THE MUNICIPAL ROLE IN ADDRESSING THE HOUSING CRISIS IN YORK REGION

Learning from Evidence and Best Practice
York Region Housing Affordability Task Force

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Housing Assessment
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(HART)

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Indigenous Acknowledgment

I am speaking to you from the unceded land of the Algonquin Anishnawbe people, also the home of many diverse First Nations, Metis and Inuit people. Non-Indigenous Canadians have much to learn from traditional Indigenous housing about the use of local materials, thermal comfort and low emission living.

As part of reconciliation, we need to redress extreme disparities in housing outcomes experienced by Indigenous people. For Indigenous By Indigenous housing and urban land back initiatives are central components of any housing strategy

HART Overview

The Housing Assessment Resource Tools (HART) project is working with governments, housing providers, and advocates across Canada to improve how we measure and address housing need, towards the national goal of "progressively realizing the right to adequate housing".

We are based at the University of British Columbia and are funded by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's Housing Supply Challenge..

Canada's Housing Crisis

The right to housing is legislated by the National Housing Strategy Act (2019). This means all levels of governments must progressively realize the right to adequate housing, including functional zero homelessness.

Current measures of housing need are flawed

Most housing need assessments use social housing waiting lists or homelessness counts, both of which grossly underestimate true household need, and there is no standardized method among Canada's three levels of government to measure "affordable housing".

Affordable housing is lost faster than it is built

Between 2011 and 2016, 15 affordable homes at $750 or less per month were lost for every one new social home constructed in Canada.

There are no coordinated efforts to use government and non-profit land

The easiest way to guarantee affordability when building housing is to provide free-leased land to social and affordable housing providers, yet thousands of hectares go underused annually.

Our tools

The tools provide a comprehensive evidence-driven analysis of housing need, as well as sustainable solutions that will improve the quality of housing supply decision-making at all levels of government. Governments will be able to more effectively track progress and evaluate programs; coordinate bi-lateral and multilateral initiatives; and communicate needs and targets more clearly with developers, decision-makers and the public.

Housing Need Assessment Tool

A census-based tool that measures need and cost thresholds across relevant income categories, household sizes, and priority populations, including net change in affordable housing and population growth

Land Assessment Tool

An equity-focused tool that assesses, and estimates yield of available government and non-profit land according to proximity to key services and amenities

Acquisitions Tool

A policy-driven framework that uses Canadian and international best practice to preserve existing affordable housing through acquisition of private sector buildings and land

Canada's Housing Targets

- National Housing Strategy Act (2019): "progressively realize the right to adequate housing"
  - Use of maximum resources
  - Prioritize marginalized populations
  - Include their voices in the development and evaluation of policy

- National Housing Strategy (2017)
  - Reduce Core Housing Need by 530,000 households (out of 1.7 million) by 2028
  - Reduce Chronic Homelessness (estimated at 25,000) by 50%
  - Sub-target: 33% of spending on women-led households

Core Housing Need

Current measures

- A household is below one or more of habitability, suitability and affordability standards.

- The household would have to spend 30% or more of its before-tax household income to access local housing that meets all three standards.

Core Housing Need

Currently leaves out

- **Homelessness**: individuals and households who are unsheltered and in emergency shelters
- **'Hidden' homelessness**: individuals and households who are involuntarily "doubling up" or are in insecure accommodation (e.g. "couchsurfing") along with individuals who feel unsafe in their homes because of violence or the threat of violence from a household member or landlord
- **Students**: who are living independently from their families
- **Those in congregate housing** (e.g. rooming houses, assisted living) who are living in unaffordable, overcrowded or uninhabitable homes
- **People on farms, including migrant workers**
- **Suppressed household formation:** People unable to form households because of absence of affordable adequate options

A rights-based approach

Defining adequate and affordable housing

- **Affordable:** enough $ left over to pay for food, transport, other necessities

- **Habitable**: have water, toilets, heat, cooling

- **Suitable**: appropriate size

- **Accessible**: able to be lived in by people with different abilities

- **Well-located**: in relation to services, transit etc.

