Social Housing in Canada

CPRN's Housing Internship Program was initiated in 2006 to support original public and social policy research in Canada's social housing sector. The program has been funded by Social Housing Services Corporation of Ontario, the Knowledge Mobilization Unit of York University, the City of Ottawa, the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and BC Housing. Interns, who are public policy post-graduates, research and produce the papers. It is the only housing-specific policy research-training program in Canada and to date has funded 21 internships and produced 20 reports, including a synthesis report.

A summary report entitled *A Safer Haven: Innovations for Improving Social Housing in Canada*, by CPRN Researcher Nathalie Pierre, is a synthesis of key findings from the first six research papers produced. The research findings demonstrate that social housing plays a central role in stabilizing people's lives and helping them access social services that promote community integration and individual and family well-being. This purpose should be recognized fully by governments to strengthen and expand social housing in Canada.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1803&l=en (December 6, 2007)

Can Inclusionary Zoning Help Address the Shortage of Affordable Housing in Toronto? by Julie Mah. This report evaluates the effectiveness of using inclusionary zoning as a policy tool to aid in delivering affordable housing in the City of Toronto. Inclusionary zoning has been used extensively in the United States to help create mixed-income communities with a promise to improve housing affordability. The author reviews the use of inclusionary zoning in the US from the 1970s to the present, and examines more recent examples from Canada's three largest cities (Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver) to determine if inclusionary zoning delivers on the promise of more affordable housing. Mah concludes that inclusionary zoning is a promising policy but only if it is properly designed in consultation with all relevant stakeholders and if it is part of a more comprehensive housing strategy. She also advises that the policy should target specific (shallow subsidy) income groups and that affordability should be rigorously controlled through price and occupancy restrictions.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=2093&l=en (December 22, 2009)

City-Regions and the Provision of Affordable Rental Housing by Leonore Evans. The paper explores the complex jurisdictional arrangements and partnerships used to provide affordable housing. Since 1995, many city-regions in Ontario have seen very little new affordable housing built while existing stock is deteriorating or being converted to ownership. The study shows how different approaches and the particularities of place can affect success. Peel Region and the City of Ottawa's local housing strategies are examined.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1802&l=en (December 6, 2007)

Fostering Better Integration and Partnerships for Housing in Canada: Lessons for Creating a Stronger Policy Model of Governmental and Community Collaboration by Michel Molgat Sereacki of the Université de Montréal, analyzes possible avenues for strengthening housing governance through more effective collaboration among various levels of government. The paper recommends ways to create stronger models of collaboration for governments and the community in delivering housing initiatives. A framework is constructed to examine cases from Manitoba, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador and show the importance of good design, and adequate political, material and financial support. Federal and provincial governments need to be proactive and strengthen the link between housing initiatives and policy directions.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1782&l=en (October 25, 2007)

Homelessness, Program Responses, and an Assessment of Toronto's Streets to Homes Program by Nick Falvo of Carleton University. Increasingly in North America, policy-makers and decision-makers are using the Housing First model – an approach that focuses on new means of rapid and sustained re-housing of the homeless in order to combat homelessness. In spite of its development, which began in 1992 in New York City, little has been written on its adaptation and transferability to Canadian municipalities. Nick Falvo looks at Housing First and its potential value to Canadian communities and discusses its evolution in the United States. Falvo then documents, analyzes and interprets Canada's version of Housing First, Toronto's Streets to Homes (S2H) program, based on primary and secondary research including key informant interviews.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1979&l=en (January 29, 2009)

Housing for Immigrants in Ontario's Medium-Sized Cities, by David Wachsmuth of the University of Toronto, explores how medium-sized cities in Ontario provide affordable housing for newcomers – the challenges that immigrants, governments, housing providers and settlement agencies face, and the policies and strategies they follow for overcoming these challenges. The report examines the five medium-sized cities in the province – Hamilton, Kitchener, London, Ottawa and Windsor – that together receive four out of five new immigrants who do not settle in Toronto. As well, a series of recommendations for these and other cities are made.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1937&l=en (September 25, 2008)

Inclusion and Social Housing Practice in Canadian Cities: Following the Path from Good Intentions to Sustainable Projects by Joël Thibert of McGill University. Thibert comments on the design aspects of social inclusion in social housing. The author describes the policy, planning and design that led to the creation of three recent socially-mixed projects in the regions of Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. The paper explores the similarities and differences in the planning and design of the projects and the policy context for each.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1781&l=en (October 25, 2007)

