

Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness
200, 12120-106 Avenue Edmonton Alberta T5N 0Z2
www.ecohh.ca

2023 February 16: For immediate release

Homes for All- no more bandages, excuses, or indifference

Five demands to end the housing crisis are the heart of a manifesto delivered today to the leaders of Alberta's political parties.

"Too many politicians, for too many years, have let the housing situation in Alberta deteriorate, and caused the misery of homelessness to worsen as a result. It is time for real action. This spring's provincial election is the test to see if those who want to lead our province care," explains Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (ECOHH) chair Nadine Chalifoux.

Leading the calls for action is the demand for a commitment to invest \$600 million annually for ten years to build non-market housing. "Budgets for housing have been miserly for years- and often even those amounts have not been spent. With tens of thousands of households in bad, unaffordable or insecure housing around the province, the flimsy bandages of the past are no longer acceptable," asserts Chalifoux.

Other demands are to improve conditions for renters, legislate housing as a human right, provide municipalities with better support to address housing, and make an immediate priority to end homelessness.

"In the past, Alberta was a leader in Canada for its action to support housing security. Today it is critical to end the fall from this status that has taken place. There is no better time, when the financial position of the province is strong and revenue is available," notes Chalifoux.

ECOHH says evidence supports investment in housing security as less costly than continuing to fund the many costs of leaving people in homelessness or inadequate housing. "Beyond the financial benefits of action, the benefits in quality of life and healthy communities for everyone are huge," adds Chalifoux.

ECOHH has an action plan to raise awareness of its manifesto that will roll out up to and during the election campaign. The full text of the letter to party leaders follows.

"Lack of political will is the only reason every person in Alberta cannot be living in decent housing. It is a shame on all of us if we do not tell candidates in this campaign that our vote depends on their commitment to take action to make this true," says Chalifoux.

(cont.)

Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness
200, 12120-106 Avenue Edmonton Alberta T5N 0Z2
www.ecohh.ca

2023 February 16

An open letter to the leaders of Alberta's political parties

There is a housing emergency in Alberta. For too many elections, the importance of housing security for the well-being of Alberta and Albertans has had a low priority. After elections, action to ensure housing security has also been inadequate.

In this election it is essential for political parties and candidates to act for a better future.

The Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (ECOHH) wants to see commitments from elected leaders that recognize these principles:

- Adequate affordable housing is essential for all people,
- Strong healthy communities result when people have good homes,
- Housing is more than four walls and a roof- it includes services and supports as needed,
- Everyone pays the price when adequate affordable housing is not available for all, and
- Alberta has the resources, skills, and knowledge to make sure everyone has an appropriate place to call home.

ECOHH will be urging voters to look for commitments of policy and funding to achieve adequate housing for everyone-- and to vote for candidates making such commitments in the spring election.

For decades prior to the mid-1990s political parties in Alberta and Canada invested billions of dollars each year in non-market housing, and we did not have cities with tens of thousands of families living in core housing need, in danger of eviction and in unsafe or unhealthy conditions, nor thousands more people homeless and using shelters or living on the street. Over 463 000 Alberta households are living in housing that does not meet their needs. Income support and AISH amounts have never kept pace with rental costs and households are under additional pressure with looming losses of non-market housing. The cost of housing has far outstripped increases in incomes. Most people living in poverty now face significant challenges to having adequate housing. Calgary and Edmonton are two of the three most expensive municipalities in Canada (using Market Basket Measure), so a better supply of more affordable housing is especially critical. The rapid financialization of rental housing by investment bodies has made the crisis worse. Something is broken and housing is the needed repair.

We are writing you as a party leader to share priorities we will be looking for in the platform you will present during the 2023 election campaign.

The list of actions we are seeking may seem challenging, but is necessary because of too many years of neglect. We are confident the financial cost of the actions we seek will more than pay for itself. And the positive social results for all Albertans from actions that support the significance of having a safe secure affordable place to call home will pay generous dividends long into the future.

Thank you for your commitment to public service. If you have questions or desire additional information, we will be pleased to respond.

(cont.)

