

Clients' rights to housing are being violated

The housing rights of CAS of Toronto's clients are being violated. This conclusion was the subject of a thorough presentation to the United Nations housing envoy, Miloon Kothari, at a presentation on Saturday. CAS of Toronto community worker, Ann Fitzpatrick partnered with Homes For Kids Board Vice President, Elizabeth Anacleto, to highlight the situation faced by our children, youth and families and the difficult situation of youth between 18 and 21 who are leaving care.

For decades, the CAS of Toronto has recognized the important preventative role that safe, adequate affordable housing plays to support the healthy development and well-being of families and children, "said Fitzpatrick, "We know that lack of affordable housing, overcrowded conditions, homelessness, insecurity of tenure/evictions and unsafe housing conditions has a detrimental impact on children, youth and their parents."

Indeed, housing is a factor for one of every five children admitted to CAS of Toronto's care. Close to one in 10 children have their return home from care delayed due to housing problems. The Society works with families who are at high risk for poverty and vulnerability to high market rents in Toronto. There is a severe shortage of affordable social housing. These two factors mean that families are more likely to face insecure housing tenure, homelessness or frequent moves, unsafe or unhealthy housing conditions.

A growing number of youth wards who are leaving care are experiencing the housing crisis as they cannot afford market rents. With provincial funding, the CAS of Toronto provided approximately \$730 a month to eligible youth aged 16-21, a rate well below the poverty level.

So what are the solutions? CAS of Toronto recommends that the federal government:

1. Create new affordable housing

Long term annual investment in new truly affordable housing with annual targets to reduce and eventually eliminate social housing waiting lists with some targeted priority for particular groups at risk of homelessness: low-income families, abused women, youth leaving care and other groups vulnerable to homelessness. (Truly affordable rent should be equal to less than 30% of one's annual income).

A minimum of 20,000 units per year should be created across Canada annually over the next 20 years. Housing funding should include capital grants and rent supplements and should be sufficient to create healthy communities with community space, green space/parks and sufficient staff to support tenant and community development.

2. Create a long term, deep rent supplement program that is flexible but ensures affordable rents.

Develop long-term rent supplements for the private rental market and co-op non-profit housing. These rent supplements should be sufficient to ensure rents are not more than 30% of household incomes. Organizations developing housing should be able to combine capital housing grants with rent supplements to ensure affordability in new projects. Current housing

allowance programs do not provide adequate support, have a 5-year time limit and require tenants to change addresses.

3. National commitment to preserving existing rental housing in private sector and social housing supply.

Existing rental housing and social housing across Canada and in Toronto is aging and deteriorating in condition leaving many households living in unsafe and unhealthy conditions and putting affordable housing at risk. Local municipalities cannot afford to maintain and sustain this housing without federal and provincial capital repair funds. In Ontario alone there is a \$300M backlog in repairs. Private landlords may also need resources to rehabilitate older, private rental buildings to ensure that rents can stay affordable and housing preserved.

CAS of Toronto's recommendations are in keeping with those of the UN envoy. Mr. Kothari told a news conference yesterday, an ambitious national housing program and a strategy to combat poverty is urgently needed, if Canadians wish to avoid the situation facing the United States. He had harsh words for politicians saying the crisis had been caused by governments' deep funding cuts in the mid-1990s to housing programs and social assistance that were of help to Canadians. "You have had a history of very progressive housing policies which were summarily abandoned in the mid-'90s, and the consequences of that are here tragically for all of us to see," he said, "I hope there is a radical shift in government policy."