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Housing Research Central: The online home of the NHRC

Quality research is vital for Canadian housing decision-makers. This website addresses the needs of Canada's housing research community—the people and organizations that use, sponsor or conduct research. Housing Research Central provides information on who is involved, where research is being conducted, and where outputs can be found. It connects you directly to the National Housing Research Committee's activities, video webcasts and presentations. Join the Canadian Housing Research Network: get informed and interact with other community members.

Printer Friendly

What is the CHRN?
Connect with housing researchers across the country through the Canadian Housing Research Network(CHRN)
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A New Look for www.nhrc-cnrl.ca

After months of work, the new website of the National Housing Research Committee is nearly ready to launch! In fact, it will be up and running in January.

The idea of revamping the site came after the completion of the Housing Researcher Mapping Project last year. At that time, it was suggested that the NHRC could use its influence to better link researchers, improve transfer of research knowledge and facilitate the creation of a research network. The goal was to have a dynamic, bilingual website that would be visually appealing, easy to navigate and attract university users as well as a wider audience.

Mission complete: the NHRC website will offer all this and more. Visitors will be given the choice of either an English or French home page and then choose to either explore the key components directly or navigate by clicking on one of the three images: "I am a Student," "I am a Researcher" or "I am a NHRC member".

The site will offer a number of features and resources that have been specially created for this purpose:

- What is the Canadian Housing Research Network (CHRN)? Producers and users of housing research will be invited to fill out a profile and register, allowing them access to a secure area

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About the National Housing Research Committee

The National Housing Research Committee (NHRC), established in 1986, is made up of federal, provincial and territorial, municipal, industry, social housing, academic community and consumer representatives. Its objectives include:

- identifying priority areas for housing-related research or demonstration,
- fostering greater co-operation, developing partnerships and minimizing overlap in research activities,
- encouraging support for housing research,
- promoting the dissemination, application and adoption of research results.

In addition to the Full Committee, the NHRC also operates through working groups to exchange information, discuss research gaps and undertake research projects. Currently, working groups meet on housing data, homelessness, sustainable housing and communities and distinct needs. NHRC participants also contribute articles to the *NHRC Newsletter*, which is produced twice a year, and network through their online community: www.nhrc-cnrl.ca.

The NHRC co-chairs are John Black of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and Doug Page of the province of British Columbia. CMHC provides the Secretariat for the Committee and produces this Newsletter.

How to reach us

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Call 1-800 668-2642
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that will allow file and image upload as well as document and member directory sharing. An update function on this portion of the site will alert other members to changes that have taken place since their last visit.

- Where is Research Conducted? Housing research hubs will be shown on a map and a brief profile of each will be provided. The objective is to inform those in, or interested in becoming engaged in, the housing researcher community with easily accessible and annually updated information that highlights housing research hubs in Canada. The contents of the profiles will be searchable and there will be hyperlinks to the individual sites.
- Where is Research Stored? A map of Canada will show where virtual and physical housing research repositories are located, together with a brief profile of each. By identifying, describing and annually updating the profiles for these collections, the housing researcher community will be better informed about what is available and be able to conduct more comprehensive research as a result. As in the case of the hubs, the contents of the profiles will be searchable and there will be hyperlinks to the individual sites.

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All of the material that the NHRC produces, both current and in the recent past—webcasts, meeting summaries, video clips and presentations—will be made available in an easy-to-access, searchable format. The search engine will allow simple as well as advanced searches using key words or phrasing to locate material. The multi-media functions will make it easier to sign up for the live video webcasts and to share images in the galleries.

The website will also incorporate Web 2.0 features to enhance creativity, information sharing and collaboration among users. Among them are RSS feeds, e-mailing others, subscribing to the NHRC Newsletter, as well as links to StumbleUpon, Facebook, and del.icio.us bookmarks.

"There is no comprehensive housing research network in Canada and it is needed" says Nancy Walker, NHRC coordinator. "One of the goals of the website" she adds, is to encourage "emerging" housing researchers "to become involved in the housing field."

Researchers interviewed by the NHRC proposed, for example, that abstracts on housing topics, produced by master's and PhD students from all universities, be available on the site and searchable, with a link to the Theses Canada database. This is just one of the many ways that the new site will respond to the needs of the housing researcher community.

Of course, all websites are a work in progress, and improvements will need to be made continually to keep it relevant and current. Fortunately, the site is using Drupal, an open-source internet language, as its platform. The site has been designed with a content management system, which, with Drupal, allows quick revision and easy incorporation of open-source applications.

All this being said, nothing will beat the experience. Visit the new website at www.nhrc-cnrl.ca. Tell us what you think of it by dropping us a line at nhrc@cmhc.ca ■

The screenshot displays the NHRC-CNRL website interface. At the top, the header includes the NHRC-CNRL logo and the text "National Housing Research Committee / Comité national de recherche sur le logement". To the right of the header is a login section with fields for "CHRN Login" and "Password", a "LOGIN" button, and links for "Forgotten Password?" and "Register". Below the header is a horizontal navigation menu with links: Home, About NHRC, Research Roles, Hubs, Repositories, CHRN, Discussion Board, What's New, Quick Links, a search bar, and a "Français" language toggle.

