

### The Challenge

Safe, secure and affordable housing is needed across the Toronto region. While the vast majority of people in the region are fortunate in having access to a full range of housing opportunities, almost one in five households (322,415) continue to struggle with finding and keeping an affordable home.<sup>1</sup> The development of new affordable housing has not kept pace with the region's needs.

There is simply not enough affordable housing for those who need it. Some 26% of owners and 46% of renters pay too much for housing (more than 30 per cent of their income).<sup>2</sup> Many low-income people must choose between paying for housing or buying food.<sup>3</sup> Many homes in high rise rental towers are aging and need repairs,<sup>4</sup> vacancy rates are decreasing<sup>5</sup> and waitlists for social housing are growing.<sup>6</sup>

### Current Situation

Over the past decade, the federal and provincial governments, regional municipalities of Durham, Halton, Peel, York and City of Toronto have recognized affordable housing as an essential component in creating strong, healthy and prosperous communities.

To support this work, municipal and regional governments in the Toronto region have created comprehensive plans and strategies to meet local housing needs. They have fostered partnerships with governments, non-profit organizations and private developers to create affordable and well-maintained homes that help make the region a great place to live, work and play.

In the last two years, governments have used economic stimulus initiatives to invest more than \$500 million in housing in the Toronto region. These investments are supporting the repair and renovation of more than 1,000 social housing units to make them healthier and more energy efficient. These funds are also creating more than 2,200 affordable homes and assisting over 800 low- and moderate-income households to buy their first home.

As economic stimulus initiatives wind down, the Toronto region faces an uncertain future. Renewed action on affordable housing is required by all stakeholders. The federal and provincial governments have yet to renew beyond March 31, 2011 the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program – one of the key programs that funds new construction. Without stronger commitments from federal and provincial governments, safe, secure and affordable housing will be out of reach for many people.

There is a lot of work ahead. Social, economic and demographic indicators make it clear that action on housing and poverty issues is needed now.

### Promising New Developments

**The Toronto Regional Housing Data Bank:** Created as a pilot project of CivicAction's pre-Summit Neighbourhoods and Affordable Housing Working Group by the City of Toronto's Affordable Housing Office and other partners, the new Data Bank marks a significant advance in our understanding of social and economic conditions related to housing in Halton, Durham, Peel, and York regions and the City of Toronto. For the first time, regional statistics and trends concerning housing, poverty and other indicators have been compiled for use by governments, the private sector, non-profit organizations, academics and community agencies.

The Data Bank provides a common fact base that is crucial to formulate consensus and collective action. It will help people and organizations across the region to articulate local issues and create a powerful, united voice to advocate for government funding and program renewals. As a collective evidence base, the Data Bank calls attention to inconsistencies in data collection and highlights key issues of concern for housing policies and practices.

The Data Bank is also a resource to support reports, recommendations and public education, help foster partnerships and promote housing opportunities with other key stakeholders in the community.

The information from Halton, Durham, Peel, and York regions and the City of Toronto establishes a regional housing picture using a number of indicators. It is divided into five themes: 1) The Toronto Region, 2) Population and Household Characteristics, 3) Housing Supply and Cost, 4) Poverty and Housing Need, and 5) Programs and Policies.

The Data Bank is a powerful tool to support affordable housing opportunities across the region. As a regional housing evidence base, it can assist our advocacy efforts and energize our partners. This information has the potential to support and enhance strategies that focus on improving social and economic conditions within communities and region-wide.

**Building Foundations: Building Futures- Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy:** In November 2010, the Ontario government released Building Foundations: Building Futures – Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, and introduced Bill 140 – Strong Communities through Affordable Housing Act. The strategy provides a framework for addressing housing issues by putting people first, creating strong partnerships, supporting affordable options and accountability. In addition, its strategic initiatives provide the foundation for renewing the region's social housing by calling for sustained federal funding. The proposed legislation also recognizes the need for, and importance of, each regional or municipal service manager within the region having a 10-year housing and homelessness plan.

