



Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services

Go to: [Ministry Home](#) | [Housing Policy](#)

---

## Housing Policy and Programs: Advances and Activities since the Provincial Commission on Housing Options

What Has Happened Since the Provincial Commission on Housing Options?

Housing Policy  
April 1999

---

### Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[The Commission](#)

[The Report](#)

[That Was Then...](#)

[And This Is Now...](#)

[The Province's Implementation of the PCOHO](#)

[Recommendations](#)

[Local Government and Housing](#)

[Housing Policy and Program Development](#)

[Special Needs Housing](#)

[Conclusion: Partnerships key to Future Solutions](#)

[Appendix - Select Publications List](#)

---

## Introduction

The provincial government has acted on many recommendations of the Provincial Commission on Housing Options (PCOHO). It has developed an affordable housing strategy; it has given local governments tools they need to encourage more, and better, housing for low-income citizens; it continues to work with local governments, advocacy groups and communities to ensure special needs housing is available throughout the province.

## **The Commission**

The Provincial Commission on Housing Options (PCOHO) was launched on June 2, 1992, with Elain Duvall and Michael Audain appointed by the housing minister to lead the work. The Commission's mandate was to recommend "ways to meet British Columbia's housing needs within shrinking federal budgets and limited provincial and municipal financial resources." The work was to focus on market and non-market rental housing, and home ownership for first-time buyers, and in particular to look at ways to develop partnerships to increase housing affordability.

During the two-month consultation period the Commission held public meetings, met with small groups and individuals, visited market and non-market housing developments, and reviewed a total of 358 submissions.

In their report, the Commission pointed out that the provincial government's housing policy was at a pivotal point. Until then, housing policy had consisted primarily of participation in federally-initiated housing programs, the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) shelter allowance for seniors and tax deductions for both renters and owners. Given the declared intention of the federal government to withdraw from funding housing programs [\(1\)](#), the Commission saw the opportunity "to design and implement changes in policy and programs which are better suited to the needs of British Columbians... (and) seek out the co-operation of others - notably, local governments and non-profit organizations - to find innovative and practical solutions to housing issues."

The Commission, and most of the housing stakeholders consulted, saw this as an opportunity to create a "made in BC" housing policy.

## **The Report**

The Commission's report, completed in December 1992, proposed ten policy goals for the province, and made 57 recommendations ranging from legislative and regulatory reforms, through government spending and programs, to changing provincial and municipal roles and even the organization of government's housing functions.

The goals were:

1. To ensure that all British Columbians have the right to an adequate standard of housing at an affordable cost;
2. To encourage an understanding of the importance of housing as part of the government's overall social and economic policy;
3. To extend opportunities for as many British Columbians as possible to own their homes;
4. To ensure an adequate supply of affordable rental housing to meet the needs of low and moderate

- income groups;
5. To ensure that people with special needs have access to suitable housing, managed in a socially sensitive manner, and co-ordinated with health and community services;
  6. To assist the homeless to move off the streets by giving priority to accommodation for the homeless and for people who are vulnerable to becoming homeless;
  7. To ensure that all communities have an adequate supply of serviced residential land to meet the future housing needs of British Columbia's growing population;
  8. To ensure that housing development occurs in conjunction with sound regional planning policies leading to the development of attractive, sustainable communities that include people from all income levels and household types;
  9. To conserve and maintain the condition of existing housing throughout the province;
  10. To foster broad community participation in the provision of affordable housing, including partnerships among the provincial government, local governments, the private sector, and non-profit and self-help organizations.

After defining *affordability* [\(2\)](#) and some key variables affecting affordability - such as population growth, vacancy rates, prices and rents, income and tenure - the report proceeds to make recommendations in eight key areas:

- residential land
- home ownership
- rental housing
- special needs housing
- homelessness
- secondary suites
- provincial government roles and directions
- local government.

### **That was then ...**

Before looking at the results of the Commission's recommendations, it is useful to consider briefly how the housing environment has changed in the province in the past seven years. In 1992, British Columbia was in the middle of a growth-driven economic boom. Although mortgage rates had recently begun to decline, housing costs were high and increasing for both renters and owners, particularly in the two largest urban areas. There were 163,000 renter households who met national criteria for housing need - their housing was not affordable, not suitable, not adequate or some combination of the three.