The main content area is titled "Home >> Text Page >> Text Page". It features a "Printer Friendly" and "Send to a Friend" option. The primary text states: "This section of the website provides an overview of the housing researcher community in Canada, identifying the various players and their roles and the infrastructure that has evolved to date to promote and facilitate housing and housing related research. The intent is..." followed by a bulleted list:

- to provide information about what exists to those interested in housing research
- to improve linkages between those doing research and users of the research, and
- to facilitate the creation of research networks.

Below this list, a paragraph defines housing research: "Housing research can be defined as the systematic investigation (including homelessness) in order to advance knowledge to the public. The field encompasses a large range of topics related to socio-economic impact analysis. It is essential because it lives and to our communities. The outcomes of research in the housing industry (builders, funders, suppliers), to government standards, and to individual consumers (identification of needs, etc.)."

The sidebar on the left, titled "Research Roles", contains a list of categories: Researchers (with sub-links for Private Consultants or Firms, Academics, Student Researchers, Government Entities, Community Based Organizations, and CHRN), Users and Sponsors (with sub-links for Federal Government, Provincial / Territorial Governments, and Special Purpose Bodies), Hubs, Repositories, and Key References.

At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with several promotional boxes: "Newsletter Sign up", "Instant Updates Subscribe to our feed", "Del.icio.us Add us to your links", "Share our site Stumble onto NHRC", and "Find us on Facebook Join our group on the popular social network". The footer also includes a navigation menu and a statement: "NHRC gratefully acknowledges the financial support of our sponsor CMHC".

CMHI Launches Manufactured Building Survey

Factory-built single-family homes accounted for 10.2% of national single-family home starts in the second quarter of 2008, says a new survey by the Canadian Manufactured Housing Institute (CMHI). The survey of producers of factory-built homes found that 4,125 factory-built single-family homes were started in Canada in the second quarter, up a modest 1.0 % from the same period in 2007.



CMHI surveys producers of factory-built homes every month to provide information on the evolving position of manufactured buildings in the Canadian construction sector. The results are reported in the CMHI Manufactured Building Survey, produced with the financial assistance of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).

"The CMHI Manufactured Building Survey will provide us with better and more comprehensive data that will help us increase our market knowledge and aid in our business planning," said CMHI President Peter Aitchison. "This knowledge is important in our continuous effort to improve the homes and services we provide to consumers."

The survey found that manufactured building production in Canada totalled \$376 million in the second quarter of 2008. Net exports gained momentum, rising to \$16 million—a 39% increase from the first quarter of the year.

Producers reported that manufactured residential buildings averaged 133 m² (1,425 sq. ft.) for single-family units and 50 m² (540 sq. ft.) for multi-family units in the second quarter of the year.

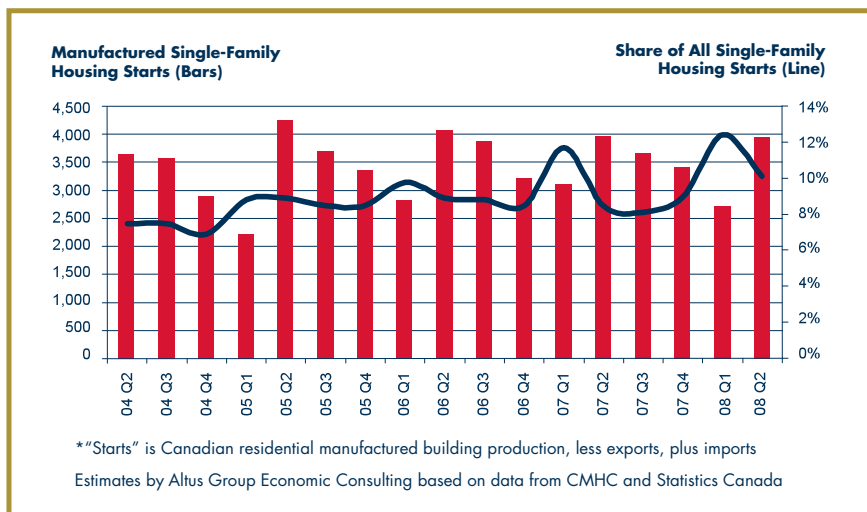
The survey shows that 51% of single-family factory-built homes averaged between 93 m² (1,000 sq. ft.) and 140 m² (1,499 sq. ft.); that 41% averaged between 140 m² (1,500 sq. ft.) and 186 m² (1,999 sq. ft.); that 4% averaged less than 93 m² and that 4% averaged more than 232 m² (2,500 sq. ft.). Just over half of single-section homes were more than 16 feet wide.