While there is still much work to be done to implement the strategy and ensure successful housing outcomes, the Ontario Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy is an important foundation on which to build housing across the region.

## Chief Barriers to Progress

---

There are five things needed to spur effective action on housing within the Toronto region:

- a federal housing strategy;
- sustained federal and provincial funding and appropriate programs;
- increased co-ordination among regional stakeholders and the municipal, provincial and federal governments;
- incentives for private and non-profit sectors to participate in providing affordable housing; and
- public education about the positive power of affordable housing and the stories of people who need it.

## Opportunities for Action

---

There is strength in numbers. Taking a regional approach provides the opportunity to bring together best practices and ideas from across the spectrum of housing needs and solutions. It enables local issues to be articulated, and at the same time creates a powerful, united voice to advocate for funding and program renewals. A regional approach allows us to:

- tap into the resources, knowledge and expertise of private, non-profit and government sectors;
- capture the attention of a larger audience;
- encourage greater engagement from citizens;
- foster partnerships; and
- encourage participation from key stakeholders.

Opportunities for action include:

### 1. A Region-Wide Housing Working Group

A region-wide housing working group could provide an opportunity for government, business and community sectors to collectively champion best practices and solutions. It would allow for a shift from reactionary toward proactive solutions to housing issues. A region-wide housing working group could integrate new ideas into existing provincial and regional strategies. For example, it could provide support and recommendations for the implementation of Building Foundations: Building Futures – Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy. It could also direct a public education housing campaign and/or further the development of the Toronto Regional Housing Data Bank.

### 2. A Public Education Housing Campaign

A public education campaign could create awareness about housing issues and broaden the conversation to include more of the region's residents. It could speak to a diversity of groups and individuals about the economic and social value of housing, conveying messages that reduce the stigma associated with homelessness and social housing. It could bring statistical information to life by sharing people's stories, their housing hardships and their successes. It could generate support and increase opportunities to address the lack of housing and problems of housing affordability. A public education campaign could educate and engage Toronto region residents on issues related to affordable housing.

### 3. Maintaining the Toronto Regional Housing Data Bank

Maintaining the Toronto Regional Data Bank could provide a powerful tool to leverage affordable housing opportunities across the region. It is a resource of statistical information that could be used to strengthen reports, guide recommendations and support public education efforts. As a regional evidence base, it could support existing advocacy efforts as well as new initiatives to create more housing opportunities across the region.

## Questions for Discussion

---

1. What is the best way to co-ordinate region-wide housing activity? If a region-wide working group were used, what could be its primary goals?
  2. If a public education campaign was launched to advance affordable housing within each region and region-wide, who should be involved and what elements should be included?
  3. What role can the information in the Data Bank play to support existing efforts and new initiatives?
- 

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. (2010). *Census Data, 2006*. Accessed December 2010 from Statistics Canada: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/start-debut-eng.html>

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada. (2007). *Small Area Administrative Division, Tax File Family Tables, 2000-2007*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

<sup>3</sup> Daily Bread Food Bank. (2010). *Hunger snapshot 2010 profile of the GTA*. Accessed November 2010 from: <http://www.bing.com/search?q=Daily+Bread+Food+Bank%2C+Fighting+Hunger.+%282010%29.+Hunger+snapshot+2010+profile+of+theGTA.&src=IE-SearchBox&Form=IE8SRC>

<sup>4</sup> Stewart, G. & Thorne, J. (2010). *Tower Neighbourhood Renewal in the Greater Golden Horseshoe*. Toronto: Province of Ontario, ERA Architects, Planning Alliance, Cities Centre at the University of Toronto.

<sup>5</sup> Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (Fall 2010). *Rental market report GTA*. Accessed December 2010 from Canada Mortgage Housing Corporation: <http://www.cmhc.ca/en/hoficlincl/homain/foan/index.cfm>

<sup>6</sup> Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association. (2010). *Data Request*.

*This paper was prepared in consultation with the Affordable Housing Office and informed by discussions of CivicAction's Neighbourhoods and Affordable Housing Working group.*