



## Transit-Oriented Development: Les Cochères de la gare

**A**s detailed in our Spring 2009 Newsletter, CMHC commissioned a series of case studies on transit-oriented developments: compact developments centred on transit nodes. The study on Les Cochères de la gare, a condominium development with convenient access to commuter rail, highlights some of the benefits and challenges of transit-oriented developments.

Les Cochères de la gare is situated in Sainte-Thérèse, a town of about 25,000 northwest of Montréal. Though the Town had been considering options for densification for some time, their first transit-oriented development began fortuitously. "We'd put the train back on the rails temporarily because they'd closed a nearby bridge,"

says Town planner Normand Rousseau. "Then we saw the success of the commuter train and pursued experimentation." By 1999, it had gelled into a Concept Plan, which set out six parcels of land that could be developed within walking distance of the train station. Because of the parcels' original industrial use, the Town had to proceed with some decontamination and rezoning; they also added a new train station, parking lot and space for bicycle storage.

Les Cochères de la gare was also a first for developer Habitations Viagère, which purchased a narrow strip of land on either side of the rails for two of the projects, and demolished a derelict factory so that decontamination and construction could begin. "We didn't

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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](http://www.nhrc-cnrl.ca).

The NHRC co-chairs are Steve Mennill of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and Michael Buda of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). CMHC provides the Secretariat for the Committee and produces this Newsletter.

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have any vacant lots, so we wanted to make sure that it was financially viable for the developer," says Rousseau. "One thing the Town did that was really appreciated was to change the zoning bylaws, before issuing the first permit, from industrial to residential use, and to allow seven storeys instead of two."

Aiming for convenience, affordability and comfort, Habitations Viagère built a series of eight-plexes with distinctive mansard roofs and cochères—carriage passageways for access between the buildings and to the rail station and a nearby park. The developer and builder, Philippe D'Alcantara, found the neighbours receptive. "We have excellent neighbours who were happy to see something new come in. Many are in their seventies, and were born and raised there. For us to bring 94 new first-time buyers into the area—well, we were not expected to succeed. But there have been no complaints."

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Les Cochères de la gare was built and sold in only 11 months, ending in 2005, with an average price of \$130,000. Rousseau considers the project a success. "It was good for the town for tax purposes and other reasons." Another benefit is that a significantly higher percentage of the occupants surveyed for the case study use public transit as their main mode of travel to work than the average for Sainte-Thérèse (19 vs. 5.3 per cent, respectively). Proximity to transit was either the main reason or a secondary reason in residents' decision to move to Les Cochères in 45 per cent of those surveyed. Proximity to transit was second only to unit price as the main or secondary reason for moving to the development. In general, residents were satisfied with the amenities and cost of living.

Sainte-Thérèse has followed through on more high-density developments in its Concept Plan, but both the planner and the developer caution that other towns take more time with their market research. As D'Alcantara puts it, "Make sure you understand the needs of the people you're trying to attract. If you were to do a similar project on the South Shore of Montréal, I couldn't say if eight-plexes would be the right product. We did it and it worked, but it might not always." ■

The CMHC case study on Les Cochères de la gare is available on the CMHC website (product # 63409). For more information, contact Normand Rousseau of the Town of Sainte-Thérèse, at 1-450-434-1440 ext.2224, or Philippe D'Alcantara of Habitations Viagère, at 1-514-344-3334 ext.1149.

## Affordable Housing Options for Converting Catholic Institutional Buildings in Québec

Though no longer needed by Roman Catholic religious communities, many former religious buildings, such as monasteries or convents, still grace the urban landscape of the city of Québec. Over the years, many developers have sought to build anew on these properties, rather than convert the existing buildings: their institutional layout is not easily adapted to the most profitable forms of new development, such as condominiums. Also, buildings may have deteriorated if they have been abandoned. But these buildings also represent potential for affordable or alternative housing.

To determine whether this approach is more sustainable than new construction, Dr. Tania Martin of the Université Laval surveyed 30 existing conversions to affordable or alternative housing in the city of Québec, and conducted case studies of three:

- Centre Jacques Cartier, a former school now providing affordable housing for youth;
- Domaine des Franciscains, a former monastery now housing seniors; and
- Habitations du Trait Carré, a former convent now housing seniors.

The study funded under CMHC's External Research Program (ERP) chronicled the conversion process, analyzing historical records and consulting with the architects, developers, residents, neighbours, the religious community and the non-profit or charitable organizations involved in creating the affordable housing component of the development.

The analysis and interviews revealed that these buildings present considerable design challenges for conversion—such as higher ceilings, larger windows and narrower floor areas than are characteristic of modern residences. "Schools, convents and monasteries are more adaptable to residential units than churches and chapels, which require new openings and have large interior spaces that have to be subdivided, unless used as communal spaces. While changes to the buildings' exterior were virtually imperceptible, significant changes were made to the interiors to make the spaces functional for their new use."

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Because conversions present more unforeseen variables, the costs of new construction are easier to estimate. Still, the study found that conversions are generally more economically viable than rebuilding—as much as 25 per cent less expensive. But the savings depend on several factors, such as the existing condition of the building. The study recommends early and meticulous documenting of existing conditions and including contingencies in cost estimates for conversions. The change of use should also happen quickly so that buildings do not deteriorate from neglect.