The CMHI survey is an interactive, web-based survey that collects production volume data from Canadian producers of manufactured buildings. In the second quarter of 2008, 11 of the 100 manufactured building firms certified by the Canadian Standards Association responded, translating to a sample response rate of 11% and an effective response rate of 16% (the share of survey respondents' production of single-family homes to estimated total factory-built production in Canada). ■

For more information, contact Kathleen Maynard, Executive Director, Canadian Manufactured Housing Institute: Phone: 613-563-3520, e-mail: kmaynard@cmhi.ca

Established in 1953, the Canadian Manufactured Housing Institute is the voice of the factory-built sector of the homebuilding industry in Canada. Representing all facets of the factory-based building sector, CMHI members include builders, retailers, community developers and managers, suppliers and others who work together to provide homes to Canadians in every province and territory.

Manufactured Building Residential Starts Canada, 2004-2008*
Source: The CMHI Manufactured Building Survey, Second Quarter, 2008



CMHC'S Life Cycle Costing Tool for Community Infrastructure Planning

The planning of sustainable communities that takes into account alternate development forms requires an overview of the costs and revenues for all aspects of development, including green infrastructure. Until recently, there were very few tools available to effectively compare different forms of development, especially during the early planning phases when course corrections are most feasible.

In 2002, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation commissioned a project to develop a user-friendly costing tool that would generate 75-year life cycle cost comparisons of alternate planning scenarios at the earliest stage possible and with the least amount of information.

The resulting Costing Tool is a stand-alone Microsoft Excel® file designed to assist planners, designers and stakeholders identify the most cost-effective directions to follow. It follows a step-by-step procedure and has mandatory and optional steps so the user can customize the Tool.

In the first mandatory step, the user selects as the base case one of six default scenarios: a unique combination of development characteristics and costing variables for a sustainable community that takes into account such factors as development densities, demographics and planning and service standards.

The second mandatory step requires the user to alter the development characteristics of the base case in regards to: land use and location, the desired development type, demographic assumptions, infrastructure traits such as road lengths and widths, and transit infrastructure. The user can create alternate scenarios in a manner of minutes.

In the six optional steps the user can customize the default costing and revenue variables and allocations and user costs and revenues to the degree that they are known. The costing variables include infrastructure, municipal services, private costs, external costs such as water distribution, a replacement period for capital assets, and general cost assumptions. Revenue variables include development charges, property taxes and user charges.

The Tool can also integrate cost savings for sites where infrastructure is already in place, or where green infrastructure elements that cost less than conventional sewers, such as engineered wetlands, are in place.

The final step—viewing results—enables the user to visualize results with graphs and tables. The Tool calculates the entire cost automatically and delivers the answers in multiple



Life Cycle Costing Tool for Community Infrastructure Planning

Source: CMHC

categories and forms, which can then be inserted into reports and presentations. The CMHC Costing Tool can also be used in conjunction with other sustainable community planning tools.

The Costing Tool comes with some limitations. Firstly, it is primarily intended for residential developments although it does recognize mixed-use developments. Secondly, the Tool should be used with care in different regions as costing variables vary with local circumstances and over time. Thirdly, green infrastructure costs, savings and trade-offs are notional and will need some manual inputs. In every instance, however, the Tool generates reliable relative costs for every scenario based on a particular set of assumptions.

The Costing Tool enables users with virtually no costing experience to quickly and efficiently evaluate a broad range of costs for several infrastructure options as integrated scenarios and demonstrate their long-term cost-effectiveness.

The Life Cycle Costing Tool for Community Infrastructure Planning has another undeniable redeeming feature: it's free and can be downloaded from CMHC's website at <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca> ■

For more information, visit the CMHC website or contact Douglas Pollard, CMHC project manager: Phone: 613-748-2338, e-mail: dpollard@cmhc.ca

Sustainable Housing in Iqaluit: Adapting to Northern Climate and Culture

Avi Friedman definitely knows a thing or two about affordable and sustainable housing. A professor at the McGill University School of Architecture and recipient of the United Nations' 1999 World Habitat Award, Dr. Friedman has directed McGill's Affordable Homes Program for 20 years, revitalizing neighborhoods and communities across Canada with the help of graduate students. This summer, he published *Sustainable Residential Development*.

But until August of last year, he remained, in his words, "foreign" to the Far North. It was at that time that he accepted an invitation from the City of Iqaluit to design social housing in Nunavut's capital.

He put forward six proposals, among them two social housing projects and one sustainable community project, for the Inuit Land Trust.

The sustainable community project calls for construction of up to 400 housing units. The goal was to design suitable and affordable homes and also take into account sustainability in the context of the Far North.

Even though Northern Canada is in transition due to mineral discoveries and climate change, he says that fundamentals must be respected in planning housing in the area.

"Designing for extreme weather plus a very short construction period poses awesome challenges," says Dr. Friedman. "Houses have to be built for the Arctic climate and environment."

Nunavut occupies one-fifth of Canada's land mass but it rests on permafrost. All construction material has to come from the south by boat and arrive by September, before ice makes the sea impassable. Also, he says, "houses need to be designed to be efficient as energy is very expensive." Designers, he adds, must also realize that the notion of demarking property is absent in the North.

According to Dr. Friedman, to build a successful sustainable community in the North, you need to:

- develop a sustainable local economy;
- develop houses that take into account the local lifestyle and culture; for example, designing kitchens for people who hunt for their meat, and dwellings for multi-generational families;
- take into account the local environment: wind, sea, snow and cold;
- take into account cultural and societal values that include designing houses to accommodate the needs of the elderly.