Linking Social Housing and Energy Efficiency by Mary Pitt, McGill University, explores the link between the theory, policy and practice of energy-efficient social housing. The theory addresses the general question of what is energy-efficient housing and why a lot of social housing is not energy efficient. Current policy and programs in Ontario are reviewed to discover what incentives and opportunities exist to enhance the energy efficiency of affordable housing. Pitt also considers social housing and the environmental policy issue of energy conservation. Three case studies of social housing in Ottawa are used to support a series of recommendations.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1852&l=en (March 20, 2008)

Moving Towards Sustainability: City-Regions and Their Infrastructure by Leonore Evans of Carleton University. The report looks at competitive city-regions and what sustains them. Infrastructure, particularly affordable housing and its importance for cities' socio-economic well-being and sustainability is considered. The paper contends that because of Canada's shortage of affordable housing, social housing in public infrastructure policies needs to be prioritized. This means federal, provincial, and municipal commitments to build, subsidize, and maintain affordable housing to ensure that Canadian cities can prosper economically, while being socially and environmentally resilient. Mississauga and Calgary are used as case studies.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1801&l=en (December 6, 2007)

Overcoming Challenges in Centralized and Decentralized Housing Models: Ontario and British Columbia Compared by Carla Schuk. Social housing policy has experienced substantial changes over the past two decades. In the early 1990s, social housing devolved completely from federal responsibility to the purview of provincial and territorial governments who have differently organized and administered their respective social housing programs. This paper addresses the centralized model for social housing employed by the British Columbia government and the decentralized model employed by the province of Ontario in order to assess the challenges and advantages of each system. The report also examines theoretical models that have been adapted to overcome the trade-offs associated with these two systems. The author demonstrates that in both models there is an increasing movement toward encouraging partnerships and co-operation vertically and horizontally across levels of government, moving away from rigid models of organization and administration toward more fluid and responsive frameworks.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=2090&l=en (December 22, 2009)

Recession and Stimulus Spending: A Preliminary Examination of Stimulus Spending on Affordable Housing in Ontario by Arif Jinha (Forthcoming, January 2010)
The federal budget of January 2009 allocated almost $2 billion toward social housing, reversing a trend of funding cuts to social housing policies and programs from previous governments. This paper provides an early look at the significance of the global economic recession and the impact of one-time stimulus spending on affordable housing programs in the province of Ontario. The author interviews policy-makers from regional, provincial and federal levels of government and analyzes housing indicators to review the long-term needs for successful social housing programs. The author argues that housing is a public good unlike other durable goods in our economy and that the economic crisis creates an opportunity to think about the long-term needs and challenges for sustainable and affordable housing in Canada.

Rehousing Vancouver's Street-Involved Youth by Heather Millar. From 2002 to 2008, the homeless population in Metro Vancouver has more than doubled in size to more than 2,660 people. Youth aged 16 to 24 account for a sizeable portion of the city's homeless, estimated between 10 and 20%. Studies suggest that the youth homeless population is extremely vulnerable, facing high levels of violence and sexual exploitation as well as complex mental health and addiction issues. This paper documents, through key informant interviews and focus groups with youth service providers, government managers and private philanthropic funders, the challenges of youth homelessness and provides best practices and policy recommendations for permanently housing street-involved youth in Vancouver and British Columbia.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=2094&l=en (December 22, 2009)

Social Housing Wait Lists and the One-Person Household in Ontario, by Suzanne Swanton of the University of Waterloo, looks at the housing challenge of low-income, one-person households under the age of 65. These households make up approximately 40% of applicants on Ontario social housing wait lists and is the cohort with the longest wait times, typically in the order of years. With a trend toward smaller household size, low-income, one-person households confront severe affordability issues in the private market and deal with long wait times for limited numbers of available social housing units. Swanton looks at the housing experiences of this group in two Ontario cities, Kingston and Guelph.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1976&l=en (January 22, 2009)

