

research snapshot

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While home ownership has increased, more people are at risk of homelessness in the cities.

What is this research about?

The past two decades have shown a decline in funding to create affordable housing and support to those in need. Lower levels of government are placed with these costs, although they cannot afford it.

What did the researcher do?

The researchers looked at trends related to housing and homelessness in 22 cities in Canada. They sought to identify the challenges with regards to housing and homelessness. They also described actions taken by lower levels of government in response to these issues. Their focus was from the year 2001 to 2006.

What did the researcher find?

The researchers found that in comparison to the rental sector, home ownership has been increasing. There is a growing number of housing in terms of townhouses and condominiums. However, in spite of increased home ownership, homelessness is still a major problem. Construction of new rental housing is at a low, with fewer than 9% built annually. There has been a large increase in renting costs, but not with incomes earned. Also, there is more competition between renters to receive available units, which have decreased.

What you need to know:

Affordable housing is a growing problem in cities across Canada. Cities are experiencing an increase in renting costs and demands for available units. However, the amount of renting units is declining, and the amount of income earned by renters has stayed the same. More townhouses and condominiums are being created. But people who cannot afford this type of housing are at an increased risk of becoming homeless. There needs to be more government funding to support cities to develop more affordable housing. This would include housing for seniors and those with special needs, more housing options and reinvesting in rental housing overall.

As a result, the most vulnerable people cannot purchase or rent in the housing market. This would include: low-income earners, single parents, single individuals and those who receive social assistance. The researchers also noted that 10% of all rentals already need major repairs. As a result, more social housing is needed than is currently available. Social housing is falling apart due to the lack of funding and support for upkeep.



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Cities will soon be seeing quickly aging populations. The researchers found that meeting the housing needs for this group would become very expensive. With an increase of people on waiting lists for affordable housing, there is more risk of becoming homeless.

The researchers suggested the following solutions:

- Increase housing for seniors and others with special needs: This would come in the form of grants to support renting and repairing housing units.
- Create and maintain more affordable housing options: This would include creating a land trust strategy. That is, a fund by corporations and governments. Also, it would include asking for a percentage of units in new housing projects to be more affordable. “Housing first” policies would ask for unused city properties that could be used for affordable housing.
- Reinvest in rental housing: Offer free rebates to developers who invest in rental housing. Alternatively, create “Convert to Rent” programs.

How can you use this research?

This research would be useful for both local and national levels of government. It offers insight on some of the critical housing and development needs in cities. This is especially relevant in light of a growth in numbers and the ages of people “at risk” in the city. This research also shares possible strategies for improving affordable housing. Both the lack of affordable housing units and the quality of units available need to be

addressed by funding.

About the researcher

Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) is an organization whose membership includes more than 2,000 municipal governments and 21 provincial and territorial municipal associations. This ResearchSnapshot comes from their publication, “Trends and Issues in Affordable Housing & Homelessness”.

Keywords

Affordable housing, homelessness, cities, government funding.

The Homeless Hub

This snapshot was originally developed as part of the Homeless Hub’s Research Summary Series. The Homeless Hub is a web-based research library and information center representing an innovative step forward in the use of technology to enhance knowledge mobilization and networking. The Homeless Hub has emerged as a place where community services providers, researchers, government representatives, and the general public can access and share research, stories, and best practices.

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