Moreover, says Dr. Friedman, sustainability in an Arctic environment also means:

- recycling the building material when its usage is complete;
- developing an urban agriculture so dwellers can grow food in the winter in greenhouses powered by photovoltaic panels;
- designing sustainable transportation such as sheltered walkways between buildings;
- designing adaptable houses to reflect the changing needs of the dwellers.

For all these reasons, Dr. Friedman favours the building of modular houses in the North by a local labour force and positioning them so as they capture the sunlight to create what he calls "thermally appropriate microclimates" and minimize the effects of Arctic winds and snow drift.

On the financial side, his proposals call for housing units that will be 30 per cent cheaper to build than current local market costs. The three projects are now in the approval process at the City of Iqaluit. Dr. Friedman is confident that all will start soon. ■

For more information, contact Dr. Avi Friedman, School of Architecture, McGill University: Phone: 514-398-4923; e-mail: avi.friedman@mcgill.ca



Housing proposed in the city of Iqaluit, Nunavut by the Affordable Homes Program students during Winter 2008.

Quebec Households with High Affordability Ratios: What is the Situation?

Who are the Quebec households with high affordability ratios—shorthand for household shelter cost-to-income ratio—and are they facing a generally stable or temporary situation? These are important questions, and the Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ) wanted to clarify this issue by conducting a study.

Because stability in affordability ratios involves a longitudinal dimension, the study was based solely on the data from the Statistics Canada Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) for the period 2002 to 2004.

The study used three affordability ratio levels:

1. Affordable ratios
(less than 30 per cent of income).
2. Ratios with moderately heavy burdens
(from 30 per cent to 49.9 per cent).
3. Ratios with very heavy burdens
(50 per cent or more).

Since the primary objective was to find out more about households that must spend a significant share of their income on housing, the author studied households that spend 30 per cent or more of their income on housing. The Quebec households used in the study were those with incomes equal to or greater than \$6,500 and shelter costs less than \$100,000.

Number of years during which 30% or more of income was spent on shelter costs	Households	
	n	%
0	3 598	74.5%
1	534	11.0%
2	282	5.8%
3	419	8.7%
Total	4,832	100.0%

Weighted Number of Households Having Spent More Than the Affordability Limit Quebec, 2002-2004

Statistics Canada, Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, longitudinal file, 2002-2004.

Based on the cross-sectional model of the study, it was deemed that 8 of the 13 variables considered were significant in explaining the household affordability ratios. The eight variables are: the age of the major earner, the sex of the earner, the major source of income, the type of economic family, the major activity, the size of the area of residence, the move status, and the level of education. These variables had to be significant at least two out of three years.

In its longitudinal dimension, the study showed that the Quebec households most likely to experience two or three years of high affordability ratios over the period studied were those:

- whose major earner was under 65 years old;
- whose major earner was female;
- having an earner whose major source of income was self-employment or government transfers;
- whose household type was single person or single-parent family;
- whose major earner was going to school;
- who lived in urban zones with a population of 100,000 or more;
- who were renters; and
- whose major earner did not have a high school diploma.

The study showed that close to three-quarters of Quebec households had affordability ratios below 30 per cent all three years.

One-quarter of the households had affordability ratios of 30 per cent or more in at least one year: Of this quarter, 40 per cent for only one year, while 60 per cent for two or three years. ■

To find out more about this study, which will be published shortly, please contact François Rivest, Research Officer, Société d'habitation du Québec: Phone: 418-644-6758; e-mail: francois.rivest@shq.gouv.qc.ca

Changing Patterns in Homeownership and Shelter Costs in Canada: Information from the 2006 Census

A Statistics Canada analytical report based on the 2006 Census provides fresh insight into housing, homeownership and shelter costs in Canada. The report analyzes evolving trends by looking at homeownership, including the homeownership rate, mortgages and condominium ownership. It also examines household shelter costs, the housing situation of immigrants and differences among provinces and territories and certain metropolitan areas. The results show evolving housing patterns in the country.

For instance, homeownership continues to increase: 68.4 per cent of Canadian households owned their dwelling in 2006, the highest rate of homeownership since 1971. The homeownership rate continued to be highest in the Atlantic provinces and lowest in Quebec.

The data also shows that homeownership increased at all income levels and that the median selling price Canadian homeowners (excluding farms and Indian reserves) could expect for their dwellings rose by more than 49 per cent between 2001 and 2006, to \$200,474.

The share of owner households with mortgages rose to a level not seen since 1981. Nearly six out every 10 households that owned their homes had a mortgage in 2006. Statistics Canada says most of the increase was due to renters moving to homeownership; the agency also says part of the explanation is homeowners taking on new mortgages or adding to existing ones to finance renovations or other large purchases.

The Census also shows condominium ownership is on the rise: 913,000 households owned condos in 2006, up 36.5 per cent from 2001. In 1981, fewer than four per cent of household owners were condominium owners. This proportion reached a record high of 10.9 per cent in 2006. In Vancouver, 31 per cent of owner households are in condominiums, the highest rate in the country.