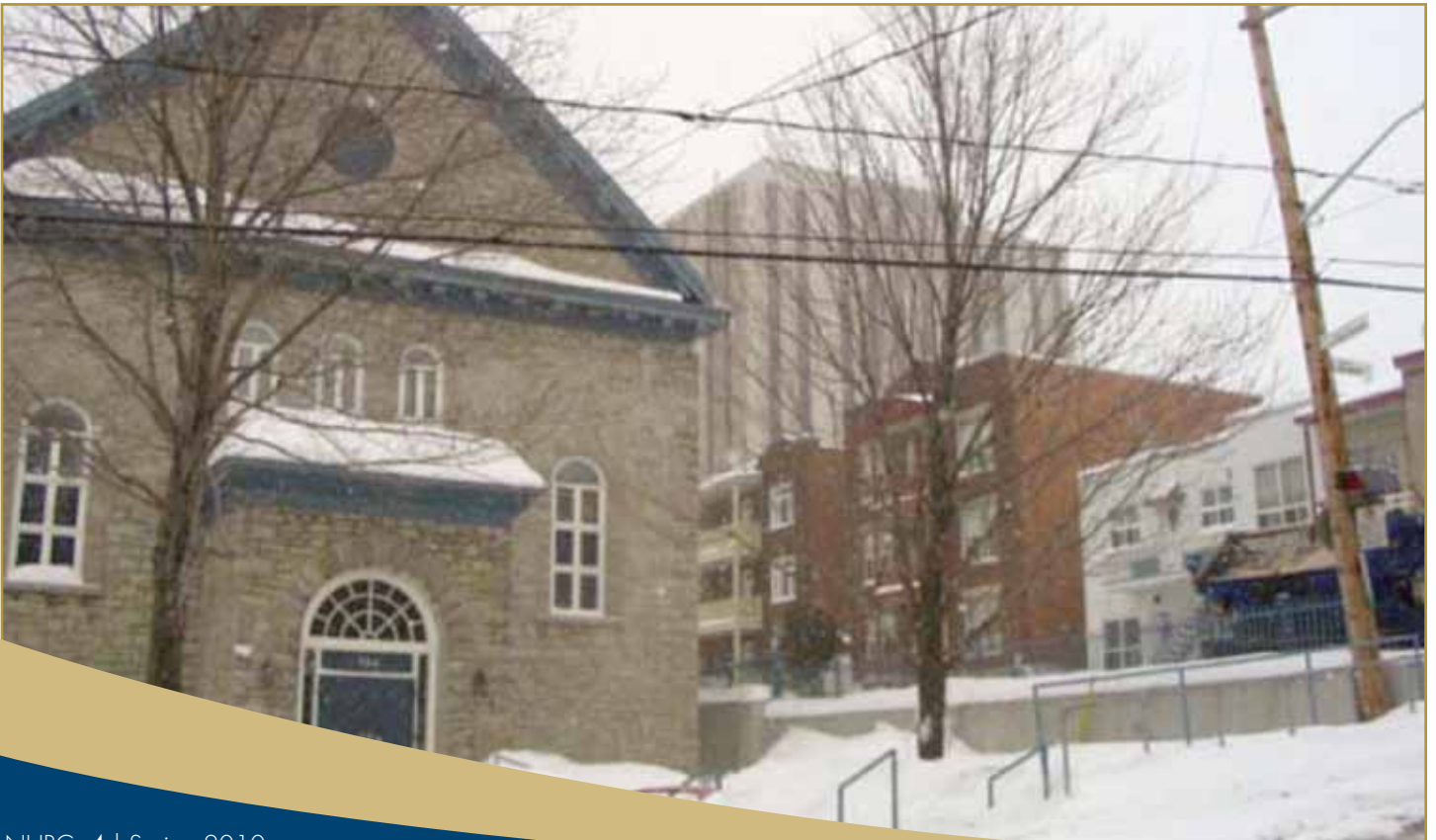
Current funding programs make preserving special heritage features a challenge; financial incentives, such as heritage grants, would help. Even with financial incentives, adaptations would still present creative challenges, such as working with heavy masonry or using large window openings to promote passive solar heating. This touches on issues of environmental as well as financial sustainability: “If some policies indirectly favour demolition, that goes against the principles of sustainable development,” Dr. Martin says. “As the saying goes, the greenest building is the one already built.”

The study also firmly establishes the importance of “bringing all stakeholders to the table to meet all needs”—given their varying and sometimes conflicting interests. Whereas architects were

primarily challenged by the internal logic of the buildings, neighbours were concerned about maintaining the building envelope, which represents its historical character. Consulting with community representatives, finance people, environmental experts and representatives of the people they’re aiming to house may help to elicit technical and spatial solutions that respect the historic character of the buildings, contribute to neighbourhood acceptance of affordable housing and may help to overcome the oft-cited challenge of bringing partners and financial resources together to realize these projects.

Dr. Martin hopes that her study helps the City and developers to realize the potential of these religious buildings, especially as a second wave of larger properties is now entering the market; many of these properties are in older suburbs and have excellent access to public transportation and other amenities. Some developers, and the City, see these properties as opportunities to densify these areas and combat suburban sprawl. ■

**A Research Highlight, now available on the CMHC website (product #11999), provides more detail on the case studies and recommendations. For more information, contact CMHC Senior Researcher Susan Fisher at [sfisher@cmhc-schl.gc.ca](mailto:sfisher@cmhc-schl.gc.ca).**





# The National Research Council's Indoor Air Initiative

Dr. Hans Schleibinger and his team at the National Research Council Institute for Research in Construction (NRC-IRC) may be studying thin air, but the complexity of the problem is worth venting about.

"We know a lot about the key parameters of air quality and the health and safety issues related to high concentrations of contaminants—such as benzene, tobacco smoke or radon—but not about the long-term effect of low doses," he says. "Indoor air contains hundreds of compounds in low concentrations. If we evaluate one compound, is it harmless over 70 years of exposure? What happens if you combine them? Are there synergistic effects?"

Such issues have been thrust into the foreground as Canadians make their homes more energy-efficient, and correspondingly more airtight, says Dr. Schleibinger. "People think we ventilate because we need oxygen, but it's really to flush out contaminants." These contaminants, ranging from mould spores to volatile organic compounds, can cause adverse health effects, irritations



*Heat recovery ventilators improve energy efficiency—but their overall effect on air quality is still unknown.*

and exacerbate a host of respiratory illnesses, such as asthma. In response to these issues, and in support of the federal Clean Air Agenda, NRC has launched the Indoor Air Initiative, establishing a unique Indoor Air Research Laboratory and carrying out a series of experiments that could transform how Canadians think about the air in their homes and offices.

In the most prominent of these experiments, NRC-IRC and the *Institut national de santé publique du Québec* are working with 100 families in the Québec City area who have children with asthma. "We simulate the homes in the lab first, seeing what kind of ventilation rate they have. In the Indoor Air Research Laboratory, we can mimic different scenarios and pick the best one for an intervention." In half of these homes, the team increased the ventilation rate, using the rest as a control group. The team is now measuring 16 parameters in the resulting air quality, and are tracking health outcomes such as the number of days when the residents reported asthma symptoms. This combination of laboratory and field work gives the team the opportunity to identify effective interventions for the improvement of respiratory symptoms.

Another series of experiments focuses on testing the effectiveness of commercially available air quality products and services. Dr. Schleibinger and his team have begun by looking at three general technologies: standalone air purification systems, heat recovery ventilators, and commercial air duct cleaning services. The goal of this

research is to help Canadians make more informed choices about ways to improve air quality, he says. "There will be a few surprises. People think of these devices as a black box that pumps out cleaner air. But, where they improve at all, it may be only the concentrations of certain contaminants." This is not necessarily a bad thing, he adds. "If your child has asthma, with the right information about how the equipment performs, you can shop for something that will cleanse the contaminants that cause it."

Because translating the experimental results into practical guidance is important to the Indoor Air Initiative, NRC has established the Canadian Committee on Indoor Air Quality and Buildings, an independent body with representation from significant stakeholder groups across Canada. The Committee's first task is to validate information, pulling together relevant research and identifying gaps for future exploration.

With so many parameters to research in this relatively unexplored field, the Committee has a lot of work ahead of it. Meanwhile, NRC-IRC expects to deliver a comprehensive report on the current Indoor Air Initiative experiments in early 2011. ■

For more information, visit the NRC-IRC website at [www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/eng/ibp/irc.html](http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/eng/ibp/irc.html) or contact Dr. Hans Schleibinger at [Hans.Schleibinger@nrc-cnrc.gc.ca](mailto:Hans.Schleibinger@nrc-cnrc.gc.ca) or 613-993-2365.

# EQuilibrium™ Housing InSight Showcases Proven Housing Design Strategies

Since its launch in 2006, CMHC's EQuilibrium™ sustainable housing demonstration initiative has met with considerable success and interest from both the public and developers. To meet this demand, CMHC has now launched a new publication series, *EQuilibrium™ Housing InSight*, which presents specific housing design strategies and technologies implemented in EQuilibrium™ housing demonstration projects.

Through the EQuilibrium™ housing initiative, CMHC hosted a national competition of builder-led teams to design, construct and demonstrate houses that take advantage of proven innovations in energy efficiency, healthy design, resource conservation, reduced environmental impact and renewable energy production. Each of these homes is open to the public for at least six months, then sold at market rates and monitored for performance—ensuring that the homes are sustainable both environmentally and financially.