### **And this is now ...**

Seven years later, the province's economic situation is less rosy, and immigration has eased off from the explosion levels of the early and mid-nineties. Given less pressure on the housing market, rents are relatively stable, though they have not fallen to any great degree. Access to first-time ownership has increased considerably because of low interest rates, a weaker market and federal programs (just as the Commission was being established, the federal government introduced measures to allow a 5% down payment, and access to RRSP funds). In addition, the federal government has fully implemented its withdrawal from funding new social housing units and is seeking to devolve existing commitments to the provinces.

Other issues have risen in prominence, including homelessness, youth unemployment and underemployment, lower real incomes, a decline in purpose-built rental housing stock, and growing housing demands from seniors.

## The Province's Implementation of the PCOHO Recommendations

A major thrust of the PCOHO recommendations was that the province should take leadership in establishing partnerships among all the players that could contribute to making housing more affordable.

In response, the Ministry immediately established a housing branch to "*provide leadership on housing policy and to guide the activities of BC Housing*" (the agency that delivers provincial housing programs). It also inaugurated a Minister's Advisory Council on Affordable Housing, composed of representatives of all groups with an interest in housing policies and programs.

Review and implementation of the Commission's recommendations began even before the new housing branch was fully staffed (July 1993). The branch approached its work by focussing on three distinct aspects:

- policy and planning tools for local governments,
- housing policy and program development, and
- special needs housing initiatives.

Although housing was moved to the Ministry of Housing, Recreation and Consumer Services, then back again to Municipal Affairs, and although BC Housing is currently part of another ministry (Employment and Investment), the province's initiatives around housing have consistently followed these three themes.

To give a sense of the momentum of the provincial government's action on the PCOHO recommendations, this report is organized according to those key themes.

---

## Local Government and Housing

***Local Government Role in Housing.*** The Commission observed that, unlike local governments in some other jurisdictions, BC municipalities had little tradition of addressing housing issues. Rather, most had seen affordable housing as the concern of senior governments, a matter for subsidized housing programs. The Commission also found, however, that a number of local governments had been very active in planning for affordable housing, and expressed the belief that:

*There is a reawakening of interest for housing issues at the local government level in British Columbia. In our view, there is also a growing awareness that local governments already have the capabilities and most of the resources to positively influence affordability within*

*their own communities.*

**Local Government Powers.** Their report recommended a number of measures to encourage local government efforts, such as revisions to the *Municipal Act* on:

- inclusionary zoning (requiring proportion of housing in a development to be affordable) (#53)
- bonus density and the transfer of density rights (#54)
- authority to lease residential land at below market value to non-profit organizations (#55)
- ability to include housing in capital works referenda and to issue debentures to raise revenue for affordable housing (#56)
- ability to establish special reserve funds for housing purposes (#57).

Although it did not make a specific recommendation on manufactured housing, it did endorse the recommendation of the Kennedy report (1992) that amendments be made to municipal Official Community Plans and zoning bylaws "to recognize the current standards of design and construction of manufactured housing."

The Ministry moved quickly to act on the PCOHO recommendations. In May, 1992, the *Municipal Act* had been amended to require that Official Community Plans include policies on affordable, rental and special needs housing. A guide for local governments beginning to develop community housing policies quickly followed. Housing was given higher profile in the ministry's planning grants program.

In July 1993, the Legislature amended the *Municipal Act* in response to Recommendations #53 - 57 and #29. The amendments gave clear authority to local governments to provide:

- bonus density in exchange for meeting specified conditions, in particular affordable housing
- more flexible, comprehensive zoning arrangements for large projects, and
- the ability to enter into enforceable housing agreements to ensure that affordable housing commitments are carried out.

The legislation also allowed local governments to request powers for specific purposes by Cabinet regulation. These powers could be used to:

- lease land for affordable housing at below market value to non-profit groups
- establish housing reserve funds
- borrow for housing purposes following a referendum, and
- enforce standards of maintenance for rental housing.

The next year the provincial government moved to provide clear authority for local governments to lease or

sell land at below market rates to non-profit housing organizations and to establish standard of maintenance bylaws.

In addition, the provincial government produced a toolkit to assist local governments and community groups address complaints by some neighbours that they didn't want increased density or special needs housing projects next door (Not In My Back Yard, or NIMBY syndrome). *Toward More Inclusive Neighbourhoods* won several awards after it was published in 1996.

More recently, a provincial-sponsored series on social housing appeared on the Knowledge Network. *Opening Doors* raised many issues surrounding social and affordable housing, and discussed the importance of housing to family stability, neighbourhood resistance to change and similar topics facing local governments when it aired in the Spring of 1999.

