preserved for future generations. We are committed to developing new partnerships with government that will help co-ops preserve their non-profit status, maintain their physical assets, and provide housing that is affordable to low-income families. Together we are committed to building a bright future for Canada's housing co-ops.

Protecting Canada's investment in existing housing co-ops is only a first step.

Census data has shown that nearly one in every seven Canadian households cannot find decent, secure housing at a price they can afford. Instead, nearly four million people are living in substandard or overcrowded housing, or paying too much. Behind these statistics are real people – young families, seniors, Aboriginal households, women fleeing abusive relationships, newcomers to Canada. One in six children under 10 is in acute housing need in Canada!

There is no single solution to Canada's housing challenge, but housing co-ops can play an important role. But Canada's existing housing co ops are full and many have long waiting lists, especially for homes that low-income Canadians can afford.

Here's how housing co-ops can help solve Canada's shortage of affordable housing:

Maintain the Federal Government's Investment in Co-op Housing

Although federal funding for new co-operative housing programs ended in 1993, financial assistance to existing co-operative housing continues for almost 1,600 projects, enabling these co-ops to house some 180,000 Canadians affordably. The households who live there receive federal housing subsidies amounting to roughly \$200 million annually, but these funding agreements are coming to an end. By renewing this subsidy commitment, the federal government can make sure that existing housing co-ops can continue to house low-income households.

Provide Redevelopment Funding

Many co-ops could add new homes to their existing properties at a fraction of what it would cost to build on new land. A capital funding program will encourage new development and keep new units affordable. Governments should take advantage of this cost-effective opportunity to invest in new co-op homes.



Include Co-op Housing in Any New Spending on Affordable Housing

Co-op housing offers a long-term housing policy solution that brings more than just the benefits of decent shelter. Co-ops are dedicated to their the needs of their members, staying true to their non-profit community housing purposes in perpetuity and rewarding the public's investment again and again.

Over the past four decades, Canada's housing co-operatives have proven they can create sustainable, secure and affordable homes for Canadians who need them. Today, Canada's housing co ops look forward to building on that success.

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