The key to the success of the EQuilibrium™ housing initiative lies in how it engages industry. “Developers really see the importance of moving to sustainable housing,” says CMHC Senior Researcher Thomas Green, who led the launch of the initiative. “This has been a great vehicle for them to push themselves further and in ways they might not otherwise—and to think about sustainability in an integrated and holistic way. They certainly get good publicity and financial support—but they also work hard for it.”

The first issues of *EQuilibrium™ Housing InSight* detail several of the innovations that are now in production:

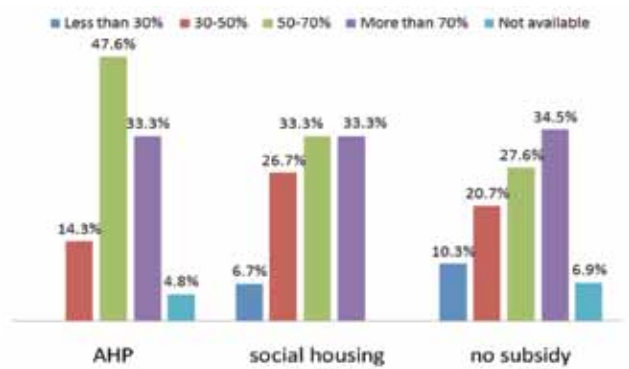
- The **Riverdale NetZero Deep Wall System**, a 16" (40 cm) thick, double-stud wall system built to achieve an impressive insulation value of RSI-9.9 (R-56), using the same amount of wood needed for a typical 2" x 6" (5 cm x 15 cm) stud wall. With this system, highly insulated roof and foundation, and high-performance windows, the house requires minimal heating.
- The **Riverdale NetZero Passive Solar Design** elements helped achieve an estimated 40 per cent passive solar heating fraction, leaving an estimated auxiliary heating load of only 15 kWh/m<sup>2</sup>. More than 60 per cent of this load was covered by the Riverdale NetZero Active Solar Thermal System—though the implementing team discovered that other technologies were more cost-effective at this scale.

- The **Avalon Discovery 3 Passive Solar Design** strategies balance passive solar gains with improving occupant comfort. By carefully designing and positioning windows with exterior shutters, the implementing team expects to provide occupants with a stable and comfortable temperature year-round—and a 30 per cent passive solar heating fraction.
- The **Now House™ Exterior Envelope Retrofit** makes a 60-year-old house more energy-efficient than most energy-efficient houses constructed today. The implementing team increased the insulation value of the exterior walls almost fivefold to RSI-6.9 (R-39); they also improved the airtightness of the envelope, from a forced-air leakage rate of 5.6 to 2.6 air changes per hour at 50 Pa.

Green expects the *EQuilibrium™ Housing InSight* series to grow along with the EQuilibrium™ initiative itself. “The incredible response we got from our first request for proposals showed us how interested industry was in sustainable housing,” he says. “Now, we offer consumer and industry tours of demonstration houses, and an industry-focused EQuilibrium™ Housing Forum. We’re seeking to help train industry, raise awareness with consumers and increase demand for these innovations.” As of February 2010, fifteen teams have been selected to build EQuilibrium™ demonstration projects across Canada—including, most recently, three teams to build eco-friendly homes in British Columbia and Atlantic Canada. ■

The new EQuilibrium™ Housing InSight issues are available, along with information on EQuilibrium™ demonstration projects, housing forums, tours and monitoring at [www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/inpr/su/eqho/index.cfm](http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/inpr/su/eqho/index.cfm).

# Exits from Homelessness and Children's Well-Being: Developing a Research Strategy



*Percentages of income spent on shelter costs*

How effective are Ontario's affordable housing and social housing programs at providing successful exits from homelessness? A research team led by York University's Dr. Uzo Anucha examines ways to shed light on this issue, but there are challenges. "We've always wanted to do a large-scale, multi-city study, but it's resource-intensive," she says. "The Ministry [of Municipal Affairs and Housing] wants to understand the impact of the Affordable Housing Program, and several cities are doing different things, but they're all on different timelines."

Part of the challenge is that the data that's easiest to capture—statistics on exits from homelessness—do not illustrate how people's lives actually change after they access affordable housing; they can spend years on wait lists, and their experiences vary considerably. Many live from monthly cheque to monthly cheque, unable to afford the luxury of long-term planning; others' homes are overcrowded, lacking the privacy needed for sleep or study. Of particular interest to Uzo and her colleagues are the experiences of children, and how waiting lists and access to

housing programs affect their development.

The team began with a literature review that informed a preliminary research strategy. They then pretested the strategy through a pilot study that focused on families in social housing and the Affordable Housing Program in Peterborough,

Hamilton and the County of Hastings.

The pilot was a two-wave longitudinal study that began with a baseline survey of 65 parents, 22 children and 13 youth either on wait lists or with recent access to housing programs. The questions addressed a variety of topics related to child well-being, and were repeated with the same group six months later. The team also conducted in-depth interviews with a smaller group of participants, focusing on the connection between affordable housing and employment, education and health. These participants were invited to submit drawings and pictures of their previous and present homes.

The pilot's combination of quantitative and qualitative data not only shed light on children's well-being but also served as a guide to what indicators the strategy should focus on. "We started off with indicators that were already in the literature—the way they feel about themselves, family, how they're doing in school—and eventually added indicators like food and security,

feelings of safety in their neighbourhoods," says Uzo. "The pilot helped us get some data we would not otherwise have had." The pilot draws preliminary connections between these indicators to elicit several themes to guide future study:

- the actual affordability of affordable housing;
- stigma, social exclusion and subsidized housing;
- pathways to subsidized housing;
- waiting lists; and
- moving into subsidized social housing.

In all, the findings of the study suggest that that children and youth living in non-subsidized homes may experience more negative outcomes than those living in subsidized housing. Yet the picture is far from rosy: most of the participants, in both subsidized and non-subsidized housing, still spent more than half their income on housing-related costs.

Just as importantly, the study provides guidance on how future research can gather an adequate sample size, better track participants through the waiting lists and into subsidized or affordable housing, and take a more holistic approach to evaluating the effectiveness of social-housing and affordable-housing programs, especially as it applies to children's well-being. ■

The team's report, "(Un) Affordable Housing and the Well-Being of Children," is available at [www.yorku.ca/aswreg](http://www.yorku.ca/aswreg); for more information, contact Dr. Uzo Anucha at [anucha@yorku.ca](mailto:anucha@yorku.ca) or 416-736-2100, ext. 23080.

# Safe, Stable and Affordable Options for Abused and Homeless Women



Dr. Leslie Tutty, at RESOLVE Alberta at the University of Calgary, finds that Canadian women who become homeless by fleeing an abusive relationship are often trapped by the systems designed to support them.

"We spoke to one woman whose children were taken from her because she was homeless. When she applied to regain custody of them, she was told she could have the children back when she had access to subsidized housing. Then, when she applied for subsidized housing, she was told that access was a priority for women who have children."

Although Canadian statistics on violence from intimate partners are well established, Dr. Tutty, leading a team of researchers from the Alliance of Research Centres on Violence, found that the situations of

women after they exit a shelter are relatively unexplored—and often misunderstood. "There are very few second-stage options in Alberta that can promise women a safe place," she says. "They can stay at a violence-against-women shelter for about a month, and then they face another backlog, another barrier." Many of these women return to abusive relationships, or opt to couch-surf—effectively removing themselves from the visible side of the homelessness problem.