**Residential Land.** In the section on residential land, the PCOHO report pointed out that local governments are critical to ensuring that serviced land is available for housing - an important factor in land costs and therefore in housing costs. While sufficient land was available for apartments in most parts of the province except Victoria, land for ground-oriented housing was scarce in Vancouver, Victoria and Kelowna. Some factors underlying this scarcity that the Commission noted were:

- lack of local and regional planning,
- resistance to more intensive land use on the part of both residents (NIMBYism) and planning departments,
- development cost charges that load the cost of new developments onto incoming purchasers,
- slow processing of development approvals.

Most of the Commission's recommendations on the availability of land were directed towards influencing the activities of local governments in the planning and development process, i.e.:

- reintroducing the authority for regional planning (#3)
- amending the *Municipal Act* to set out more specific rules for the public hearing process for rezoning land (#4)
- local governments' pre-zoning of land for residential use (#5)
- amending the *Municipal Act* to establish annual housing production targets (#6)
- amending the *Municipal Act* to require municipalities to plan for an adequate supply of serviced residential land (#7)
- amending the *Municipal Act* to establish reasonable time frames for processing residential development applications (#8)

- amending the *Municipal Act* to levy development cost charges on the basis of "habitable floor area" rather than per dwelling (#9)
- providing proportionately higher provincial revenue sharing grants to faster-growing municipalities (#10)
- amending the *Municipal Act* to require an annual infrastructure levy on residential properties in the CRD and GVRD for financing services in high-growth municipalities (#11).

After review, the provincial government considered many of these recommendations to be too much of an invasion of local government's powers. However, a number of key provincial initiatives did meet the spirit of these recommendations.

The *Growth Strategies Act* (1995) addressed recommendation #3 by introducing planning tools for coordinating regional responses to rapid urban growth. Regional Context Statements link each member municipality's Official Community Plan to the Growth Strategy. The GVRD was one of the first regional districts to have links between its Livable Region Strategic Plan and municipal OCPs. Together, the GVRD and its members set out a practical framework for planning on a local and regional basis, laying out actions to meet the needs of future residents in relation to housing, transportation, services, parks and economic development.

The *Best Practices Guide on Development Cost Charges* (1997) addresses many frustrations surrounding financing infrastructure related to development. The guide, developed by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs in consultation with local governments, encourages standardized general practices for the formulation and administration of DCC bylaws, while recognizing that some flexibility is needed to accommodate specific circumstances.

***Municipal Act Reform.*** Many of the land use issues identified by the Commission will be addressed through the current Municipal Act Reform process. The team is in the early stages of planning consultation on zoning and land use issues, with discussions scheduled for next year.

Many local governments have acted on recommendations directed at them. Several have adopted a "one-stop shopping" approach to new development proposals. Someone wishing to build housing has one point of contact for the entire proposal.

***Secondary Suites.*** The PCOHO report found secondary suites are a key source of affordable housing, and were a major contributor to new rental housing units throughout the province. The report made many recommendations on secondary suites, including:

- amending the *Municipal Act* to provide one additional residential dwelling in all houses "as a right" (#41)
- preventing local governments from establishing policies or regulations which impede secondary suites (#42)


- establishing and funding, provincially, a loan program for homeowners wishing to upgrade or create a suite (#43)

The provincial government recognizes that local government is responsible for land use decisions, including determining density and whether secondary suites should be included in a community's authorized housing stock. Therefore it has not acted on the recommendation to make secondary suites part of every community. However, it has developed a building standard for secondary suites to assist local governments identify and address the safety issues involved, and encourages them to put legalization procedures in place.

The provincial government has helped local governments learn from each other. It published two documents: *Secondary Suites: A Summary of Local Practices* (1995) and *Secondary Suites Progress Report* (1996), which detail planning powers, tools and practices. Work continues on these issues.

In summary, the provincial government has acted on most recommendations dealing with local government and housing. It has provided local governments with new tools, primarily by amending the *Municipal Act*. It has assisted local governments use the tools through publication of various guides and model bylaws. In 1997, it also published *Planning for Housing: An Overview of Municipal Initiatives in British Columbia*, which documents key housing planning initiatives and gives examples of how they are being used across the province.

In those areas where it has not acted, it is most often because local governments already have the authority to deal with the issues raised by the Commission's report. Some outstanding issues may be addressed through Municipal Act Reform.

