

# "Home Sweet Home"

*Not the story for many Albertans*

## There is a housing crisis in Alberta.

Tens of thousands of adults and children do not have safe, affordable homes of their own, with implications that affect every aspect of their lives. Thousands more are homeless.

There is a provincial election underway. On May 5 Albertans will vote to elect a new government. The Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (ECOHH) urges voters to make key housing issues a factor in deciding which candidate and political party will receive your vote.

This leaflet presents five issues. When you meet candidates or attend forums ask them for their stands on these issues.

The political parties have been asked to provide their positions. Responses will be available at the ECOHH website ([www.ecohh.ca](http://www.ecohh.ca)) after April 23.

## Issue 1: Affordable housing

There is a pressing need for **more non-market affordable housing** in Alberta. Non-market affordable housing provides homes for people who cannot afford market options. This type of housing requires direct financial subsidy to lower the cost of housing. Edmonton's community plan on housing estimates a current shortfall of 22 000 units. When there is a tight supply of appropriate housing for people who cannot afford market housing, they are forced into shelter options that

come with health and safety problems. There has been little provincial government investment to support construction of new social housing for several years.

## Action

A commitment of stable predictable funding to support the building of new low-rental housing is needed. This funding must demonstrate results in completed housing units and not announcements of promised action. A minimum commitment of \$500 million/year for ten years would support a good start on addressing the existing shortfall.

*Ask:* What would your party do to ensure the construction of more non-market housing?

## Issue 2: Affordable rent

Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Edmonton exceeds \$1200 per month. This is not affordable for many people with low and modest incomes. This puts them at risk of becoming homeless or being forced into unsafe or overcrowded accommodation. The current Alberta funding of **rent supplements** has been too low to ensure people in such situations do not lose their housing and the March budget proposes a further cut.

## Action

Rent supplements are a cost-efficient way to prevent housing instability and loss that can have dangerous ripple effects. While safeguards are needed to ensure rent supplements are not abused by landlords, more generous funding of the program is essential since in most of Alberta vacancy rates for the less expensive housing are very low and people have few options. Waiting

lists for subsidized housing are years long in Edmonton.

*Ask:* What proposals does your party have on funding rent supplements to ensure rental cost does not create a crisis for people?

## Issue 3: Homelessness

Alberta's Ten Year **Plan to End Homelessness** is past the half-way point. Recent counts of homeless people show homelessness remains a serious issue for thousands of people in Alberta communities. The current plan only addresses people who experience chronic episodic homelessness by providing housing and services to such people. The program has never been funded at the level originally called for. The March 2015 budget cuts funding further. Demands on emergency shelters and drop-ins, which are not a full response to the need for housing, are heavy and will increase without adequate resources for ending homelessness. The Plan is based on the Housing First model, so is narrow in application.

## Action

Resources needed for success of the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness need to be reviewed and increased to reflect current realities in Alberta. Funding should reflect the increase in numbers of people who are homeless. It must accommodate a greater diversity of programs and approaches that respect the knowledge and experience of those working with homelessness. Integration of the Plan with a comprehensive housing policy framework would give more priority to actions such as rent supplements and building more housing.

*Ask:* Is your party committed to funding the 10 Year Plan, and how would you implement it for the remaining term?

## Issue 4: Social housing

Federal and provincial funding for social housing is set to end with the **expiry of current operating agreements**. This will affect more than 50 000 social housing units across Alberta, currently housing low-income households. These agreements enable organizations to offer below-market rent, more geared to the income of the residents. Such funding has a major impact preventing people from having to live in overly-expensive or inadequate housing.

### Action

Even with the expiry of the funding from the federal government, the province should commit to maintain its funding for social housing under a new program/partnership focused on long-term sustainability of social housing projects. Without such action, social housing operators are pushed to raise rent or convert some units to market level rent. The province could also urge the federal government to extend its funding.

*Ask:* Would your party commit to maintaining funding after the expiry of the agreements for social housing to ensure stable affordable housing for those in need?

## Issue 5: Municipal action

The **capacity of municipalities to address the need for more non-market housing** is limited if they must act on their own. Currently provincial legislation does not support municipalities to act effectively on these issues. There are many jurisdictions where municipalities have more power to set requirements with developers. In the absence of an overall provincial housing strategy, amendments to address some key issues could be helpful.

## Action

A major review of the Municipal Government Act is currently underway. Two useful amendments would be to: (a) allow municipalities to set aside land for non-market housing when new neighbourhoods are developed, by creating a new “non-market housing reserve,” and (b) allow for zoning for affordable housing to be a power under the zoning bylaw, to provide affordable housing in all neighbourhoods, and greater choice to people with low incomes.

*Ask:* What is your party's position on amendments to create a non-market housing reserve and allow inclusionary zoning powers to municipalities?

### Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness

For nearly 30 years ECOHH has been active in education and advocacy and action in support of decent housing for all. Monthly educational meetings are open to all interested people. In addition to activities to raise housing as an issue during the provincial election, ECOHH has two other events this spring:

1. **10<sup>th</sup> annual memorial for the lives of those who have died from homelessness**

Friday, June 5, 3 pm

Small park by CN Tower on 103 A Avenue at 100 Street

2. **Right to Housing conference**

June 5, 7 pm-- Opening session with Michael Shapcott

June 6- Thematic sessions will include Canada's historic commitments on housing, the current crisis, and Indigenous understanding of home, as well as guided study walks in the urban core.

Registration available at [www.ecohh.ca](http://www.ecohh.ca)

\$75; \$40 students & low-income

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