Even those who locate second-stage supported housing are usually allowed only a few months' stay, which can uproot children's schooling and support. Dr. Tutty points to one promising third-stage option, now being explored in Edmonton, where agreements between housing providers and schools help keep the family safe and

stable. "The rates were the same as for subsidized housing," she says. "The difference was the agreement on how long they can stay."

The team conducted an environmental scan and, by working with several other research centres and community partners, established variables on which housing options could be evaluated: safety, maximum length of stay, quality of housing, emotional support and access. The options included not only shelters and second- and third-stage supported housing but also ways to increase the women's safety in their current homes, such as court orders.



Research partners across the country then interviewed 62 women who had been abused by partners and were homeless at some point, seeking their views on preventing homelessness and how best to safely house abused women. The team identified prominent themes and sub-themes in the interviews. From these themes emerged eight recommendations on how to create safer housing options for abused women, including:

- lengthening the allowable stays in Canadian emergency and second-stage shelters;
- reviewing shelter and agency policies for implicit biases or discrimination in accessing services; and
- advocating to child protection services for a more humane approach to women and their children who have been or are at risk of homelessness.

The involvement of community agency representatives was key to arriving at the recommendations. "Often it was the community lead who would identify what's important," says Dr. Tutty. "They were involved in crafting interview questions and helping us to find people."

Dr. Tutty hopes that the research helps to shine light on the often-hidden situation of homeless and abused women. At the same time, Dr. Tutty and her colleagues at the University of Calgary Faculty of Social Work are building on this research: working with the Calgary Homeless Foundation, they plan to develop a tool that will help identify people who are at risk of becoming homeless. ■

The full report, "'I Built My House of Hope:' Best Practices to Safely House Abused and Homeless Women," includes the full set of recommendations, extensive detail on methodology and testimony by the interviewees. For more information, or for a copy of the report, contact Dr. Leslie Tutty at 403-220-5040 or [tutty@ucalgary.ca](mailto:tutty@ucalgary.ca).

## CALL FOR ARTICLES

**You are invited** to submit information for articles, to be considered for publication in the fall 2010 NHRC Newsletter.

The NHRC Newsletter offers you an opportunity to share information about housing research with members of the NHRC and other interested people in organizations across the country. The approximately 1 500 people who will receive the newsletter have a keen interest in hearing about your project.

Your information may be submitted as a rough draft. The NHRC Secretariat will hire a writer to produce the articles based upon initial information you provide, and a brief telephone interview. A high-quality drawing, photograph or chart to accompany your article is also welcome. If you are drafting an article, please ensure that it be less than 500 words.

### **Normal Intake Period:**

April 19, 2010 - June 18, 2010

Do not miss this opportunity to share your housing research with a national audience; this publication will be a valuable resource for everyone wishing to stay abreast of news in the Canadian housing research community.

We look forward to considering your story for inclusion in the fall 2010 issue of the NHRC Newsletter.

Please submit your information by e-mail to [\*\*dstansen@cmhc.ca\*\*](mailto:dstansen@cmhc.ca)

# The Pathways Housing First Model Takes Shape in Canada

"The conventional approach to homelessness is, 'if they get themselves clean and sober, we'll get them a home' – but it doesn't work," says Shelley Heartwell, Executive Director of The Alex Community Health Centre in Calgary. "I believe it's everyone's right to have a home, and it shouldn't be based on conditions, especially where poverty and mental health are issues. If they have a home first, they have a place where they can get their lives under control."

That's the essential philosophy behind the Pathways Housing First model, which was first developed in New York, and then pioneered in Canada by The Alex and the Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF) in 2007, as part of a city-wide plan to end chronic homelessness. The Pathways model was a compelling option: it boasts an 85 per cent success rate for keeping chronically homeless people housed, backed up by sound scientific evidence.

In addition to the premise that housing is the foundation for recovery, the Pathways model emphasizes cooperation among various support services. "We're wrapping a multi-disciplinary team of support around these people," says Heartwell. "We support 50 clients on one team – for example, one to keep people from cycling in and out of the hospital system. The team includes an occupational therapist, a psychologist, an employment specialist and a housing specialist." She adds that the support network is available to clients around the clock.



The Pathways model isn't for everyone: clients must have a mental-health diagnosis and a history of chronic homelessness. But the first step is to empower them, says Heartwell. "We house them first, and they agree to pay 30 per cent of their income toward rent. They also have to allow us into their homes at least once per week, and agree to be a good tenant and community member." This is part of the Pathways commitment to client-led support, which allows clients to choose the level and type of services available to them. Another aspect, called "scatter site independent housing", helps clients choose apartments in familiar neighbourhoods.

The model has worked well for The Alex, and is now being rolled out across the country. In 2008, the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC), a national non-profit organization, selected Pathways as its intervention model for a major initiative to end chronic homelessness for people with mental health problems in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and Moncton.

The adoption of the Pathways model in so many new locations prompted the creation of a Pathways toolkit, including videos and a Canadian edition of the Pathways First Program manual. This toolkit has been adapted to the Canadian context – partly by drawing from the Calgary experience, but also by taking into account Canada's cultural norms, systems of care, funding mechanisms, and benefits and entitlements for program participants.

And the Canadian difference is considerable, says Heartwell: "Our government gets the fact that we need to help these people; it's not quite the same in the US." However, she also stresses that every Pathways team must adapt to the homelessness situation and culture of their own cities.

The toolkit is yet to be launched but, once available, it will help to guide housing-first programs across the country, whether or not they adopt a Pathways model. And Canadian understanding of the model will continue to grow, as the MHCC is presently conducting a nation-wide study of its effectiveness. ■

For information about the Calgary Ten-Year Plan, visit the CHF website ([www.calgaryhomeless.com](http://www.calgaryhomeless.com)); for information on the toolkit and the Pathways model, visit [www.thealex.ca](http://www.thealex.ca) or contact Shelley Heartwell at 1-403-266-2622 or [Shelleyh@thealex.ca](mailto:Shelleyh@thealex.ca).

# Shifting the Way Housing and Social Service Providers Work in Quebec



The adoption of the Reference Framework for Social Housing Community Support by Quebec's Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (Ministry of Health and Social Services, or MSSS) and the Société d'habitation du Québec (Quebec Housing Corporation, or SHQ) in 2007 has begun to change the way housing providers work with their clients—most commonly, older tenants, people with disabilities, mental health problems or substance abuse problems, the homeless and those at risk of homelessness.

"The historical problem was that the Ministry would not fund housing organizations because it wasn't in their mandate," says Marie-Noëlle Ducharme of the Réseau québécois des OSBL d'habitation (Network of Quebec Non-Profit Housing Organizations, or RQOH), which partnered with the Ministry to create the Framework after what Ducharme describes as a "15-year struggle by social housing stakeholders. The Framework amended this situation by explicitly recognizing housing as a determinant to health—opening the doors for \$5 million in annual MSSS funding for social housing community support.

While non-profit housing organizations have embraced the opportunity, the Framework does more than simply fund these organizations; it also creates bridges between the housing sector and other involved stakeholders, such as health service and social service providers. "Since the launch, more than 225 agreements have been put in place between community and public housing

organizations and social service providers," says Claude Roy of the SHQ. Roy adds that the funding allocated to these agreements has been oversubscribed by about 20 per cent.