...continue forward to next page 





Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services  
Go to: [Ministry Home](#) | [Housing Policy](#)

## Housing Policy and Programs: Advances and Activities since the Provincial Commission on Housing Options - *continued*

---

### Housing Policy and Program Development

As stated earlier, one of the provincial government's first actions in response to the PCOHO report was create a housing policy unit. This section has worked on, and continues to work on, policies and programs stemming from recommendations of the report.

The first two initiatives were the introduction of the Affordable Housing First Lands Policy, and development of the *HOMES BC* program through which new social housing units are created.

**Lands Policy.** The first recommendation of the PCOHO report was that surplus urban land owned by the provincial government be developed for housing and related uses. In response, Cabinet, in June 1994, passed the Affordable Housing First Lands Policy, which gave priority to residential use of Crown land in support of the government's corporate commitment to affordable housing. The policy, directed specifically to supporting the construction of social housing through the province's housing program (*HOMES BC*), provides surplus Crown land at a discount for social housing projects. It is administered by the provincial government's housing agency - the BC Housing Management Commission (BC Housing).

The results of this policy can be seen in housing developments on the Oaklands site in Burnaby and the legislative precinct in Victoria, as well as special needs housing in Port Alberni, Merritt and Masset. In addition, pending local government zoning approvals, non-profit housing is planned for other provincially-owned sites in the Lower Mainland, such as the Riverview, Woodlands and Jericho lands. To date, seven properties - 165 units of social housing, and 54 special needs units or beds - have been assisted under the Affordable Housing First Lands Policy.

**HOMES BC.** In 1994, the provincial government launched its first comprehensive housing program, *HOMES BC*. It was aimed at providing British Columbians with secure, affordable homes. It was designed to support the ideas, skills and efforts of the community-based, non-profit and co-operative housing sectors while increasing the supply of affordable housing and developing healthy communities. *HOMES BC* had four initial components:

- *Non-Profit Housing* assisted non-profit sponsors to build housing for low- and moderate-income renters. Priority was given to mixed-income projects designed for families with children and people with disabilities
- *Homeless/At Risk Housing* assisted non-profit sponsors to build self-contained second stage and permanent housing for people who find it difficult to secure safe and affordable accommodation. Further discussion is in the *Special Needs Housing* section later in this paper

- *New Options for Home Ownership*, a three-year demonstration project initiative to create innovative, affordable forms of home ownership, such as equity co-ops. This component of *HOMES BC* was designed to provide a bridge to home ownership for low- to moderate-income renters and free up social housing units
- *Community Housing Initiatives* aimed at supporting and strengthening community housing organizations, such as advocacy groups and housing registries.

**Strategy for Affordable Housing.** Provincial housing policy has developed beyond introduction and implementation of the *HOMES BC* Program. The provincial government formalized its housing policy with the adoption and publication in April 1996 of *British Columbia's Strategy for Affordable Housing*. The strategy has five points, many of which are issues already mentioned in the discussion of local government and housing and under *HOMES BC*:

- build partnerships to broaden participation
- reduce land costs
- increase affordable ownership
- expand affordable rental housing
- promote housing for individuals with special needs.

The overall thrust of the provincial government's housing strategy can be summarized as: creating a range of affordable housing choices in diverse and sustainable communities.

**Home Ownership.** At the time of the Commission's research, access to first-time home ownership was a severe problem in British Columbia's two largest urban areas. Although mortgage rates had recently fallen from 14% to 9%, home prices were still historically high, and households were moving to the edges of commuting range in order to enter the market.

The Commission made several recommendations to assist people wishing to buy their first home:

- revise the Mortgage Assistance Program (a guarantee to lenders for an increase in a first mortgage), setting house price limits that reflected the real costs of housing in various BC markets (#12).
- exempt first-time purchasers from the Property Transfer Tax (#13); finance this exemption by raising the amount of the tax for all other buyers.
- terminate the existing Property Transfer Tax Relief Program, which was applied to purchasers using high-ratio mortgages (#14).
- create an Equity Co-operative Housing Program to enable low and moderate income renters to purchase their first home (#15).

The Mortgage Assistance Program was cancelled in 1993 after the Canada Mortgage and Housing Commission (CMHC) provided assistance to first-time buyers by allowing a 5% down payment and use of RRSP funds. On the other hand, in the 1994 provincial budget the *Property Transfer Tax Act* was revised to exempt first-time buyers from paying the provincial tax.