- **Secure in tenure**: not subject to eviction

- **Culturally appropriate**: allowing relationships with family, community, spiritual needs

Income Categories and Affordable Shelter Costs

York Region

| Income Group		Portion of total HHs	Annual Household Income	Affordable shelter cost (2015 CAD$)
Area Median Household Income			$96,000	$2,400
Very Low Income	up to 20% of AMHI	2%	<= $19,200	<= $480
Low Income	21% to 50% of AMHI	16%	$19,201 - $48,000	$481- $1,200
Moderate Income	51% to 80% of AMHI	18%	$48,001 - $76,800	$1,201- $1,920
Median Income	81% to 120% of AMHI	21%	$76,801 - $115,200	$1,921- $2,880
High Income	121% + of AMHI	43%	>= $115,201	>= $2,881

Percent of Households (HHs) in Core Housing Need, by Household Income Category

York Region

Income Category (Maximum Affordable Shelter Cost)

- Very Low Income ($480)
- Low Income ($1,200)
- Moderate Income ($1,920)
- Median Income ($2,880)
- High Income (>$2,880)

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
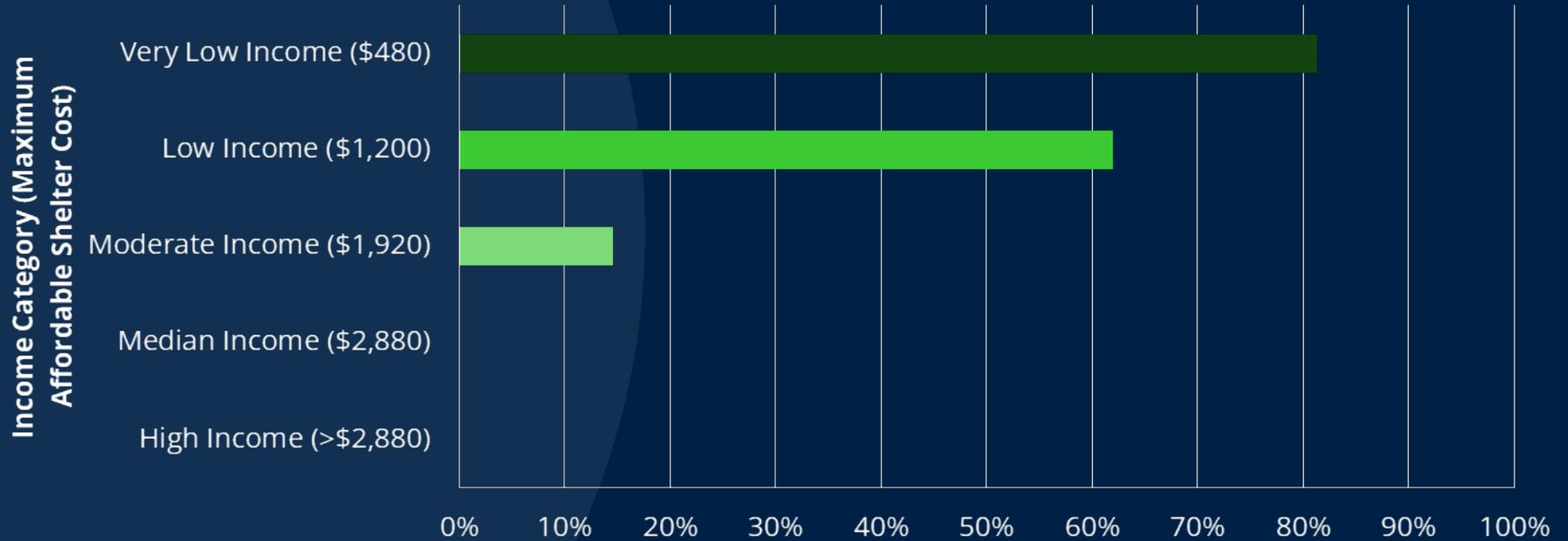
Total Affordable Housing Deficit