"Some of the organizations that were funded have been able to open up to the community and network with community organizations," says Ducharme. At the same time, the Framework must respect the operating rules of each of the sectors involved.

The fact that the funding is regular is also changing the way housing providers work, says Roy. "Many groups were asking for funding from year to year, not knowing if they'd get the money. Now they know it's there." This more regular funding, subject to evaluations, allows the groups to do longer-term planning, rather than dealing only with immediate needs.

The ultimate goal of each of these changes is to improve the lives of vulnerable tenants, maximizing their independence and integration within their communities. To that end, the Framework recognizes the importance of taking action with tenants who, without support, have difficulty accessing or keeping social housing. Effectively, this principle centralizes the role of tenants as active participants in social housing, which previously seemed to treat tenants as passive patients. As Ducharme puts it, "It's a shift from focusing on people's problems to their capacity, focusing on such aspects as welcoming, information, participation, security and living together—in short, doing the same thing any citizen would do."

Now in its third year, the Framework is still in its implementation phase, but there is more to come. A monitoring committee, with representation from all stakeholders, regularly evaluates the implementation of the agreements and the management of the Framework. "We look at how it's being done—sometimes well, sometimes not so well—and recommend adjustments," says Roy. "One thing we do know is that there's more need out there." ■

The Reference Framework is available on the SHQ website ([www.shq.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.shq.gouv.qc.ca)) and the RQOH website ([www.rqoh.com](http://www.rqoh.com)). For more information, contact Marie-Noëlle Ducharme at 514-846-0163, ext. 226, or [mducharme@rqoh.com](mailto:mducharme@rqoh.com), or Claude Roy at [claudio.roy@shq.gouv.qc.ca](mailto:claudio.roy@shq.gouv.qc.ca).

# IPPH: New Strategic Directions Support Research with Multi-Sectoral Partners



A new strategic plan developed by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Institute of Population and Public Health (IPPH) emphasizes health equity and an interdisciplinary approach. This in turn will have an impact on the housing-related research that CIHR-IPPH supports.

As part of CIHR, Canada's major federal health research funding agency, IPPH seeks to improve the health of populations and promote health equity in Canada and globally through research and its application to policies, programs and practice in public health and other sectors. Rapid change in the field is what led to the Institute's development of the new strategic plan, says Emma Cohen, Knowledge Translation and Communications Officer at CIHR-IPPH. "There has been considerable change in the population and public health landscape since 2001, and quite a few achievements, including the formation of the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and several more Canadian universities offering graduate programs in the field."

There is also an increased recognition of the factors that produce inequities in health status between population groups. Population health interventions are needed to address those that are unfair and unjust. With that in mind, the new plan, *Health Equity Matters*, sets out four strategic research priorities:

1. Pathways to health equity
2. Population health interventions
3. Implementation systems for population health interventions in public health and other sectors
4. Theoretical and methodological innovations

"The main point of the strategic plan is its focus on health equity; the other three priorities are all meant to be viewed through the lens of health equity," says Cohen. This includes research on physical and social environments, which can have profound effects on health. The built environment, including the design of homes, neighbourhoods and communities, is a case in point. For example, men living in Canada's richest neighbourhoods can expect to live five years longer than men in Canada's poorest neighbourhoods—a health inequity that would require expertise from many sectors including housing and health to understand.

In encouraging interdisciplinary cooperation, CIHR-IPPH is building on strengths—as demonstrated in some ongoing research projects supported by CIHR-IPPH and other partners:

- an analysis of the health impacts of the Toronto Regent Park redevelopment project, which involves the replacement of existing buildings with a new district that will feature both public and market-value housing (by Applied Public Health Chair Dr. Jim Dunn);
- a study that has helped to build community capacity to develop supportive housing for people with HIV/AIDS by engaging community members, researchers and policy makers (Sean Rourke, Jean Bacon and Ruthann Tucker);
- a study on the role of housing in promoting and maintaining the health of victims of domestic violence (by Patricia O'Campo of St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto); and
- a knowledge-translation grant to enable discussions between key institutions about factors involving mental health issues, addiction and homelessness, toward developing policies for intervention and prevention (Bernadette Pauly and Victoria Smye of the University of Victoria).

CIHR-IPPH hopes that the new priorities will stimulate the further development of interdisciplinary collaborations between researchers, policy makers, and front-line practitioners to address the many challenges that still exist in population and public health. As Cohen puts it, "We recognize that promoting the health of the population requires more than a health sector effort." ■

The *Health Equity Matters* strategic plan is published on the CIHR website at [www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/27322.html](http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/27322.html). For more information, contact Ashley Page at 613-562-5800, ext. 8414, or [ipph-ispp@uottawa.ca](mailto:ipph-ispp@uottawa.ca).



# CMHC Research Covers a Spectrum of Disability-Related Housing Issues

CMHC continues to support research that addresses housing and a variety of disability-related issues, through its research program. This research applies to a full spectrum of disabilities, rather than just mobility, says Ian Melzer, CMHC's Manager of Housing Needs. "When people think of accessible housing, they're most likely to think about entrance ramps. But we need to take many other things into account for a home to be safe, accessible and comfortable to someone with a visual, auditory or cognitive disability."

Several research initiatives conducted or supported by CMHC touch on a variety of disability-related issues:

- The Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership and the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living (SACL) have conducted a series of focus groups and surveys with SACL clients and their families. The aim is to understand how individuals with cognitive disabilities who live in intentional communities use living spaces in their homes and to identify appropriate support, home design and community features. The research is summarized in Research Highlight #66464.
- A longitudinal study by Jill Grant of the University of Windsor and Anne Westhues of Wilfrid Laurier University compares the results of two supported housing residences for individuals with serious mental illnesses—one with a high-support model and the other with lower support. The researchers took a

baseline measure of tenants' satisfaction with the program and social support, of their mental and physical health, and of their subjective feelings about being able to control areas of their lives; the researchers tracked progress over the course of a year.

- A 2008 study, undertaken by the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies and partially funded by CMHC, analyzes the progress and diffusion of visitability in Canada, identifies barriers and facilitators to its adoption, as well as best practices, gaps, trends and issues. The research is summarized in Research Highlight #65959.

Several CMHC-supported research efforts are currently under way:

- development of a compendium of Canadian codes and standards for accessible housing, capturing technical accessibility requirements, innovations, and best practices from all the provinces and territories;
- a study on the effect of snow and ice on wheelchair navigability of exterior ramps;
- an examination of the benefits of congregate living for individuals who have a mental illness or a concurrent disorder; and
- a study of the relative costs and benefits of home renovations to accommodate aging and disability, as opposed to long-term care institutionalization.

While promoting these research initiatives benefits industry and guides policy-makers, CMHC also reaches out to Canadians. For example, CMHC is presently developing 12 "Accessible Housing by Design" fact sheets, on topics ranging from lifts to appliances. Several of these fact sheets are now available on the CMHC website.

Melzer expects that this stream of CMHC-supported and conducted research will continue to drive change. "Research on housing and disabilities is not a side-issue for CMHC" says Melzer. "Many of our findings translate into real and practicable solutions for people with disabilities—and they're often at the leading edge of changes that will eventually make housing safer and more comfortable for all Canadians." This broadening application of research ranges from "smart" grab bars to the models used to link housing with social and support services. Indeed, one of the findings of the study on intentional communities is that the facilities and amenities that people with cognitive disabilities require are similar to those needed by families with small children. ■

For more information on these and other research initiatives related to housing and disability, contact Jim Zamprelli at 613-748-2349 or [jzamprel@cmhc-schl.gc.ca](mailto:jzamprel@cmhc-schl.gc.ca).