Shelter costs—which include rent, mortgage payments, property taxes, condo fees, and utilities—grew faster between 2001 and 2006 than consumer prices, especially for owner households. Predictably, owners of households that were mortgage-free had lower median shelter costs than homeowners with mortgages. Median shelter costs for owner households with mortgages were \$15,263 in 2006, compared to \$8,057 for renter households and \$5,054 for mortgage-free owner households.

Comparing shelter costs to income, Statistics Canada found that 24.9 per cent of households spent 30 per cent or more of their income on shelter in 2006, up slightly from 2001. Of those households that spent 30 per cent or more of their income on shelter, just over half (50.9 per cent) were renters, compared to 56.3 per cent in 2001. Those who spend 30 per cent or more of their household income on shelter may do so by choice or they may be at risk of experiencing problems related to housing affordability as defined by CMHC.

The 2006 Census also showed that the homeownership rate for immigrants in Canada increased by more than three percentage points since 2001: 71.6 per cent of the 6.2 million immigrants enumerated by the Census lived in a dwelling owned by a household member. Of those, more than 14 per cent lived in a condominium. Another notable fact: immigrants were more likely than the Canadian-born to spend 30 per cent or more of their income on shelter in 2006. ■

The study, co-authored by Willa Rea, Devin MacKay and Sandrine LeVasseur, is available at www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/analysis/shelter/pdf/97-554-XIE2006001.pdf

For more information, contact Willa Rea, Senior Analyst, Statistics Canada: Phone: 613-951-1585; e-mail: willa.rea@statcan.gc.ca

Do Homeless Families in Toronto Prefer Shelters to Homes?

A study by the University of Toronto's Centre for Urban and Community Studies says that this can be the case. The authors came to this surprising conclusion after interviewing 91 mothers of homeless families in Canada's largest city, all recruited from homeless shelters.

Each woman was interviewed three times over a year. The interviews showed that 43 per cent of the respondents had been homeless before, while homelessness was a first for 57 per cent. All reported housing instability in the previous two years, having lived in an average of four places.

The study showed their most common reason for leaving their last stable place was abuse. Other reasons cited were bad housing conditions and affordability. Lack of sufficient income, high housing costs, insufficient subsidized housing and lack of adequate social assistance and access to housing were found to be the basic causes of their homelessness.

The study confirmed that violence, especially partner abuse, can provoke homelessness among women and that inadequate housing and employment prospects expose them "to the risk of further abuse and sexual exploitation."

But this research's unique insights came out of a deeper analysis, as the 91 respondents were divided into two groups: homeless immigrant and refugee families, and Canadian-born homeless families. It showed that women without status "are extremely vulnerable, often living in conditions of deep poverty, housing instability, danger, and exploitation" and "must rely on under-the-table employment or the compassion of others to secure housing."

Another key finding is that family shelters are functioning as transitional and supportive housing for specific groups of families who are in need of dedicated housing programs.

The authors also found that "in some respects, women were often better off in the shelter than they were in their own homes," as they considered the homes to be unaffordable, unsafe, inadequate, in poor condition and cause isolation.

What would have helped these people to maintain their housing? Three-quarters of the respondents said they needed more money, either higher welfare rates or better wages; one-quarter said they needed affordable housing.

In any case, more than three out of four respondents said they were satisfied with the shelter they were in, because they met their material needs, had access to child care or felt safe, comfortable and had the necessary privacy or independence.

Oddly enough, leaving the shelter for housing in the community was not necessarily positive, as they still faced the conditions that made them homeless in the first place: deep poverty, lack of employment, violence from partners and ex-partners and, for non-status mothers, lack of permanent status in Canada.

The study recommends giving these homeless families appropriate housing to meet their needs. For Toronto agencies specializing in housing and support, this would mean offering more subsidized housing in districts deemed safe for women and children that are close to amenities. It also suggests offering dedicated transitional and supportive housing programs for non-status migrant women and their families and for women involved with child protection agencies. ■

For more information, contact J. David Hulchanski, director of the Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto: phone :416-978-4093; e-mail: david.hulchanski@utoronto.ca

Better Off in a Shelter? A Year of Homelessness & Housing among Status Immigrant, Non-Status Migrant & Canadian-Born Families, at www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/pdfs/researchbulletins/ParadisetalBetterOffinaShelter7-2008.pdf

Range of number of places in past two years (including interview shelter)		1-8
Average number of places in past two years (including interview shelter)		4
Lived in only one place before interview shelter	Number	%
All	18	20
Canadian-born women	9	18
Immigrant women with status	7	33
Migrant women without status	2	2
Lived in four or more places in previous two years (including shelter)		
All	48	53
Canadian-born women	27	55
Immigrant women with status	9	43
Migrant women without status	12	64

Housing History

Source: *Better Off in a Shelter? A Year of Homelessness & Housing among Status Immigrant, Non-Status Migrant & Canadian-Born Families*

Provincial Supportive Housing Strategies to Deal with Homelessness in B.C.

