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HOUSING POSITION STATEMENT

BY

**CANADIAN PENSIONERS CONCERNED, INC.,
ONTARIO DIVISION**

February 2004

**POSITION PAPER ON HOUSING
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CANADIAN PENSIONERS CONCERNED, INC.,
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Executive Summary.

Canadian Pensioners Concerned (CPC), founded in 1969, is a membership-based, non-partisan organization of mature Canadians committed to preserving and enhancing a human-centred vision of life for residents of all ages. It promotes a society that takes pride in seeing that all realize their full potential.

From the perspective of elder persons, Canadian Pensioners Concerned (Ontario Division) seeks to ensure the well-being of all Canadians by advocating policies, legislation and services that allow them to reside in safe, healthy and responsive communities.

CPC's activities are guided by the values inherent in social justice, social inclusion, equity, integrity, community and a belief in the worth and dignity of all members of society.

CPC's Position on Housing and Homelessness.

We believe that good housing at a reasonable cost is a social right of every resident of this country.

We believe the extent of homelessness in Canada is disastrous and nothing short of a national disgrace for an advanced, democratic society.

We support the research and proposals of the National Housing and Homelessness Network for the "1% Solution" to achieve a renewed national housing strategy.

We support a return to a federally funded program of building between 15,000 and 20,000 new rental units of affordable community-based co-op and non-profit housing.

We support replacement of the Ontario Tenant Protection Act (1998) by new legislation which protects tenants from exorbitant rent, and from unwarranted and rapid evictions.

We support the protection of Ontario's rental stock through legislation that prohibits the conversion to condominiums.

We support the use of government incentives to rehabilitate older housing while protecting tenants from displacement.

We support the protection of existing affordable housing stock by providing a realistic rent allowance for welfare recipients and for low income persons whose rental costs amount to more than 30% of their income.

We support higher minimum wage levels and higher social assistance rates indexed to rising costs of living to help prevent anyone from living in inadequate housing or becoming homeless.

We support a range of supportive housing options, adequate to meet the needs of vulnerable people who are unable to live independently, such as victims of violence and/or de-institutionalization, the physically or mentally ill or the disabled.

We support programs and services that assist homeless people to secure appropriate housing.

We support a return to a productive partnership of municipal, provincial and federal governments, non profit and co-operative housing organizations, and private sector designers, builders and developers, to create affordable housing.

We support the establishment of a mechanism for accountability for all players in the housing sector, public and private.

Finally, we encourage all organizations and residents to work together to influence and direct government action in solving the housing crisis.

We need action now!

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Main Concerns and Public Policy Recommendations

We have particular concern for the quality of life for people in our society who are vulnerable by virtue of age, ill health or impairment, or economic need.

We believe that:

*Proposed or enacted legislative and policy changes by governments and other public institutions be required to serve well the general public good.

*Such changes should be made only after full and open public disclosure and discussion with individuals and groups who may be directly or indirectly affected by such changes.

*That seniors should be given the opportunities to take part in those discussions.

CPC's Position Statement on Housing and Homelessness.

Background

Michael Shapcott points out that Past Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau is on record in this regard,

“Good housing at a reasonable cost is a social right of every citizen of this country...This must be our objective, our obligation and our goal.”
(Trudeau, 1973).ⁱ

“By the early 1980s, the federal government was funding about 20,000 new units of community-based social housing annually. Several hundred thousand social housing units were funded under post-1973 federal programs.”ⁱⁱ

Shapcott recalled that the foregoing led the Hon. Paul Martin to state in the **Liberal Task Force on Housing, 1990:**

*“The federal government has abandoned its responsibilities with regards to housing problems. . . The federal government’s role would be that of a partner working with other levels of government, and private and public housing groups.”*ⁱⁱⁱ

However, from 1984 to 1993 about \$1.8 billion was cut from national housing programs and the federal government cancelled all funding for new housing in 1993. In 1996, they transferred the administration of national housing programs (with some exceptions) to the provinces and territories.

