

media release

Federal government once again boycotts critical national housing summit

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TORONTO: Provincial and territorial housing ministers are meeting August 20 in St John's, NL, but the federal housing minister has rejected an invitation to join the national summit. It is the second time the federal government has refused to meet with provincial housing counterparts in two years. In June, after criticism for failing to meet its housing obligations, the federal government promised in a formal note to the United Nations that: "the Government of Canada commits to continuing to explore ways to enhance efforts to address poverty and housing issues, in collaboration with provinces and territories."

The federal government promised \$1 billion in new housing funding this year, and another \$1 billion next year, and has made other short-term housing announcements in recent years. At the same time, the federal government has quietly reduced its housing supports (the number of households assisted under federal programs will drop by 10% from 2001 to 2013 even as affordable housing needs continue to rise). Over the past two decades, there has been a significant erosion in the federal role in affordable housing while provincial and municipal investments have increased. If recent trends continue, municipalities will out-spend the federal government within the next two years.

"Canadians are suffering a nation-wide affordable housing crisis that is deep and persistent," says Michael Shapcott, Director of Affordable Housing and Social Innovation at the Wellesley Institute. "The last time federal, provincial and territorial housing ministers met, four years ago, they tentatively agreed on a new framework for a national housing plan. But there has been no progress since then on a plan that would include targets and timelines, adequate funding, monitoring and ongoing assessment. The federal government needs to get back to the table, and other key partners should also be invited, including municipalities, Aboriginal groups, and representatives of the non-profit and private sectors."

The Wellesley Institute will soon release a comprehensive housing report called *The State of the Nation's Housing 2009*. Some key findings from that research are posted in a two-page backgrounder at www.wellesleyinstitute.com and include:

- **Lagging federal investments:** Federal affordable housing investments have been stagnant, falling behind inflation and population increases. At \$64 per capita, the federal government spends a little more than half the average of provinces and territories.
- **Nation-wide affordable housing crisis:** Across Canada, about 1.5 million renter households, and 1.5 million owner households, are paying more than 30% of their income on housing – the commonly accepted threshold for being precariously housed.

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The Wellesley Institute is an independent, non-partisan, and pragmatic urban think tank that works at the national, provincial, and local levels to advance urban health issues. We conduct our work within four core pillars: Affordable Housing, Healthcare Reform, Social Innovation, and Immigrant Health and do so through rigorous research, pragmatic policy solutions and community action.