

It has now been a year since the announcement of many of the programs through the National Housing Strategy (NHS). A panel of experts came together to discuss: What has changed for the non-profit housing sector in Manitoba over the past year? And what can housing providers expect from the National Housing Strategy in the years to come?

Summary of the Panel

National and Historical Housing Context: Dr. David Hulchanski Professor, Housing and Community Development, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto

The NHS is not, yet, a dramatic increase in investment in housing. Data shared from the Parliamentary Budget Office summarizing spending on housing over time, adjusted for inflation and as a percentage of total expenditures is now available ([see slides from the panel](#)).

The data show that spending has declined since its peak in 1983, and last year remained below 1995 and 2010 levels. Despite being marketed as a \$40b investment, much of the funding attached to the NHS is in the form of loans, as well as investments from other levels of government. Housing providers should not expect the strategy to change the housing environment unless there is increased pressure on the federal government to spend more.

Manitoba Housing Context: Dr. Tom Carter, (retired) Canada Research Chair in Urban Change and Adaptation, Director of the Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg

In Manitoba, there has been less emphasis on building new social housing in recent years; housing that has been supported by government has tended to be mixed-income and mixed-use, with a focus on housing that is ‘affordable’ – that is, below market rent, but not geared to the income of households. With significant investments in Rent Assist, Manitoba has increased ‘pressure,’ ‘reliance,’ and ‘opportunities’ on the private rental sector. There is therefore a gap between social housing and affordable housing, and on social housing and rent assist.

Given Manitoba’s context – with limited capacity available in areas (geographic and population-based) with the highest needs, it is possible that most of the funding through the NHS will go to a few, and may not meet the housing gaps in the province. The funding available through the NHS is focused on ‘affordable’ housing, not social, and is simply not enough to meet the supply needs.

Implications of the National Housing Strategy for Non-Profits: Dr. Sarah Cooper, Assistant Professor, Department of City Planning, University of Manitoba

The NHS moves Canadian housing policy towards an increasingly market-based approach to meeting housing need. It describes low-cost housing as being provided by and through the market; it targets increased ‘affordable’ housing, in particular for middle-income households. The programs provide financing and capital grants for the community housing sector, no longer supporting long-term operating agreements that hold housing providers accountable for meeting the housing needs of specific populations or providing housing to the lowest income households.

On the positive side, the NHS provides new funding opportunities and increased flexibility to non-profit housing providers. However, market involvement comes with risks. The NHS does little to recognize the other benefits non-profits offer other than affordability (community ownership, involvement, different values from market-based providers), and will not necessarily meet the housing needs of lower income households.