# Locations, Amenities and Links to Successful Supportive Housing

Though it's well established that neighbourhood characteristics such as locale, amenities and transportation affect the quality of community living, their effect on the success of supportive housing is not so clear.

A study by Eric Oberdorfer, a master's candidate with the University of British Columbia's School of Community and Regional Planning, has established some links between these characteristics and

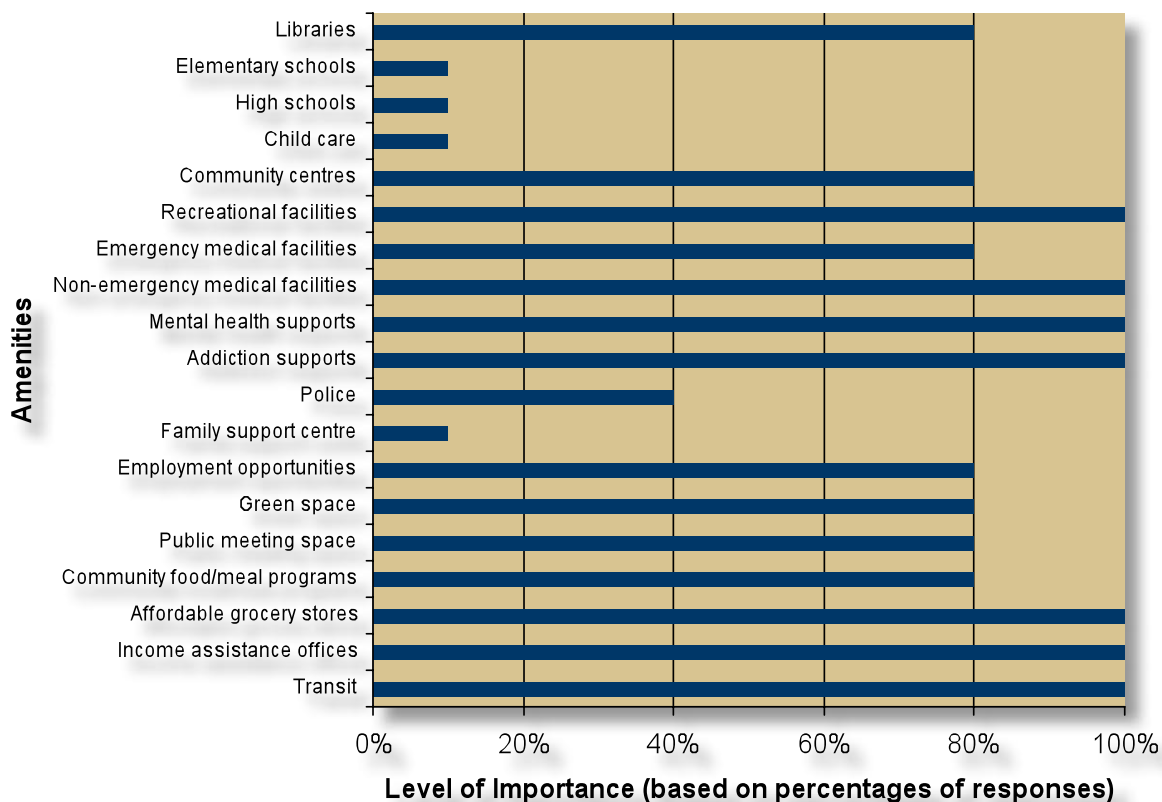
successful social housing—as well as the effect of social housing on these neighbourhoods. The study was funded by Mathematics of Information Technology and Complex Systems (MITACS), the Government of British Columbia and BC Housing to promote co-operation between academia and government.

"We wanted to know what happens in neighbourhoods when you build a lot of social housing," says Dr. Cecile Lacombe,

Director of Housing Research with the B.C. Ministry of Citizens' Services, who supervised the study. "We were particularly interested in how maps could be used to draw out connections in a new way."

In the summer of 2009, Mr. Oberdorfer surveyed 12 British Columbia neighbourhoods where social housing is located, combining map data, local census data and details on available services, transportation amenities and other

**Table 1 Level of Importance of Amenities for Outcomes of Supportive Housing**





neighbourhood characteristics. He then conducted neighbourhood walkthroughs and semi-structured interviews with building managers to gain an overall profile of each area.

The study found that neighbourhoods with high concentrations of supportive housing and support services can both benefit and detract from desired outcomes. While such neighbourhoods may facilitate community integration, they often have high levels of visible drug use, making rehabilitation more difficult. Residents also have less chance to learn how to access amenities outside of their direct neighbourhood, making it difficult for them to move after the rehabilitation is complete. In contrast, locating supportive housing in dispersed and diverse neighbourhoods removes residents from high levels of visible drug use, and reduces local inhabitants' impression of being overburdened.

Certain neighbourhood features appeared more beneficial than others for the success of residents in supportive housing: recreational amenities, transit, support services and everyday amenities such as affordable grocery stores, restaurants and cafés. "Surprisingly, recreational amenities turned out to be quite important, and were mentioned by all the housing managers," says Dr. Lacombe. "These could be a gym or a place to do crafts—essentially ways for residents to use spare time." Providing residents with normal, everyday affordable activities also helps increase community integration, a critical component of recovery.

Supportive housing could be made more effective by positioning it within neighbourhoods that possess qualities that positively impact behaviour and health outcomes—and the connections between neighbourhood characteristics, supportive

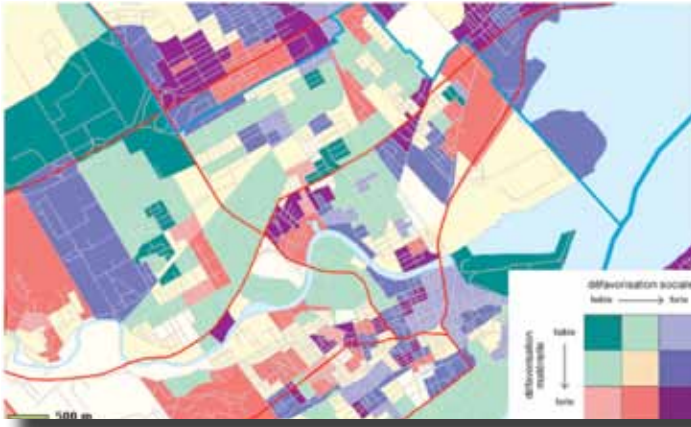
housing and homelessness elucidated in Mr. Oberdorfer's research could help to inform policy and planning in British Columbia as well as other jurisdictions.

While the research presents a holistic analysis, Dr. Lacombe cautions that this was "more of an exploratory case study. From here, we can identify relationships that may be worth investigating in the future." More longitudinal studies could draw out causal relationships among the links developed in the research. ■

A full report on the study will be available in the near future at [www.gov.bc.ca](http://www.gov.bc.ca).

For more information, contact Dr. Cecile Lacombe at 250-356-0779.

