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## Province-Wide Report Highlights Housing Needs *Housing Affordability Remains a Challenge in Barrie, Owen Sound and Muskoka*

(Toronto) Access to affordable rental housing continues to be a problem for many households in cottage country. In **Barrie, Owen Sound and Muskoka**, thousands of households spend more than half of their income on rent - a situation that puts them at increased risk for homelessness as the economy continues to decline.

The eighth annual edition of *Where's Home? A Picture of Housing Needs in Ontario (2008)* authored by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA) and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada (CHF Canada) Ontario Region, analyzes 22 separate housing markets across Ontario.

"One -in -five Ontario tenant households are still spending more than half of their income on housing," said ONPHA Executive Director, Sharad Kerur. "Many of these households are one paycheque away from losing their homes. I am really worried that as the economy moves deeper into recession, more and more households will be forced to choose between paying the rent and other necessities."

"We need to fix the housing we have and build more co-operative and non-profit housing," commented Harvey Cooper, Manager of Government Relations at CHF Canada Ontario Region. "Affordable housing is a natural firewall against poverty - we need more of it."

*Where's Home? 2008* shows that the level of rental housing production across the province is too low to meet demand. The report's authors estimate that 10,000 additional rental units must be built annually to meet demand. Last year, only 3,000 units were produced. Over the last decade, there has been an 8,500 unit net *decrease* in the total number of rental housing units in Ontario, with many rental units being converted to condominiums or demolished. In **Owen Sound**, there are over 100 *fewer* units of rental housing in 2007 than existed in 1997.

Tightening rental markets in **Owen Sound and Muskoka** are being reflected in decreasing vacancy rates in both areas. In **Muskoka**, vacancy rates dropped from 3.2 in 2006 to 3.0 in 2007, possibly reflecting higher homeownership costs and increasing rental housing demand.

In **Owen Sound**, the vacancy rate declined to 2.5% in 2008 - below the 3% vacancy rate considered a “healthy rental market.”

Rents have continued to increase in **Barrie, Muskoka** in **Owen Sound**. This appears to be a particular issue in **Muskoka**, where rent on a two-bedroom apartment increased by 3.7% between 2006 and 2007 – a rate of increase that is 30% higher than the rate of inflation.

**Where’s Home? 2008** also shows that affordability continues to be a concern for many households in areas like **Barrie**. More than 23% of tenants in **Barrie** spend more than half of their income on rent, forcing them to make daily choices between necessities, and putting them at considerable risk of losing their homes. As the economic condition across the province deteriorates, such households are at increased risk for housing-induced poverty.

The report argues that a larger inventory of permanently affordable non-profit and co-operative housing would offer low-income households a measure of stability as the economy worsens. Furthermore, the report argues that building new affordable housing can act as an effective stimulus strategy, benefiting Ontario’s low-income households and creating jobs in sectors like construction.

“Housing affordability problems are getting worse and Ontario’s low and moderate-income households are losing ground” said Harvey Cooper. “While many municipalities are attempting to improve the situation, they can’t do it alone. Senior governments have to do their part.”

“The time is now. The public wants economic stimulus, energy conservation and poverty reduction. Good housing policies can achieve all three.” said Sharad Kerur.

ONPHA and CHF Canada Ontario Region want to see senior governments take a balanced approach to the creation of more affordable housing, combining permanently affordable non-profit and co-op housing, private sector rental, renovation of existing social housing, as well as rent supplements to fill vacant units.

**“Where’s Home?” can be found on [www.onpha.on.ca](http://www.onpha.on.ca) or [www.chfc.ca](http://www.chfc.ca). For more information, contact:**

**ONPHA’s David Peters** at (416) 948-3260 (Cell) or (416) 927-9144  
**CHF Canada Ontario Region’s Harvey Cooper** at (416) 809-5048 (Cell) or (416) 366-1711 ext. 237