The Equity Co-operative Housing Program was not implemented in the form the Commission recommended. However, *New Options for Home Ownership*, a component of *HOMES BC*, was introduced to support non-profit

and co-operative societies in achieving the same purpose.

New Options was a three-year demonstration program that offered project development funding and interim financing for equity co-ops and other innovative forms of ownership housing. In the end, the initiative was cancelled, essentially because home ownership itself was becoming more accessible through falling interest rates, a softening market, and the two federal programs.

The provincial government has continued with a longstanding initiative to assist property owners. The Home Owner Grant reduces property taxes, helping many homeowners meet continuing expenses. The grant is higher for senior citizens, who often cannot adapt to increased costs.

**Consumer Protection.** A policy issue that arose since the Commission's work was that of consumer protection for homeowners. Through the late 1990s, a large number of condominium residents faced substantial costs due to construction deficiencies. Homeowners found water penetrated their walls, leading to structural decay and moulds growing inside their homes.

The provincial government established a Task Force in 1995 to study the scope and causes of deficient construction practices and to make recommendations on measures to improve consumer protection. Responding to these recommendations, the provincial government published *Buying a New Home: A Consumer Protection Guide*. In 1998, it appointed former Premier Dave Barrett to head a Commission of Inquiry into the Quality of Condominium Construction. Again, consumer protection issues were a focal point in recommendations. The Homeowner Protection Office was established in response, and given three goals:

- strengthen consumer protection for home buyers
- help leaky condominium owners obtain the financing they need to repair their homes
- improve industry standards and improve quality of new homes.

The office works with builders and construction professionals to achieve these goals.

The first steps have been taken toward strengthening consumer protection and improving standards. The *Homeowner Protection Act* requires mandatory warranties, and the Homeowner Protection Office is in the process of licencing builders. In addition, it provides financing to homeowners who are unable to secure funds for their repairs through conventional sources.

**Rental Housing.** The Commission reported that in 1992, about 36% of British Columbia households lived in rental accommodation. According to the 1996 Census, the proportion of renters had decreased slightly to 34.5%. The absolute numbers continue to grow. In 1991, there were 447,000 renter households; by 1996, there were 491,545 renter households.

The PCOHO report noted that many British Columbians rent because they cannot afford home ownership. Almost 163,000 renter households in BC were in core housing need [3](#) in 1992. By 1996, the number of renters in core housing need decreased by 10,000 people. In the same period, the actual number of renters increased. The province has been able to absorb a large number of renters without a corresponding increase in core need, and it is to be hoped that the provincial government's housing strategy and *HOMES BC* been a positive influence.

The PCOHO report also noted that very little purpose-built rental housing had been built in the 1980s, partly because of a gap between economic rents and market rents. The gap remained throughout the 1990s, and very little market housing has been added to the rental stock since the report was published. This issue is one of the current priorities in the Ministry's business plan.

In the rental housing recommendations, the PCOHO report also focussed on funding and management of social housing:

- maintaining provincial government housing funding at 1991 levels (#16)
- allocating provincial government funding to families with children and people with special needs (#17)
- rewarding partnerships and understanding of local requirements in the selection process for new social housing units (#18)
- undertaking a comprehensive review by BC Housing to find ways to increase the effectiveness of delivering social housing (#21)
- developing a BC Housing strategic plan for using older social housing projects more effectively - through densification, updating and conversion (#26)

Since 1994, families have benefited: the provincial government has funded or committed to fund almost 2,500 family housing units under the *HOMES BC* program. In this year's budget, the finance minister said the provincial government will also be working with our partners to increase social housing by 1,200 homes over the next two years.

Progress has been made on the housing management front as well. In 1996, the housing ministry, working with BC Housing and representatives of non-profit and co-operative housing organizations, developed a new *operating agreement* for all units developed under *HOMES BC*. This operating agreement recognizes the role and expertise of societies and co-ops that own and manage development supported by *HOMES BC*. BC Housing also published a series of manuals and guides to ensure that *HOMES BC* developments are well managed and that tenants are treated in a consistent, respectful manner.

***Supportive Housing for Seniors.*** The Commission noted an emerging need to address the housing needs of the frail elderly. Since the PCOHO consulted with British Columbia residents, local governments and community groups have sought provincial assistance in understanding the issues. In response, the Housing Policy Unit has been working with the Ministry of Health and people at the local level, with the goal of developing a policy and legislative framework that protects consumers living in supportive housing.