Most of Canada’s provinces and territories cut their funding in the 1990s. The two richest provinces, Ontario and Alberta, had the worst records, together, cutting \$498 million from their housing budgets from 1993 to 2000.

In the absence of federal and provincial leadership The National Housing and Homelessness Network, with others put forward specific proposals:

“The One Percent Solution: an additional \$2 billion for housing. This new money, along with existing federal housing and homelessness spending, would create a renewed national housing strategy.”^{iv}

The One Percent Solution was recommended in 1998 by the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC) which proposed that all levels of government should spend one percent more of their existing total budgets on housing than they now do. An increase of one percent would go a long way towards ending homelessness in the next three to five years.

Shapcott included the following five elements:

- \$1 billion for 20,000 to 25,000 new social housing units,
- \$500 million for rent supplements to 160,000 households annually,
- \$125 million for 10,000 new supportive housing units annually,
- \$125 million annually for rehabilitation of housing ,
- \$250 million annually to double spending on emergency services and shelter for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness.

“The One Percent Solution is affordable. The federal Department of Finance reported a budgetary surplus of \$4.8 billion for June 2002. Less than half of that one-month surplus would fund an entire year of a renewed national strategy.

Provinces, territories, municipalities, community-based organizations and the private sector all have a role to play in this new strategy. Each can bring additional money and other resources to the table. But leadership needs to come from the national government.”^v

It is encouraging to note the growing interest and support of the corporate sector for affordable housing found in the opening statement of a study and report developed by the TD Bank Financial Group June 17, 2003:

“Housing is a necessity of life. Yet, after ten years of economic expansion, one in five households in Canada is still unable to afford acceptable shelter – a strikingly high number, especially in view of the country’s ranking well atop of the United Nations human-development survey. What’s more, the lack of affordable housing is a problem confronting communities right across the nation – from large urban centres to smaller less-populated areas. As such, it is steadily gaining recognition as one of Canada’s most pressing public-policy issues.”^{vi}

Specific Concerns about Housing in Ontario.

Ontario urgently needs to summon the political will and sustained commitment to redress over 20 years of political and governmental neglect.

In 1995 the Ontario Government dropped social housing from its budget expecting the private sector to build affordable housing for low income households. They gutted the tenant protection laws so that rent could rise to the level of the market. They argued that this would stimulate the building of affordable housing.

Since 1995 rents have increased in Ontario by 26% more than incomes. Currently rising vacancies do not translate into lower rents that meet the needs of low, moderate or even middle income renters. Social housing programs were downloaded to the municipalities. Social Assistance was reduced by 21.6%. The long waiting list for affordable housing became a permanent feature.

Michael Shapcott pointed out that over the past eight years Ontario had lost 45,000 private rental units and 23,300 affordable social housing units. This along with 59,600 affordable housing units that should have been built deprived 224,000 women, men and children of social housing along with 121,000 in the private rental area.^{vii} These included low income families with children, the disabled, seniors, people on social assistance, and those living with no income. It has been estimated that 1/3 of the population in Ontario has been deprived of low income housing.

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ⁱ Quoted in Shapcott, Michael – Housing for all Canadians: An additional \$2 billion for a comprehensive national strategy, A submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance Pre-budget Discussions for 2002. National Housing and Homelessness Network/Toronto Disaster Relief Committee: Toronto 2002, p.1.

ⁱⁱ Ibid., pp.1, 2.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. p.1.

^{iv} Ibid. p.1.

^v Ibid. p.1.

^{vi} Drummond, Don, Burelton, Derek, Manning, Gillian. Affordable Housing In Canada: In Search Of A New Paradigm, TD Economics Special Report, June 17, 2003. TD Financial Group, Toronto 2003, Executive Summary, p. 1.

^{vii} Shapcott, Michael. State of Crisis, 2003: Ontario housing policies are de-housing Ontarians, in Ontario Alternative Budget, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Toronto, 2003, p. 7.