



NATIONAL

# NO PLACE TO CALL HOME

— LOOKING AT CANADA'S HOUSING CRISIS



Ken Eaton has a job that pays nearly \$75,000 a year. That's \$15,000 more than the average Canadian worker. After **income tax** and other **deductions**, he brings home around \$3400 each month.

That sounds like a lot. But Mr. Eaton and his son live in Vancouver. There, it costs about \$4000 a month to rent a 2-bedroom apartment. So in June, when they were looking for a new place to live, they were having a hard time.

"I'm pretty frightened. I'm gonna be homeless in probably 30 days if I don't find a place that I can reasonably afford without it taking my whole salary," said Mr. Eaton, who was temporarily staying with friends. "If I can't find a place, am I gonna be living in my car?"

## A HOUSING CRISIS

Sadly, Mr. Eaton's troubles are not unique. Canadians everywhere are finding it hard to pay for a place to live while still having enough money left to pay for other basic needs. In fact, lack of affordable housing has become the hottest political issue in the nation as the 2025 federal election approaches.

Rents, especially in big cities, have skyrocketed. In Toronto, for example, the cost of a one-bedroom apartment now averages \$2500 per month. That's a 25 percent bump in just one year. Across the country, rents were averaging over \$2000.

Home ownership, too, is also out of reach for many Canadians. The average price of a house was around \$750,000 in August.

That's four time more than it was in the early 2000s. And in the past five years alone, home prices have jumped by 40 percent. As well, **mortgage** borrowing rates have risen. That has been making it hard for existing homeowners to keep up with their payments.

"This is now not just a crisis for low-income families," said Federal Housing Minister Sean Fraser. "This is a crisis for seniors looking to retire under very different circumstances than existed even a few years ago. It is a crisis for students who cannot find a place they can afford to live within an hour commute of the campus. And it is a crisis for young people who... can't afford a place to live."

## DEFINITIONS

**DEDUCTION:** the process of taking an amount of something, especially money, away from a total; the amount that is taken

**INCOME TAX:** the amount of tax that you pay to the government according to how much you earn

**MORTGAGE:** a bank loan for money to buy a home



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## WHY THE SHORTFALL?

Canada is one of the world's richest nations, yet we don't have enough affordable housing. Why is that?

Experts say many factors are contributing to the crisis. The biggest one? There are way fewer homes available than the number of people who need them. And when the demand for housing exceeds supply, prices for rents and real estate rise rapidly. The **Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)** says that we'll need 5.8 million more housing units by 2030 to bring costs in line.

In part, immigration is behind the housing shortfall. Over a million people arrived here just this past year. That means that there are five new Canadian residents for every new home being built. Many observers believe Ottawa should reduce its immigration targets to allow supply to catch up with demand.

Yet even before the immigration surge, housing construction wasn't keeping pace with need. The reasons? Inflation has caused **interest** rates to climb. So, many construction companies don't want to

borrow the money they need to take on contracts. By mid-2023, some 22 percent of Canadian homebuilders had cancelled projects.

As well, Canada lacks skilled tradespeople. That means that builders can't find experienced workers. And unsettled global conditions have upset the world's **supply chain**. So builders often can't get the materials they need, either. Additionally, complex rules and permit processes have discouraged many builders.

## POLICY CHANGES

The housing crunch is also partly the result of policy changes. Until the 1980s, the federal government set housing policies. Then, the provinces took over. But the money that the federal government gave to the provinces didn't always go to new housing, says former Liberal Deputy Minister Sheila Copps.

The federal government got involved again in 2017, but Ms. Copps says it is taking time for new federal-provincial partnerships to take hold.

## THE LIBERAL PLAN

In August, the Liberals held a retreat to focus on the crisis.

They promised to allocate \$4 billion to a Housing Accelerator Fund. It is designed to create 100,000 new **middle-class** homes in major urban centres by 2025. They pledged to speed up permit approval times and to encourage greater density in cities. And they may cut back on the number of international students who can attend Canadian universities.

## TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE?

Opposition parties say the Liberals have fumbled the ball on housing. They point out that the government won't be able to keep its 2021 promise to make 1.4 million new homes available by 2026.

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre vows to make changes if his party wins in 2025. For one thing, he says his government would cut some funding to big cities unless they increase housing by 15 percent. And NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh wants to turn empty office space into affordable rental units.

Meanwhile, Ken Eaton and others are still grappling with the high cost of housing. They are hoping for any positive change. ★

## DEFINITIONS

**CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION:** Canada's national housing agency with the goal of making mortgage loans affordable for all Canadians  
**INTEREST:** the extra money that you pay when you borrow money or that you receive when you invest money

**MIDDLE CLASS:** the social class whose members are neither very rich nor very poor  
**SUPPLY CHAIN:** the series of processes involved in the production and supply of goods, from when they are first made, grown, etc. until they are bought or used