

# AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN CANADA:

2010 - The year in review

2011 – The year for long overdue action?



WELLESLEY INSTITUTE  
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Will 2011 be the year that Canada finally re-joins other leading nations of the world by implementing a comprehensive and fully-funded national housing plan? A powerful foundation for a long-overdue housing strategy was laid in 2010 with actions in Parliament, the courts and the community.

The pressure is growing for a co-ordinated strategy that links the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments, along with the non-profit and private sectors. Canada is alone among the developed countries of the world without a national housing plan. Deep and persistent housing insecurity is not only disrupting individuals, but it is affecting the health of communities and both local and national economies.

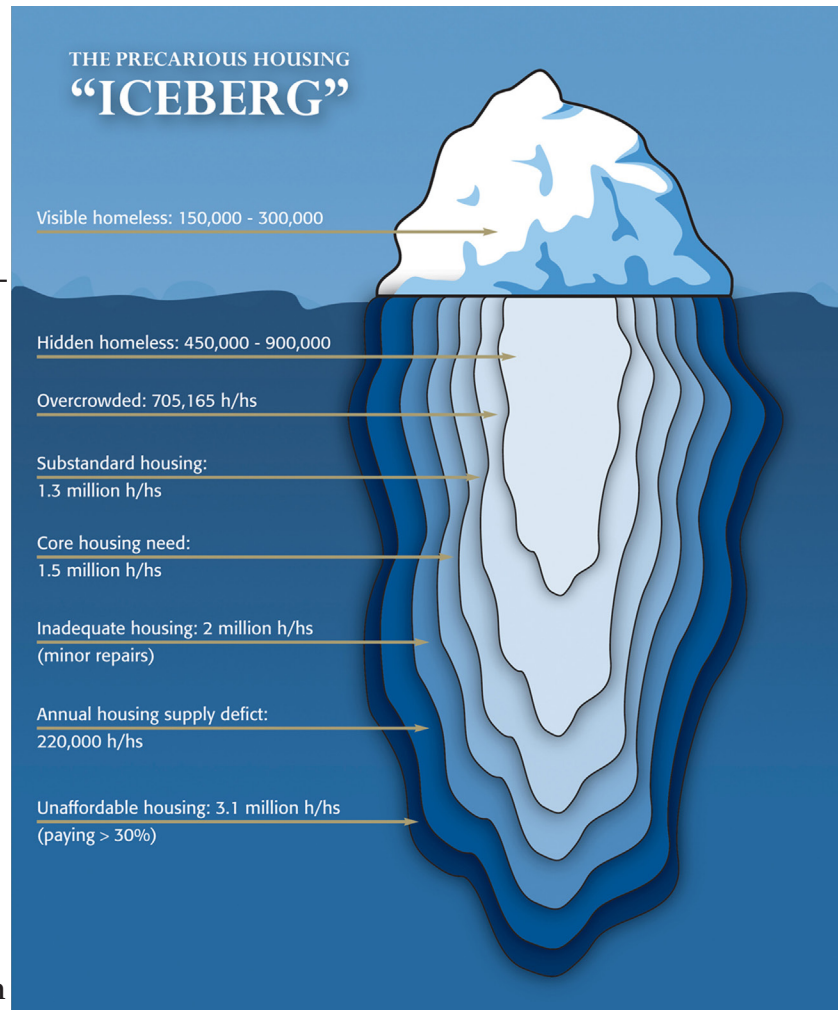
Follow the hyper-links throughout this back-grounder for a tour of housing and homelessness highlights from 2010 that will have an impact on policy in 2011.

## SETTING OUT THE EVIDENCE

[Precarious Housing in Canada 2010](#), The Wellesley Institute's detailed research and policy report, was launched in August of 2010 and sets out the most recent evidence on the links between poor housing and poor health, provides a detailed review of housing and homeless issues across the country and details governmental initiatives. It includes a practical and pragmatic 10-year agenda for action.

The year 2010 was book-ended with powerful research and policy events which the Wellesley Institute co-sponsored with other partners.

In mid-January, the [Housing, Health and Human](#)



[Rights](#) forum included a major series of workshops that drew international experts, including Miloon Kothari, the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, and local experts to review the evidence and build policy-relevant responses.

In May, the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association reported that [affordable housing waiting lists](#) were at an all-time high.