In summary, many policy and program areas identified by the PCOHO report have been addressed, including adoption of *British Columbia's Strategy of Affordable Housing*. Many issues relating to social housing have been addressed through the implementation of *HOMES BC*. Homeownership has become more accessible, largely through federal programs. Consumer protection for home buyers emerged as an issue, and the provincial government established the Homeowner Protection Office in response. Consumer protection for the frail elderly has also come to the fore. Issues surrounding rental housing continue to receive provincial attention.

---

## Special Needs Housing

In 1992, as now, there were many British Columbians who had special housing needs that were not fully met through the private housing market. Groups with particular needs include people with chronic mental illness, brain injuries, chronic abuse of drugs or alcohol, people with physical disabilities and those who are HIV positive or have AIDS.

Recommendations on special needs housing include:

- improving co-ordination among provincial ministries and agencies that provide services to people with special needs (#31)
- dedicating 5% of all dwellings in social housing projects to people with special needs (#32)
- doubling from the 1992 allocation the number of special needs dwellings for people with mental illness (#33)
- increasing the number of wheelchair-accessible rental dwelling units in communities where there is a shortage (#34)
- ensuring that, where practical, all new publicly-funded emergency shelters and transition houses are wheelchair accessible (#35)
- increasing the number of rent supplements for persons with HIV/AIDS (#36)
- giving special priority in social housing units to women with children who are required to leave transition houses (#37).

As in other areas, the provincial government took quick action on several of these recommendations.

Work began quickly to develop a corporate strategy for special needs housing, with an aim to streamline and coordinate the provincial government's overall approach to the planning, funding and delivery of special needs housing. As well as increasing efficiency, the strategy assists government to work more effectively with community partners. In 1996, responsibility was formalized with the establishment of the Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee on Special Needs Housing, led by Municipal Affairs.

At the start, *HOMES BC* also continued with the longstanding practice of integrating special needs housing in its proposal calls. As well as giving higher ratings to project proposals which addressed family housing, it has favoured proposals which include adaptable units.

In addition, in the Mental Health Plan announced in January 1998, the Minister of Health pinned improved services in the plan to more housing and improved access to care. She announced that over seven years, the government will provide:

- up to 2,600 supported housing units
- up to 1,000 subsidizing housing units in public housing developments
- development of medium to long stay (tertiary) psychiatric care provided in small, community-based facilities

In May, the health minister announced the first 200 of these new housing units, as well as confirming the commitment to 200 that were announced in the year before the Mental Health Plan was announced.

**HIV / AIDS.** There has also been progress on assistance for persons with HIV or AIDS. The provincial government currently offers three main sources of housing assistance for individuals or families with HIV/AIDS in BC: rent supplements, non-profit housing, and BC Housing's regular applicant stream.

Provincial government housing support for persons with HIV/AIDS is delivered primarily through rent supplements - monthly subsidies that bring down a household's cost of private rental market housing to no more than 30% of gross household income. These rent supplements were part of a federal/provincial cost-shared program that ended in 1993; however past funding commitments continue to be funded. Since 1990, 147 rent supplements have been allocated for persons with HIV/AIDS in BC.

In the 1990s, two non-profit housing developments have been provided for persons with HIV/AIDS in the Lower Mainland. In addition, some people with HIV/AIDS benefit from housing built under the Homeless/At Risk component of *HOMES BC*. Others may also receive housing assistance through BC Housing's regular applicant

stream, which provides access to the directly managed social housing stock as well as to a portion of units in non-profit housing developments. The number of tenants with HIV/AIDS is not known as health information is not tracked by BC Housing.

A variety of projects are currently under development to further assist people with HIV/AIDS. The provincial government is a partner in the Portland Hotel Replacement Project in Vancouver's downtown eastside. Also, BC Housing, through the *HOMES BC* program, is working with non-profit sponsor groups to develop affordable rental housing targeted to lower income urban single persons who are currently living in single room occupancy hotels or rooming houses. Three projects are proposed for a total of more than 200 units. The non-profit sponsor groups have indicated that they plan to target persons with HIV/AIDS for a portion of the units.