Communities and housing authorities in British Columbia—as elsewhere in North America—face the challenge of addressing the needs of growing numbers of homeless people.

In B.C., the problem partly stems from the loss of single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels, which, in the 1970s, provided housing for low income, urban, single people who were most at risk of homelessness. Since then, many of these units have been converted to different types of housing or lost, leaving many people at greater risk of becoming homeless.

Last year, the B.C. government purchased several SROs to preserve and maintain this fragile housing stock. To date, over 1,100 housing units have been preserved across the province. Non-profit housing societies will operate these buildings and provide ongoing support to the tenants.

Homeless Outreach is another housing initiative the government has used since 2006 under its Housing Matters B.C. program to help homeless individuals and families and those at risk to reduce the possibility of continued homelessness and address their immediate physical and safety needs. Under this initiative, community-based agencies seek out the homeless, connect them with housing and provide them with a wide range of support aimed at keeping them housed. The program started in Vancouver and now reaches almost 50 communities across the province. As of July this year, some 2,500 people have been housed through the program and of those, 80 per cent have continued to maintain their housing.

Another initiative involves strengthening partnerships with local governments, through Memorandums of Understanding, to secure the development of supportive housing for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. Agreements have now been signed with Vancouver, Victoria, Kelowna and Surrey. The local governments provide municipal land or waive development fees and expedite approvals, and the province provides funding for the supportive housing project.

The provincial government also helps homeless individuals with complex health and social needs to have access to subsidized housing through the B.C. Housing Health Services Program (HSP).

The program is designed to connect these individuals with the appropriate community services and help housing providers better understand the full range of mental illness, substance abuse and related issues that some tenants may face.

Region	Housed					Year End Target
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	
Fraser	27	30	47	42	146	50
Interior	15	2	4	19	40	30
Northern	12	10	11	10	43	30
Vancouver Island	20	9	13	20	62	30
Vancouver Coastal	25	30	44	44	143	60
Total	99	81	119	135	434	200

Applicants Housed in 2007/08

Source: Table 1, Health Services Program Assessment

In partnership with the regional health authorities and non-profit societies, HSP provides the link between affordable housing and support services. The program has had a number of successes and reports the following in the 2007–08 fiscal year:

- Since its inception in November 1991, it has been responsible for housing about 2,200 people; of those, 434 were housed during the last fiscal year and of those, only 19 moved out before March 31, 2008 resulting in a tenancy retention rate of 96 per cent. Of those housed, 57 per cent were living in private market housing and 11 per cent were living in temporary housing, such as hotels, motels and transitional housing.
- About 64 per cent of all referrals for the program came from the Housing Registry, while 21 per cent came from mental health and addictions teams.
- Mental health problems and addictions accounted for 52 per cent of the referrals.
- There were 2,909 tenant consultations during the fiscal year. ■

For more information, contact Karen Hemmingson, Senior Manager, Research and Corporate Planning, BC Housing: phone: 604-454-2062; e-mail: khemmingson@B.C.housing.org

Refugees Face Housing Challenges in Winnipeg

A two-year study funded by the Prairie Metropolis Centre and Human Resources and Social Development Canada highlights the housing circumstances of recently arrived refugees in Winnipeg. In 2006, the first year of the study, 75 households were interviewed. In 2007, 55 of these same households were interviewed again.

In the first year, the households' average annual household income of \$22,374 was one-third of the average household income for Winnipeg. Ninety-two per cent of the households fell below the poverty line (see table below).

Over 90% of the households rented. With an average rent of \$566 a month, 51% spent 30% or more of their income on housing. A year later, because of improved employment circumstances, average household income had increased by 31% to \$29,357. The proportion in poverty declined to 73% and only 22% were paying 30% or more of their income for shelter.

The larger size of refugee households means many require three- and four-bedroom units to prevent crowding. With few such affordable units available, 51% lived in crowded accommodations. This fell to 36% in the second year.

In 2006, one-quarter of the households felt their housing contributed to health problems and was unsafe. Forty-five per cent had no idea of their landlords' rights and responsibilities and 20% did not know their own rights and responsibilities as tenants. Many also felt they faced discrimination in the housing market.

In 2007, there was growing satisfaction with building and unit safety, greater satisfaction with building managers, an improved knowledge of tenant and landlord responsibilities and less concern about discrimination. Contrary to these positive trends was growing dissatisfaction with the condition of their homes and the timeliness of repairs. In the first year 25% felt their homes were in poor condition. By the second year this had increased to 42%. Concern about the timeliness of repairs increased from 26% of households to 42% in the second year.

Refugees also reported considerable difficulty in finding housing. Many struggled with lack of knowledge about the market and neighbourhood characteristics and noted the absence of a place to go for the reliable information they need.

In the first year, one-third of the refugee households lived in social housing, rising to 46% in year two. Overall, social housing residents felt more positive about their housing circumstances than private renters. Fewer households were crowded and more were satisfied with management, safety, and the condition of their homes. The biggest advantage was affordability. With rents set at 27% of gross income, social housing residents paid on average \$150 less per month than private renters.