Mid-year, academic and housing experts at the [North American HIV/AIDS research summit](#) delivered research results demonstrating that good housing has a real immediate impact on better health.

Later in the year, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives warned that a [synchronized ownership housing bubble](#) had spread to six major Canadian cities, while RBC Economics closed the year by concluding that [ownership was out-of-reach](#) for low and moderate-income Canadians.

Preliminary results of the [Health and Housing in Transition](#) study, which is tracking 1,200 people in three Canadian cities, not only confirmed the strong links between poor housing and poor health, but also concluded that for every person who is homeless, there are 23 more people who are precariously housed.

The latest round of detailed data from [Toronto's Three Cities](#) initiative – which charts growing inequality in the city's neighbourhoods – once again drew major headlines as 2010 drew to a close.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities, which has been a long-time advocate for a national housing plan on behalf of Canada's municipal governments, released the latest in a series of reports on [decaying urban infrastructure](#), including inadequate housing as it continued to call for action.

In December, [UK equality expert Richard Wilkinson](#) completed a cross-Canada tour that drew together equality and health issues.

## **CALLS FOR ACTION**

The growing body of evidence underlining the urgent need for action on housing and homelessness prompted calls for action across the spectrum.

In late spring, Canada's Senate unanimously backed the detailed [In From the Margins](#) report that linked housing, poverty and related issues and delivered a detailed agenda for action.

In mid-fall, the Commons HUMA Committee released a [powerful report on poverty reduction](#) that included specific recommendations on housing.

Also in the Commons, [Bill C-304](#) – a private member's bill that would require the federal government to consult widely to develop and implement a national housing plan – passed a series of crucial votes, including support from a majority of elected Members of Parliament in November. The bill goes before committee for final amendments early in the new year, and then is expected back on the floor of the Commons for final reading. Meanwhile, in the courts, a group of lawyers launched a [right-to-housing legal challenge](#), arguing that Canada's inaction on meeting its international housing rights obligations amounts to a violation of the fundamental rights of Canadians who are precariously housed.

The [Canadian Chamber of Commerce](#), the largest business advocacy group in the country, adopted a ringing call for a national plan to end homelessness in September.

As the year drew to a close, the dream of a [strong and independent voice on housing and homelessness](#) began to take shape. While there are strong national organizations that are providing great leadership on housing and homelessness issues, and many powerful community-based groups across the country, the emerging Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness is set to become a strong champion and a sharp focus on building a national plan to end homelessness from the community up.

## **FEDERAL POLICY HORIZON**

The two-year, \$2 billion federal investment in housing set out in the [2009 stimulus budget](#) expires on March 31, 2011 – although the federal government may allow projects that are underway to be completed.

The [five-year renewal of federal homelessness and housing repair funding](#) is set to expire at the end of fiscal 2013 – which means that federal funding for homelessness programs, affordable housing repairs and the Affordable Housing Pro-

gram will all shrink to zero.

Meanwhile, the federal “step-out” of funding for existing affordable housing continues to accelerate. The [latest corporate plan from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation](#) calls for housing program expenses to be cut from \$3 billion in 2010 to \$1.8 billion in 2014 (a 39% cut in four years).

## **ONTARIO POLICY HORIZON**

As 2010 ended, the Ontario government finally released its long-delayed [affordable housing strategy](#). The verdict: The scaffolding is now up, but there’s plenty of work still to be done to create a comprehensive, fully-funded plan. [Draft legislation](#) to implement welcome changes to the punitive Social Housing Reform Act is moving through the legislative process.

The provincial government wrapped up its public review of a somewhat obscure, but critically important planning document called the Ontario Provincial Policy Statement. The Wellesley Institute and our allies called for [strengthening the PPS](#) with a strong commitment to inclusionary housing policies.

Inclusionary housing policies are widely used throughout the United States, but not in Canada. As the year ended, the Wellesley Institute published an [easy guide to creating healthy and inclusive neighbourhoods](#).

The Wellesley Institute is a Toronto-based non-profit and non-partisan research and policy institute. Our focus is on developing research and community-based policy solutions to the problems of urban health and health disparities.

The Wellesley Institute tracks housing and homelessness research and policies. Follow us on the [web](#), on [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#) @wellesleyWI.

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