Here are the issues needing action:

1. Commit new provincial money dedicated to affordable housing

- Make a legislated commitment, during the first session of the new government, for a minimum of \$600 million/year of provincial money for 10 years, in addition to any funds transferred by the federal government for housing.
- Fund both new units of housing, as well as rehabilitation and renovations for aging housing stock.
- Increase the number and quality of non-market housing and end plans to transfer existing public housing to new ownership.
- Make not-for-profit organizations and cooperative housing bodies the priority to receive public funding.
- Fund based on on-going receipt of viable proposals consistent with objective research, and not through frequently-changing calls using criteria set by government for short-term political reasons.
- Make housing needs for people with diverse physical accessibility requirements a priority.
- Integrate funding for constructing/maintaining physical facilities with funding for operating costs and support services for tenants, where this is required, to ensure full viability of all housing constructed.
- Work with CMHC and other funders to improve certainty that projects eligible for provincial funding will have any additional required funding to proceed.
- Develop and maintain a publicly- available inventory of housing and shelter needs for Alberta.

2. Address renter challenges

- Strengthen tenant rights legislation to identify and reduce discrimination and to ensure landlords maintain housing quality.
- Eliminate the wait list of 20 000+ people needing help with rent, and provide financial assistance so low income renters do not spend more than 30 percent of income for housing.
- Regulate the size of allowable rent increases.
- Fund increased availability of resolution services in cases of disputes.
- Make data about evictions publicly available.
- Study the financialization of rental properties, with specific attention to Real Estate Investment Trusts, and develop recommendations for ensuring housing is primarily for residential and not investment purposes.
- Ensure rent subsidies and assistance do not simply result in increased profits for landlords when provided to people on income support or with very low incomes.

3. Adopt Housing as a Human Right

- Take legislative action to recognize the human right to adequate housing, in line with the guidelines described by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Housing, and approve a plan for programs and policies to be made consistent with this right.
- Create and fund an office within the Alberta Human Rights Commission for a Provincial Housing Advocate.
- Evaluate housing programs and policies in the context of relevant Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action, and develop a plan for action for more collaborative work with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, and Inuit and Métis organizations.
- Identify where the Program of Studies for schools can incorporate learning objectives related to housing and implement revisions to do so.

4. Provide municipalities with better provincial support to address housing

- Resolve municipal taxation of non-market housing to support financial stability of not-for-profit housing providers.
- Revive development of city charters for Alberta's largest cities.
- Support development of joint planning committees on housing in municipalities, with participation of all orders of government, community organizations, and representatives from people living in housing insecurity, to facilitate better integrated work to achieve full housing security.
- Scrap the current Affordable Housing Strategy and urgently develop a comprehensive plan, based on a needs assessment with current data.

(cont.)

5. Make ending homelessness a priority for immediate action

- Locate responsibilities for homelessness in a Ministry of Housing, and authorize Minister of Housing to have cross-ministerial leadership on housing, to ensure the most effective approach to the full integration of policies, programs, and funding for all aspects of housing.
- Commit more resources to homelessness prevention.
- Evaluate current approaches, including Point in Time counts and the Housing First model and its application in Alberta municipalities, and recommend possible changes.
- Evaluate the issue of criminalization of people who are homeless or in deep poverty.
- Develop improved procedures for ensuring people who are homeless or in deep poverty can receive good public services- including assessment of current dependence on need for phones, computers, and access to physical locations.
- Ensure programs to support people experiencing homelessness are comprehensive, so that last-minute severe weather emergency plans are not being developed as conditions are beginning.
- In collaborations with other ministries such as health, study possibilities and make recommendations for better tracking and reporting of health-related issues, including deaths, for people who are homeless or in housing stress.
- Undertake an external expert review of the operation of emergency shelters and make recommendations to expand availability and diversity of options and improve quality of services.
- In the context of homelessness, develop a provincial strategy to address poverty and make life better for those with small economic capacity through improvements to areas including income (including all income support programs, minimum wage, and possibility of UBI), transportation, education, early childhood education/day care, seniors, newcomer settlement services, and mental health/addiction services.

Sincerely,

Nadine Chalifoux
Chairperson

About ECOHH

The Edmonton Coalition Housing and Homelessness (ECOHH) was created in 1986. Membership consists of social profit organizations and businesses, as well as individuals. Its mandate includes education and advocacy on homelessness and affordable housing. ECOHH provided leadership in the formation of the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund in 1999. This fund now operates as Homeward Trust and is part of a long-term initiative to provide quality affordable housing in Edmonton by investment in projects. ECOHH presented an annual awareness event, Homefest, for ten years, and led the development of the public art sculpture honouring the importance of housing, located in a park north of City Hall on 103A Avenue. ECOHH has presented an annual memorial service for people who have died because of housing challenges in their lives, for the past 16 years.

ECOHH acts as a broad based voice to promote change in public policy, increase community knowledge, and share information on all aspects of housing security, especially homelessness and affordable housing.