Income Group	Households in Core Housing Need					
	1p HH	**2p HH**	**3p HH**	**4p HH**	**5p + HH**	**All HH sizes**
Very Low Income	4,160	1,010	350	165	0	5,685
Low Income	9,210	10,455	6,230	4,955	2,490	33,340
Moderate Income	0	585	1,650	3,000	3,475	8,710
Median Income	0	0	0	0	0	0
High Income	0	0	0	0	0	0
All Income Categories	13,370	12,050	8,230	8,120	5,965	47,735

York Region

Percentage of Households (HHs) in Core Housing Need, by Priority Population

York Region

Priority Population	Percentage
Women-led HH	21%
Single mother-led HH	29%
Indigenous HH	17%
Visible minority HH	17%
Black-led HH	14%
New migrant-led HH	35%
Refugee claimant-led HH	26%
HH head under 25	34%
HH head over 65	19%
HH head over 85	30%
HH with physical activity limitation	13%
HH with cognitive activity limitation	13%
Community (all HH)	14%
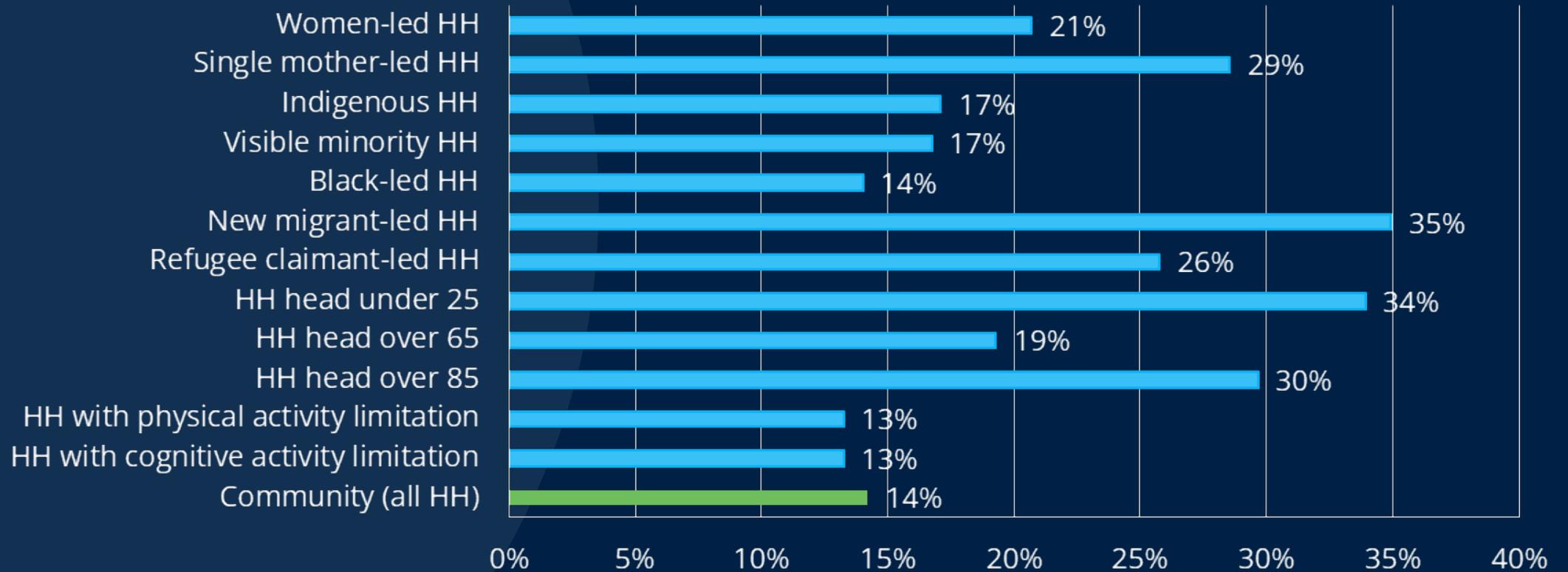
Policy implications – targets and sub-targets

France

25% sub-targets for non-profit housing are enforced by the national government on municipalities, with fines for non-compliance.