Social Lives in Social Housing: Resident Connections to Social Services by Jeff May of York University. The author asks if living in social housing has a positive or negative effect on the ability of residents to gain access to other essential social services such as education, health care, child care and immigration services. The study considers the City of Toronto's housing policy and experience. Its primary findings indicate that people do achieve connectivity but through less formal channels such as neighbourhood social networks. May concludes that more service integration is needed. Further, pre-existing social networks that allow for connectivity to services could be used more effectively.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1783&l=en (October 25, 2007)

Sustaining Ontario's Subsidized Housing by Supporting Non-Profit Organizations by Sally Turner of York University. The paper examines the relationship between non-profit organizations and social housing in Toronto. The paper shows that the focus of funding affordable housing has shifted. By concentrating on new developments to reduce the shortage of affordable housing in Ontario cities, we are no longer able to address the long-term viability of existing projects. As a result, existing developments run into financial difficulty putting them at risk of bankruptcy, a challenge for non-profit providers.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1784&l=en (October 25, 2007)

The Homeownership Component of the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program: Critical Analysis of Program Objectives by Helen Looker. In April 2005, the federal and Ontario governments jointly invested $734 million in the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program (COAHP) with more than $28 million dedicated to the COAHP Homeownership Component. The goal of the COAHP Homeownership Component was to help 3,470 low to moderate income households transition from renting to home ownership through assisted down payments. This paper assesses the variable uptake of the COAHP Homeownership Component and critically analyzes the presumption that home ownership represents a necessarily positive trajectory for low and middle income Canadian households. The author reviews the policy guidelines and conducts interviews with service managers in urban, metropolitan and urban Ontario, and housing experts from public and private sectors, and from the research community. The author concludes with recommendations that call for program-related enhancements, including the facilitation of asset accumulation in low-income households and income-related supports for low-income home owners. Looker also calls for government leadership to improve the quality of housing policy within the wider economic context.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=2092&l=en (December 22, 2009)

The Role of Public-Private Partnerships in Funding Social Housing in Canada, by Alexandra Moskalyk of the University of Western Ontario, looks at the role currently played by public-private partnerships (PPPs) in social housing development in Canada and assesses their future potential as a mechanism for financing the development and maintenance of social housing. Using case studies, the paper examines how partnerships can better use scarce public resources efficiently and equitably to meet the housing needs of low-income earners.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1935&l=en (September 25, 2008)

The Role of Supportive Housing for Low-Income Seniors in Ontario by Allison Jones, University of British Columbia, investigates housing and care options for low-income seniors, a population at higher risk of poor health outcomes as they age and can no longer function independently. The study looks at a continuum model that integrates social housing, health care and community supports. Jones concludes that Ontario faces a critical juncture in being able to provide social housing and care options for low-income seniors. Dramatic changes to Ontario's seniors' composition pose complex challenges for policy-makers, practitioners, families and seniors themselves. Implementing more integrated policies and programs is essential to low-income seniors' ability to age in place safely and affordably.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1853&l=en (March 20, 2008)

Towards Food Security Policy for Canada's Social Housing Sector, by Abigail Friendly of the London School of Economics and Political Science, looks at the need for a food security policy focusing on social housing providers and clients in Canadian cities. Notwithstanding Canada's prosperity and stated commitment to the right to food at national and international levels, the number of Canadians defined as food insecure reached 1.1 million in 2004. Food insecurity is increasingly being recognized as a crucial issue that lacks a coherent policy response by all orders of government in Canada. The concentration of low-income populations in social housing makes the problem especially acute for its residents and providers. Food security policy alternatives are suggested for social housing authorities in Canadian cities using the notion of community food security.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1936&l=en (September 25, 2008)

Under Pressure: Affordable Housing in Rural Ontario by Amanda Slaunwhite. This paper examines the geographic-specific obstacles that hinder the development of affordable housing in rural communities, such as the emphasis on single-family detached dwellings and home-ownership, and the population decline in some communities that may discourage government investment in affordable housing programs. The author focuses on the particular challenges faced by youth, single parents, the elderly and low-income families to find affordable housing in rural communities. Slaunwhite summarizes existing work on rural housing in Canada and then examines the provision of affordable housing in two specific townships: North Grenville and Rideau Lakes in the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville in south eastern Ontario. The report concludes with recommendations for all levels of government to encourage the development of affordable housing in rural areas that address the place-specific challenges faced by communities that are sparsely populated.
www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=2091&l=en (December 22, 2009)