# Inequality, Isolation and Porosity: A Micro-Territorial Profile of Subsidized Housing in Québec



*Central districts of Québec – application of the deprivation index with the population of the CSSS de la Vieille-Capitale territory as the reference population, in 2006*

The Office municipal d'habitation de Québec (OMHQ) had a problem: locations of the subsidized housing in the city of Québec coupled with aggregate demographic data were not enough to target social services and health services to the people who needed them most. To try to bring greater detail and guidance to their efforts, the OMHQ turned to Proximity and Research on Interventions, Services and their Modalities (PRISM), a group of researchers affiliated with the Centre de santé et de services sociaux (CSSS) de la Vieille-Capitale.

The PRISM team undertook a novel qualitative-quantitative approach to the data. They began by interviewing service managers and practitioners to find out what kind of data they'd need to develop new services. The team then worked with the available data. "The idea was to link data from inside social-services organizations with primary care services," says Dr. Lucie Gélinau, PRISM researcher and an associate professor at the Université Laval. "They have a database, with social and demographic characteristics, and we linked the two databases to tease out what services they were using, and what links could be drawn between them."

What emerged was a detailed profile of participants in OMHQ programs: a population that is aging, with a disproportionate number of women and singles—proportions that are likely to be reinforced by the demographics of the waiting lists for subsidized housing. In addition to age, gender and household composition, the study captures such details as income and types of social and health services used. In all, 1,146 of the 9,111 low-income households studied used social and health services linked to relationship and behavioural problems (39.7 per cent), mental health (33.3 per cent), physical health and mobility (17.9 per cent), and physical and cognitive independence (9.1 per cent).

Finally, PRISM associated the results with geographic data, creating maps that service managers could use for local interventions.

Though the data does delve to a new level of geographic detail, Dr. Gélinau was also able to identify three themes that apply to Québec subsidized housing in general:

- **Inequality** – Economic insecurity, especially among low-income households led by a single adult, has a considerable effect on their health and the social cohesion of both adults and children.
- **Isolation** – The study points to a number of "invisible" groups that warrant more attention, especially among people who live alone in low-income housing oriented to families.
- **Porosity** – In many cases, subsidized housing may simply lack barriers to outside problems. As Dr. Gélinau puts it, "Many interviewees expressed the feeling that their housing was insecure—not necessarily because of people in the subsidized housing, but that people were bringing problems such as prostitution and drugs in from outside."

Dr. Gélinau points out that the research techniques may be useful to other Quebec municipalities, which work through many of the same policies—and face the same challenges, including insufficient data. "This is a way to think about new questions and identify future needs," says Dr. Gélinau. "For example, if a population is aging, we can look at the overall services in one subsidized housing location and ask what we'll need in the next ten years." ■

The OMHQ plans to publish the full report shortly at [www.omhq.qc.ca](http://www.omhq.qc.ca). For more information, contact Dr. Gélinau at 418-681-8787, ext. 3831, or [lucie.gelineau@csssvc.qc.ca](mailto:lucie.gelineau@csssvc.qc.ca).



# Making Energy-Efficiency Retrofits Feasible for Low-Income Homeowners in Regina

"One house had an EnerGuide rating of 7," says Dr. Marion Jones, describing the housing stock she researched in Regina's North Central neighbourhood in 2007. "My four-season tent is just about as good in winter. The house was from the 1920s; it had no insulation in the walls to speak of, no vapour barrier, and the windows and doors needed replacement. What's amazing is that it didn't look so bad from the curb—but it also wasn't a big outlier in our study. We saw many ratings in the 30s."

The aim of the research, conducted by Dr. Jones, Brett Dolter and Adam Mills of the University of Regina, was to understand what prevents some of Regina's most vulnerable homeowners from seeking energy retrofits. Some of the factors they knew in advance: the housing stock is older, and many of its residents are lower-income—mainly older, long-term residents and younger residents who saw the area's lower prices as their first step into the housing market. Many are content to have escaped the greater vulnerability of the rental market.

Working with the North Central Community Association, the team recruited and interviewed 40 households that fell into what an earlier study called the "EligAbility Gap" of those whose homes are most eligible for energy-efficiency retrofits but who are unable to take advantage of available programs due to socioeconomic status. The interviews focused on household characteristics, housing needs, real and perceived barriers to improving their homes, and homeowners' knowledge of available programs. Energy audits were also done on each of their homes.

The study revealed that many residents faced limited options. "For those housed with ratings in the 30s or below, even if



*Though picturesque, North Central is one of Regina's poorest communities.*

they did everything recommended in the EnerGuide report, the rating would rise to only the low 50s. And some of these houses were at the end of their useable life, often due to poor maintenance and repairs over the years," she says. With little money left over each month, homeowners could not afford the upfront costs of a slate of energy-efficiency retrofits, and continued paying higher utility bills despite the long-term economic benefits. Lack of equity prevented many from seeking help from their banks.

Furthermore, many homeowners had reduced their expectations to meet their current situations—regarding upgrades, even with government assistance, as a pipe dream. "We were surprised that people were not more vocal about the poor conditions of their houses. We thought we'd get more reporting of health problems related to mold after they'd moved in—mold we could see. Perhaps it arises from many of them living under similar or worse conditions previously."

These factors point to the study's central recommendation for a capital loan fund. "Twenty to forty cents on the dollar is not

enough to encourage them to start retrofits, even if they're going to get the money back," says Dr. Jones, adding that governments or banks could easily recoup the capital through utility savings in addition to the rebates, possibly within five years. Other savings include reducing burdens on both the environment and the health care system.

Dr. Jones and her team are presenting their findings to several provincial government agencies, in hopes to lend empirical weight to policy ideas that encourage retrofits for a wider range of the population. They're also building on their research by examining the value of closing the EligAbility Gap in terms of comparing costs and greenhouse gas emissions. ■

**The research is the first project to be completed through the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation's Saskatchewan Housing Research Program, which has funded innovative housing research projects since 2006. For more information, contact Dr. Jones at [Marion.Jones@uregina.ca](mailto:Marion.Jones@uregina.ca) or 306-585-4463.**

## Measuring the Value of Social Housing

While several of the benefits of social housing are self-evident, others—such as reducing net social spending and the load on non-housing services—are supported more by intuition than evidence. At a time when policy-makers increasingly strive to balance priorities and harmonize efforts, it's important to support evidence-based decision-making about social housing. Likewise, advocates and civil society organizations need common analytical tools to make a case for social housing initiatives. A more sophisticated understanding of the value of social housing would also support sharing of best practices and allocation of funds to the most effective models.

In late 2009, the Social Housing Services Corporation (SHSC), a non-profit company with a mission to promote the value of social housing to Ontario's neighbourhoods, commissioned a report, *Is It Possible to Measure the Value of Social Housing?*,

to outline data and research strategies that could be used to cast new light on the household, community and wider social and economic value of social housing in Ontario and the rest of Canada.

The author of the report, Dr. Michael Buzzelli of the University of Western Ontario, discovered that "the growing need for sound evidence is unmet. There is little literature in Canada that formally analyzes, under any evaluative system, the economic value or costs of social housing, whether at the household, local community or macroeconomic level." Furthermore, different jurisdictions and groups look at the value of social housing in different ways. "This state of affairs is especially true in Canada because of a dearth of a common set of indicators—measurable variables or characteristics that provide an indication of a condition or direction—that in turn limit sound evidence-based decision-making."