**Homelessness.** Homelessness was identified by the PCOHO report as a growing problem, and unfortunately, it continues to grow. As the report noted, "very few people choose to be homeless." The Commission identified two groups directly impacted by homelessness. People who have no shelter for the night or who are forced to sleep in emergency shelters are considered to have "absolute homelessness." Those who are living in seriously substandard housing, under threat of eviction or are one pay cheque away from becoming homeless are usually included in discussions around homelessness, and are considered to have "relative homelessness." Many of these people live in single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels, motels or rooming houses.

In 1992, the PCOHO report stated that homelessness is an issue in Vancouver, Victoria and Kelowna. It estimated that about 60 to 90 single adults sleep in Victoria shelters and hostels, with the comparable figure in Greater Vancouver estimated at between 200 and 250. In 1998, a brief survey of some anti-poverty groups in our largest urban centres showed there are probably more than 1,000 people who are absolutely homeless in BC, and another 20,000 who are relatively homeless. The concentrations are in Vancouver and Victoria, but about 75-150 people have absolute homelessness in each of Prince George, Kamloops, Kelowna.

The primary recommendation of the report was:

- coordinating government responses through an interministry committee (#40)
- increasing housing for special populations, such as people with mental illness or HIV/AIDS

BC has continued to build non-market housing and has specifically targeted the most vulnerable population through Homeless/At-Risk initiatives.

In 1992/93, the Housing Ministry launched their first Homeless/At Risk initiative: it included emergency, second-stage and permanent housing for individuals who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. This initiative was continued in 1993/94.

In 1994/95 the Homeless/At Risk Housing component of *HOMES BC* was established, which provided self-contained, second-stage and permanent housing. This program has continued each year and in 1997 changes were made to the *HOMES BC* of housing initiatives, in response to community recommendations.

Between 1992/93 and 1998/99 over 700 units of housing have been allocated for individuals who are homeless or at/risk of homelessness.

**Lower Income Urban Singles.** To raise the profile of housing issues facing lower income urban singles and to highlight the need for government action, the housing minister established the Lower Income Urban Singles Task Group in late 1994. In early 1996, the Task Group presented the housing minister with the strategy document entitled "*Nowhere To Live*" that profiles eight residents living in single room occupancy (SRO) hotels across BC,

and recommends a strategy to address the housing needs of lower income singles.

To profile the "*Nowhere to Live*" report and to facilitate private/public partnerships for affordable housing, two Round Tables on the Future of Housing for Lower Income Urban Singles were held in 1996 and 1997.

This was followed by the Lower Income Urban Singles Subcommittee of the Minister's Advisory Council on Affordable Housing being established to identify priority housing actions for the public, private and community sectors. The report was presented to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in June 1997. Numerous recommendations have been implemented including:

- development of several new housing projects specifically targeted to low income singles, e.g. small suite pilot projects.
- purchase of two SROs through a partnership between the province (BC Housing and Ministry of Human Resources), City of Vancouver, the Vancouver-Richmond Health Board and the federal government (RRAP funding).
- legislative and regulation changes to address issues related to homelessness.

The ADMs Committee on Special Needs Housing and task-specific working groups continue to work to address homelessness in a coordinated manner. The Cold/Wet Weather Strategy working group, with representatives of the provincial government, the City of Vancouver and service providers is a recent successful example of an integrated approach to solving issues related to homelessness. The Vancouver Shelter Working Group, led by the City with representatives of the provincial government and service providers, is currently focused on establishing a new permanent shelter in the City of Vancouver. A similar working group is being formed in Surrey.

In summary, the provincial government has partnered with service providers, local governments and others to address the problems of homelessness. Emergency shelters continue to be operated with the assistance of the Ministry of Human Resources, and BC Housing is the lead provincial agency for second-stage housing.

---

## Conclusion: Partnerships Key to Future Solutions

Since the Provincial Commission on Housing Options consulted with British Columbians in 1992, a great many players, including the provincial and local governments, have taken steps to address housing issues.

The provincial government has acted on most of the report's recommendations dealing with local government and housing. It has provided local governments with new tools, primarily by amending the *Municipal Act* and through various workshops and publications. Zoning continues to be an important tool, and the provincial government enhanced local zoning responsibilities by requiring municipalities and regional districts to include housing policies in their official community plans.

In those areas where it has not acted, it is most often because local governments already have the authority to deal with the issues raised by the Commission's report. Some issues may be addressed through Municipal Act Reform.

Many policy areas identified by the PCOHO report have been addressed, including adoption of *British Columbia's Strategy of Affordable Housing*. The number of social housing units has increased by more than 3,000 through the implementation of *HOMES BC*. Homeownership has become more accessible, largely through federal programs. Consumer protection, both for home buyers and the frail elderly, required attention in recent years. Issues



surrounding rental housing continue to receive provincial attention.