Hamburg (pop 1.8m)

Municipalities sign multi-year agreements with development industry associations that guarantee approvals within 6 months of up to 16,000 homes a year using a 'rule of thirds':

- 1/3 non-profit
- 1/3 regulated rental
- 1/3 market ownership

All developments over 30 units are expected to adhere to the rule of thirds.

Land Policy

Numerous international studies agree: land policy is the biggest enabler to affordable housing.

Important local tools include:

- Land banking

- Right of first refusal/ acquisition of buildings and properties

- Land leasing

- Planning regulations

- Encouragement of non-profit housing

Land Banking

Buying land in advance of need and using it to shape desired market outcomes.

Finland
Eradication of homelessness

Vienna
Widespread affordability

Singapore
Economic revitalization

Canada
Post-war housing

16

Senior (provincial or national) governments provide funding to purchase well-located brownfield (post-industrial) or greenfield (ex-urban) land and often provide infrastructure in advance of development.

Planning and Zoning Enablers

Mechanisms to transform housing at a municipal level

- Building codes may want to **restrict maximum size** of new single-family homes or **ban new detached single-family homes** entirely

- **Minimum parking restrictions** should be **eliminated**

- Minimum **as of right building heights**, without restrictions as to number of units (including multi-tenant or congregate housing)

- An additional **as of right height/density bonus** for non-profit or 100% affordable homes (up to **80% area median income** housing cost)

- Example of a simplified set of zones:

  - **4 storey** in all **residential and mixed use** areas

  - **12 storey** along all **main streets** with public transit,

  - **30 storey** within **200m of a rapid transit** (train, LRT) station

Municipal Financing

Currently, municipal governments face **an unfair burden** for both municipal infrastructure, including social housing, and dealing with the impacts of senior government disinvestment in social housing, over the past 30 years. **The federal and provincial governments** should be shouldering the majority of the burden for new public transit and energy retrofit infrastructure.

Municipal government should **rely less on development** contributions (which shift the financing burden to renters and homeowners in new construction) and **more on property tax** (which is a form of wealth tax and does not sufficiently recognize windfall gains in home values).

It should continue to offer **property tax deferrals to low-income owners** who cannot pay property taxes but recoup these costs when the property is sold.

Land Leasing

Leasing land to **non-profit housing developers** was shown to decrease housing costs in Vancouver to average income affordability without any further intervention. It was the secret behind a million affordable homes for 6 million people in Sweden 1965-75. A **community land trust** model that pools non-profit assets on public land is growing in Canada.
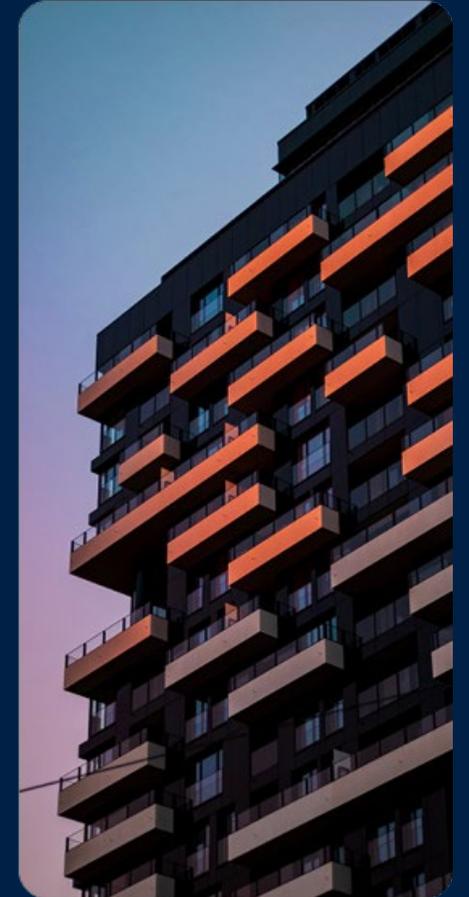
For Indigenous by Indigenous

Housing and Land Back

Because of the unique status of Indigenous people, whose land was stolen and whose rights have been ignored for multiple centuries, it is vital for them to define, develop and manage culturally adequate housing, preferably on Indigenous-owned land. Indigenous-led housing need assessment should be funded and integrated into housing supply targets for all governments.