Recognizing that developing a set of indicators for the provinces and Canada would take time and resources, Buzzelli aimed to create a strategy to support that goal. He undertook a series of consultations and an extensive literature review, drawing from both domestic and international sources, especially focusing on a "gold standard" of studies conducted in the United Kingdom and United States (primarily the Gautreaux experiment (Wasserman, 2001) and the MTO and SHARP studies) and the infrastructure built around them.

The strategy that emerges in the report contains four key recommendations:

- **Set priorities** by establishing the necessary leadership, including program administrators, service managers and researchers, to form a working group that would set terms of reference, facilitate partnering and identify priorities and short- and longer-term goals for each sector.

Scale	Health	Education	Development	Labour Force
1. Individual resident/ household	Physical and/or mental health	Test scores, school completion	Family rootedness, human capital development	Participation, skills development, consumption
2. Local neighbourhood/ community	Access to services	School integration, diversity	Community economic development, cohesion	Stability, local consumption, small businesses
3. Wider/ macroeconomic	Emergency, health care spending	Population educational outcomes	Income security	Labour force participation and taxation

continued from page 18

- **Establish partnerships** by bringing together relevant groups, including sector leaders, research users and policy-makers, community representation and the research community.
- **Identify resources** for the short-, medium- and longer-term data and research goals identified in the terms of reference. Possible avenues of this strategy element include cataloguing existing surveys and data, mining administrative data, identifying data linkage opportunities and considering alternative study designs.

- **Undertake applied research** with a sustained focus on the goals and targets important to each sector, a protocol for community engagement and a strategy for communicating results.

These measures would inform discussion and decision-making on social housing in Canada, but Buzzelli offers a caution on the limits of this kind of research. “No matter what one makes of this review’s findings and recommendations, it is important to avoid judging the value of social housing strictly on the basis of

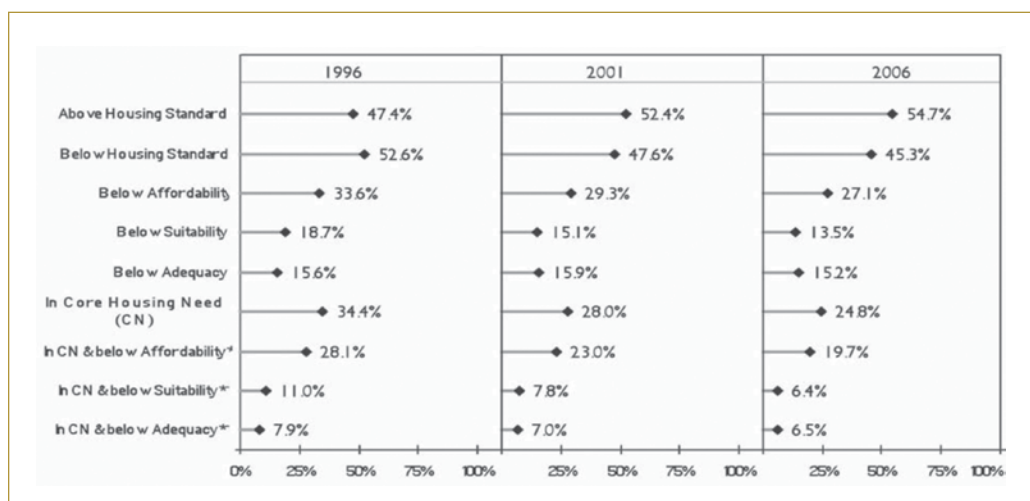
‘bottom-line’ measured outcomes, including—some might say, especially—when those measured outcomes identify ‘costs’ or poor non-housing returns on investment.” ■

*Is It Possible to Measure the Value of Social Housing?* is published on the SHSC website at [www.shscorp.ca](http://www.shscorp.ca). For more information on SHSC and its research initiatives, contact Graham Watts at 416-594-9325, ext. 211, or [research@shscorp.ca](mailto:research@shscorp.ca).

## Housing Conditions of Off-Reserve Status Indian Households: 2006 Census

Housing conditions of off-reserve Status Indian households have continued to improve, with 54.7 per cent of households living above housing standards (that is, meeting adequacy, suitability and affordability standards) in 2006, up from 52.4 per cent in 2001

and 47.4 per cent in 1996, according to a new CMHC Research Highlight (product #66748). The incidence of core housing need for off-reserve Status Indian households improved by declining by 9.6 percentage points between 1996 and 2006 (See Figure 1).



continued on page 20

Figure 1. Housing conditions of off-reserve Status Indian households, 1996-2006

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Drawing on custom data from the 2006 Census, the research focuses on the housing conditions of the 156,235 off-reserve Status Indian households identified as private, non-farm, non-band and off-reserve, and reporting shelter-cost-to-income ratios (STIRs) under 100 per cent.

In comparison to the Canadian non-Aboriginal population, off-reserve Status Indian households tended to have lower homeownership rates (47 per cent, compared to 70 per cent) and younger household maintainers, and the majority (80 per cent) were family households. A significant proportion (22 per cent) of family households were led by single parents—predominantly (83 per cent) women. Although off-reserve Status Indian households had lower than average household incomes and homeownership rates than Canadian non-Aboriginal households, both of these gaps narrowed slightly between 2001 and 2006.

The number of off-reserve Status Indian households grew by 22 per cent from 2001 to 2006. While core housing need declined by 3.2 percentage points during this period, the absolute number of households in core housing need grew by 3,000 households primarily on account of the marked increase in the number of off-reserve Status Indian households. The research sheds light on what conditions contributed to this need:

- As with the overall Canadian population, affordability was by far the most common factor: 27.1 per cent of these households reported spending more than 30 per cent of their before-tax household income on shelter.
- In comparison, 13.5 per cent did not have suitable housing—that is, housing with enough bedrooms for the household's size and makeup—and 15.2 per cent reported that their housing was inadequate, that is, needing major repairs.
- Though the average STIR for off-reserve Status Indian households with acceptable housing was higher than for non-Aboriginals (18.3 per cent, versus 17.8 per cent), the picture was reversed for those in core housing need, at 49 per cent for non-Aboriginals and 44.3 per cent for off-reserve Status Indian households.

- Off-reserve Status Indian owner households reported lower STIRs than renters, both among those with acceptable housing and those in core housing need. In contrast, non-Aboriginal owners in core housing need showed higher STIRs than renters, which may be attributed to higher shelter costs (26 per cent higher) and a lower average income (6 per cent lower).
- Rates of core housing need declined between 2001 and 2006 in all provinces and territories except the Northwest Territories, which showed a slight increase (+0.9 per cent). Prince Edward Island saw a sharp decline (-9.5 per cent), leading a general reduction throughout the Atlantic provinces.
- Canada's 33 census metropolitan areas (CMAs) accounted for 48 per cent of off-reserve Status Indian households with a core housing need rate of 27.1 per cent; rates of core housing need varied considerably among the CMAs, from 12.8 per cent in Montréal and Québec to 40.9 per cent in Saskatoon.

In all, the research reveals a housing profile for off-reserve Status Indian households that is steadily improving but remains far below national averages. The full Research Highlight, which is available on the CMHC website, provides more detail on the Census data, including breakdowns by province and CMA, tenancy type and household type. ■

For more details, see the **CMHC Research Highlight 2006 Census Housing Series: Issue 6—Off-reserve Status Indian Households: Housing Conditions and Core Housing Need** at [www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/66748.pdf](http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/66748.pdf).

For more information, contact Sibi Samiuel at 613-748-2050.