	Year one (%)	Year two (%)
Living in the inner city	78	64
Feel unsafe in their neighbourhood	26	17
Prefer to move from inner city	85	85
Below poverty level	92	73
Paying 30% or more for housing	51	22
Living in crowded housing	51	36
Living in public housing	32	46
Employed	42	66

Selected indicators for refugee households

Source: Carter et al. 2008

The findings indicate that housing trajectories for refugees are positive. Although adequate and affordable housing cannot address all the challenges refugees face, it can provide the stable basis from which they can deal more easily with other challenges. The study identifies many policy implications of the findings, but the most important priority is to increase the supply of affordable housing. ■

For more information on this research, contact Tom Carter, Canada Research Chair in Urban Change and Adaptation, University of Winnipeg: phone: 204-982-1148; e-mail: t.carter@uwinnipeg.ca

There is a Research Highlight prepared by the Canada Research Chair in Urban Change and Adaptation at <http://ius.uwinnipeg.ca/CRC/RH-27.pdf> and a complete copy of the report is at the Prairie Metropolis Centre website at http://pmc.metropolis.net/frameset_e.html

Women Speak on the Role of a Suburban Environment in Their Lives

Many Canadians live in suburbs, areas that are growing faster than urban cores. The nature of suburban developments has been linked with negative impacts on physical activity and physical health.

We know that social contact is essential to good health, but how sociable are suburban environments? What do women, who act as caregivers and health managers for their families in this type of environment, have to say about how the physical environment supports social activities? How can planning processes and built form—such as houses and neighbourhood layout—support women's efforts to socialize for their health and the health of their communities?

These are questions Kate Thompson, of Dalhousie University, Halifax, set out to answer in a participatory action research project based in Lower Sackville, N.S., part of Halifax Regional Municipality. Groups of local women were asked to investigate the role of the suburban built environment in their efforts to build and maintain social cohesion. Using the Photovoice method,¹ they documented their everyday experiences in establishing and sustaining social contact in their neighbourhoods. Through discussion and critical analysis, these women helped Ms. Thompson develop theories about the strategies they used to maintain social contact.

The premises of this research, started last January, are that:

- Social contact is important to community health.
- Women play an informal but significant role in society as health managers for their families and communities by seeking and maintaining social relationships within their neighbourhoods.
- Forming and maintaining these relationships may be either enhanced or frustrated by the built environment.
- Women's self-assessment of their environment and their own and their family's health is an untapped but highly valuable source of insight into how well the existing environment supports social contact and how population health may be affected by community design.

The research is slated to end in early 2009, but Ms. Thompson says preliminary findings indicate that most social contact in Lower Sackville is very positive.

"Women see a direct connection between their well-being and social contact, whatever the level. Neighbours are important for safety and security, but not for social contact."

In fact, the research is finding that for working women, home is not the primary place for social contact; time constraints and lack of opportunity and places leave little room for this type of encounter in home neighbourhoods.

Findings also show the amount and quality of social contact within Lower Sackville neighbourhoods appears to be decreasing. According to Ms. Thompson, this may be due to the recent loss of retail places in the community and to contextual social factors.

The research also found that regular contact is important to strengthen relationships. The findings, says Ms. Thompson, also seem to suggest that "social contact is more closely related to automobile use, constraints on time and resources, access to public spaces, and to larger social factors, than to the influence of housing."

This being said, Ms. Thompson thinks the research has implications for understanding the extent of the influence that housing type and layout has on supporting social contact in communities and on community health. ■

For more information about this research, contact Kate Thompson, graduate student and instructor, School of Planning, Dalhousie University: Phone: 902-861-3953; e-mail: kate.thompson@dal.ca



"Walmart, Sackville. I frequented that store and often met up with people I knew in the aisles, not planned meetings but opportunity to chat informally with friends. The fact that it is no longer part of our community is a HUGE loss".

Photo Credit is to L. Frankland

¹ Photovoice is a method developed by Caroline C. Wang of the University of Michigan for her studies of women's health issues. In Kate Thompson's study, participants are exploring issues related to their use of community places for social contact through discussion and photography, and share their ideas, photos and recommendations with policy-makers and those who can influence policy (such as those in the media) to initiate positive change. For more information, see <http://www.photovoice.com/> English only, retrieved October, 2008.

Aboriginal Student Housing and Success

Does housing play a significant role when it comes to recruiting and retaining Aboriginal students in post-secondary institutions in the Vancouver area? Two Aboriginal main investigators and four Aboriginal graduate students set out to answer this and related questions in a study funded under a former CMHC initiative, the Aboriginal Scholars Housing Research and Mentoring Project.

Surveys were completed between July 2003 and March 2004 by 175 Aboriginal students from six post-secondary institutions: University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, the Institute of Indigenous Government, the Native Education Center, Langara Community College and the British Columbia Institute of Technology.

The surveys showed that 56 per cent of students felt that housing was a very important or extremely important consideration when enrolling in a post-secondary institution.

Nevertheless, about two-thirds of respondents said not having confirmed housing or having problems securing housing did not deter them from attending school. This is relevant, as 60 per cent of the students said that they had problems finding adequate housing.