Land Assessment Mapping

HART Methods

Identifying potential sites

Assessing proximity to amenities

Identifying well-located land

Acquisitions

Preserving affordability

Because of the large rates of net loss of affordable housing, all levels of government must acquire homes at risk of becoming unaffordable and also purchase land and non-residential buildings to convert to affordable housing.

Right of first refusal over sales in a priority area

Purchase by a municipality or another non-profit entity

Direct provision of non-profit housing by **public housing** or conversion to **non-profit housing**

HART is creating a Property Acquisitions Tool for governments.

MOVING BEYOND CONSTRAINTS

York Region challenges

- Provinces are not providing enough funding for supportive housing
- They have gotten rid of tenant protections
- Welfare rates continue to be well below what is needed to afford even a rooming house
- Federal programs use different definitions of affordability and are not stackable

BUT

- Good evidence on need helps negotiation with senior levels of government
- Tracking the affordability of new and existing rents and house prices in relation to income categories helps steer outcomes
  - E.g. more legalized rooming houses, tiny home communities
  - Targeting of public land, property tax abatement to deepest affordability
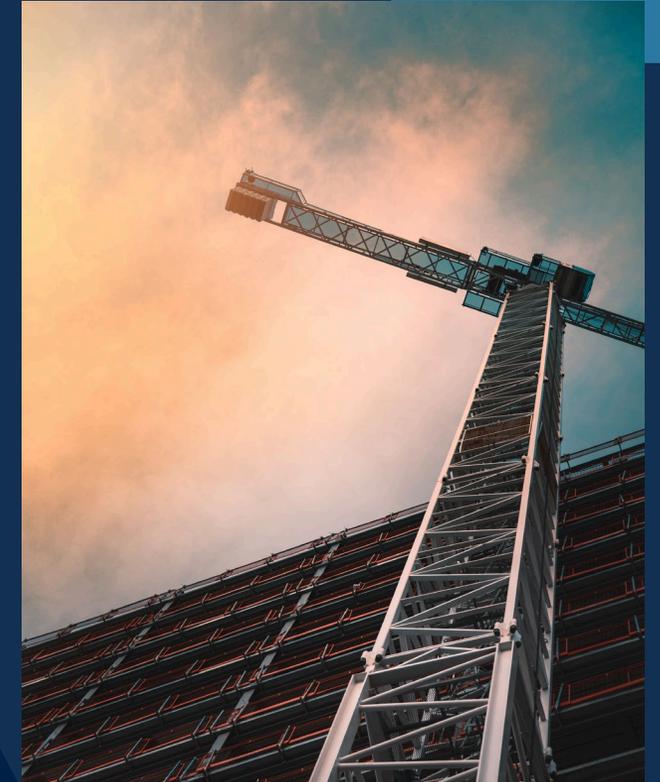
What does 'fixed' look like?

- **Functional zero homelessness**, with sufficient and culturally adequate supportive housing.

- Steady **decreases in Core Housing Need** (even with expanded definitions) towards zero.

- **Doubling non-profit housing and then at least 20% target**, to meet the needs of very low, low, and moderate income households

- **At least 20%** family-sized 3+ bedroom homes, at a range of price points, throughout all cities and regions. 15-minute cities, with sufficient educational, recreational, employment, and retail opportunities throughout all communities. **At least half of journeys** are through **active and sustainable transport** (walking, cycling, public transport).

- **Urban land back** sufficient to meet Indigenous housing need.

- **Median home prices are 3X area median household income**