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## Rental Housing Scarce in Northern Ontario

### *Province-Wide Report Highlights Housing Needs*

(Toronto) Extremely low levels of rental housing production combined with high demand means that many households in Northern Ontario are facing significant housing challenges. Low vacancy rates and long waiting lists for social housing highlight the need for increased investment in affordable housing to protect families and create jobs, according to a report released today.

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. In **Sudbury, North Bay** and **Timmins** virtually no rental housing was completed between 2003 and 2007.

In Northern Ontario, a combination of strong demand for rental housing and a lack of rental production resulted in very tight rental markets. The most extreme example of this was found in **Sudbury**, where vacancy rates plummeted from a high of 11.1% in 1999 to 0.7% in

2008. The shortage of rental housing was reflected in Sudbury's waiting list for social housing which increased by 15%, in spite of a relatively strong economy.

**Where's Home? 2008** also shows that affordability continues to be a concern for many households in the North. 20% of tenants in **North Bay** 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:**

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