What do they consider adequate housing? Affordability came out as the top factor, followed by location, condition and security. Interestingly enough, students reported that finding adequate housing reduced their anxiety and stress levels as they felt they could then concentrate more on their studies. The stress reported was caused by several factors, including lack of finances, perceived discrimination by landlords, lack of preparedness and lack of family housing.

The research team also gathered information through discussion groups and individual interviews with students and with post-secondary student services and native housing staff. This revealed that student service staff and native housing staff were notably helpful in providing housing information. As for retaining students in their institutions, the research showed that housing was, after finances, the most important factor in completing studies.

Respondents said that affordability, location and condition were the most significant problems in finding adequate housing, but other hindering factors were also mentioned, including children not being allowed or long waiting lists for native housing. Native housing and on-campus family housing came out as very important factors for student retention.

Current Housing Situation	%
Rent off-campus	63
College/University housing	9
Own personal home/condo	6
Live with family	6
Native housing (family)	5
Native housing (single)	3
Other	8

Percentage distribution of respondents' current housing situation

Source: CMHC Research Report: Role of Housing in Aboriginal Student Success – Post Secondary Institutions in Vancouver

Family came out as a very important issue among respondents. Respondents said that, at times, they were afraid to tell housing authorities of a change in family circumstances for fear of being asked to leave because of rules about the number of people allowed to stay in the housing.

Moreover, they felt that post-secondary institutions and native housing societies should have specific housing policies for post-secondary students with families. In fact, the research states that "Post-secondary institutions and Native Housing Societies that provided culturally friendly and relevant physical-social space contributed significantly to retention." The study also stressed that community relationships were important for retention.

The study concludes that post-secondary Aboriginal student success might be improved by increasing access to various forms of housing and making government and post-secondary institutions more aware of the importance of family for Aboriginal students so that housing complexes can be more community-oriented and culturally friendly. ■

For more information, contact Antoine Pomerleau, Senior Policy Analyst, Aboriginal Housing Policy, CMHC: phone: 613-748-2000, ext. 3084; e-mail: apomerle@cmhc-schl.gc.ca

"The Role of Housing in Aboriginal Student Success—Post-secondary Institutions in Vancouver," a Research Highlight based on the study, is available at <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/65935.pdf>

Study Reveals Ways to Help People with Dementia Live In Their Own Home Safely

There are an estimated 364,000 Canadians over the age of 65 who have some form of dementia; 50 per cent of whom live in the community, 29 per cent of whom live alone.

Dementia impairs cognitive capacity—the ability to think, remember, understand, reason, judge and communicate. The loss of these abilities affects an individual's capacity to function and perform daily activities, such as handling finances, cooking and driving. There are several types of dementia, the most common being Alzheimer Disease.

People experiencing dementia face challenges that potentially compromise their safety and quality of life at home. A supportive environment is crucial for people with dementia since the disease affects their physical capabilities and their ability to adapt their behaviour to the environment.

Many of the considerations for creating a supportive environment for people with dementia are similar to the safety and accessibility concerns of people with physical disabilities. But there are other important considerations, such as cognitive and behavioural symptoms and the appropriate selection, introduction and timing of the physical adaptations that also need to be considered. The family's ability to understand how to adapt the environment is also critical, as it is often the family that provides most of the supportive care for a person living with dementia.

Canadian occupational therapist Nancy Rushford recently conducted an innovative study to address the challenges faced by people with dementia and their caregivers at home. The study was conducted under the External Research Program of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), and in close collaboration with the Alzheimer Society of the Niagara Region (ASNR) in Ontario, and a group of extraordinary individuals living with dementia and their caregivers.

The study was inspired by families who sought support from ASNR to deal with the many challenges associated with dementia.



Individually, these families had unique stories to tell. Collectively, they had a common experience and a wealth of knowledge and expertise that they had developed while coping with the disease.

Ms. Rushford anticipated that a useful and practical educational resource—that could guide other individuals with dementia and their caregivers—could best be created by combining the knowledge and expertise of these families, and the expertise of family support counsellors at ASNR. The involvement and input of individuals with dementia and their caregivers was fundamental to the research process.

This study resulted in the report *Adapting Your Home to Living with Dementia*. The report is organized in two volumes. Volume One contains a research report. Volume Two contains a "Resource Book" and "Guide to Home Adaptations."

The "Resource Book" provides general information about dementia, its symptoms and common problems that impact the every day activities of people with dementia and their caregivers. It also contains strategies that can help people with dementia to continue to live safely in their home for as long as possible.

The "Guide to Home Adaptations" provides suggestions and strategies to deal with difficulties associated with dementia and caregiving at home. These suggestions and strategies address cognitive and physical issues and are designed to make it easier for people with dementia to perform daily living activities in the home and the community. ■

To obtain copies of the Research Highlight of the study, visit CMHC's website at www.cmhc.ca. To obtain copies of the research report, the "Resource Book" or the "Guide to Home Adaptations," contact the Canadian Housing Information Centre (CHIC) at www.chic@cmhc.ca.