Great strides have been made in the areas of special needs housing and homelessness. However, with population growth and economic conditions, the number of people with problems of homelessness are increasingly significant in a larger number of communities. Partnership, here too, is a key to successfully assisting people in need.

---

## Appendix - Select Publications List

Listed below are British Columbia's most recent housing related publications. Those that are available on the world wide web are listed with their web address.

- *Annotated Bibliography on Universal Design: A Selection of Books on Creating Accessible Environments*, MMAH, 1998.
- *Best Practices Guide on Development Cost Charges*, MMA, 1997.
- *Bill 31: Housing Opportunities Through Local Planning [standards of maintenance, land leasing at below market value]*, MHRCS, 1994. ([www.legis.gov.bc.ca/1994/3rd\\_read/gov31-3.txt](http://www.legis.gov.bc.ca/1994/3rd_read/gov31-3.txt) - Act only)
- *Bill 46: Homeowner Protection Act*, MMA, 1998. ([http://www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/stat/H/98031\\_01.htm](http://www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/stat/H/98031_01.htm))
- *Bill 57: Housing Opportunities Through Local Planning [density bonusing, comprehensive development zoning, housing agreements]*, MMA, MHRCS, 1993. ([www.legis.gov.bc.ca/1993/3rd\\_read/gov57-3.txt](http://www.legis.gov.bc.ca/1993/3rd_read/gov57-3.txt) - Act only)
- [\*British Columbia's Strategy for Affordable Housing\*](#), MMAH, 1996.
- [\*Buying a New Home: A Consumer Protection Guide\*](#), Homeowner Protection Office, 1999.
- [\*Density Bonus Provisions of the Municipal Act: A Guide and Model Bylaw\*](#), MMAH, 1997.
- *Discussion Paper: Report of the Secondary Suites Policy Committee*, 1994.
- [\*Existing Local Government Powers for Managing Secondary Suites: Provincial Progress Report\*](#), MMAH, 1996.
- [\*Explanatory Guide to BC's Growth Strategies Act\*](#), MMA, 1995.
- [\*Getting Our Municipal Act Together: A Discussion Paper on Principles\*](#), MMAH, 1997.
- [\*Nowhere To Live\*](#), Lower Income Urban Singles Task Group (MHRCS), 1995.



- [Nowhere To Live Next Steps...](#), Reports and Outcomes on the Premier's Round Table on Housing for Lower Income Urban Singles (MMAH), 1997.
  - [Planning for Housing: An Overview of Municipal Initiatives in British Columbia](#), MMAH, 1997.
  - *Planning for ... Supportive Housing for Seniors*, Fact Sheets (1 to 4), MMAH, 1998.  
[Fact sheet #1](#); [Fact Sheet #2](#); [Fact Sheet #3](#); [Fact Sheet #4](#))
  - [Renewal of Trust in Residential Construction](#), *The*, Commission of Inquiry Into the Quality of Condominium Construction in British Columbia, Dave Barrett, Commissioner, 1998.
  - [Rental Housing Trends in British Columbia](#), MMAH, MAG, 1995.
  - *Secondary Suites: A Summary of Local Government Practices*, MHRCS, 1995.
  - [Standards of Maintenance: A Guide and Model Bylaw](#), MMAH, 1996.
  - [Toward More Inclusive Neighbourhoods](#) (NIMBY toolkit), MHRCS, 1996.
- 

## Endnotes

**1** No new housing units were funded by the federal government after 1993, although existing subsidy commitments will be honoured until their expiry in the first decades of the next century. The federal government is currently negotiating with the provinces and territories to take over administration of its housing programs. Seven of the provinces/territories (not including British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec) have signed agreements to this effect.

**2** The Commission's definitions: **Affordable** "means annual housing costs (rent or mortgage+taxes) which do not exceed 30% of a household's gross annual income..." **Affordable housing** in the words of the Commission "means housing which would have a market price or rent that would be affordable to households of low and moderate income ...those who have incomes which are 80% or less than the average household income for the urban area they live in.

**3** The term **core housing need** is used to identify households unable to obtain market housing in adequate condition which is suitable in size and affordable, i.e., with a rent that does not exceed 30% of total household income.

[BACK TO PREVIOUS SECTION](#)