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What do various organizations say about housing allowances?

Portable housing allowances are advocated by the following organizations from all sides of the housing and poverty debate:

Federation of Canadian Municipalities:

"A shelter allowance is needed for working poor households - without forcing them first to enter the income assistance system." (Moving Forward: Refining the FCM Recommendations for a National Affordable Housing Strategy, October, 2004)

"The analysis of housing need clearly documents the predominant problem as one of affordability. ... Affordability problems account for 93% of core housing need. ... [portable shelter allowances] (i.e. linked to a household, not contracted to a unit) can be effective in helping to reduce these high shelter burdens." (2008 Housing Action Plan)

Canadian Home Builders Association:

"Housing choice vouchers to cover a major portion of the gap between a reasonable market rent and 30 percent of household income would [give] low-income households what they really need: extra money based on their shelter costs, so they can secure adequate accommodation of their own choosing." ("Building Homes and Communities for Canadians, Now and in the Future", June 8, 2004)

Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation:

"Given the reality of the rental housing market in Ontario, dealing with the income side of the equation is the most important component of any strategy to end homelessness. ... We don't criticize tax credits for poor families. ... Similarly, we shouldn't criticize income supports which are a response to the realities of rental housing in Ontario." ("Homelessness in Ontario: The Case for a Needs-Based Shelter Supplement", 2004)

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples:

"Rent subsidies can be attached to particular dwelling units, or they can be made available to households in the form of shelter allowances that bridge the gap between the market rent of adequate accommodation and what the household can afford. The latter type of assistance leaves maximum choice to the household. This approach has been tested in several provinces, with generally favourable results." (Report, Volume 3, Chapter 4, October, 1996)

[Toronto] Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force:

"Shelter allowances are the most effective tool to prevent homelessness for low-income households." "The best solution for the 106,000 households [in Toronto] with severe affordability problems is to provide them with shelter allowances for housing in the private market..." "A shelter allowance for the working poor will reduce the risk of homelessness without creating a disincentive to work." ("The Golden Report", January 1999)

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Federal Liberal Women's Caucus:

"It is often suggested that the only way to assist low income tenants in need of adequate and affordable housing is to build new social housing. Not only is the creation of new subsidized housing costly, but subsidized housing benefits only a small number of households who are in need."

"One solution to this persistent problem is a portable shelter subsidy that is tied to need rather than to designated units. The portability allows a woman to choose where she would like to live, be it closer to family, social support networks, schools, etc. It also avoids the stigma that can come with living in social housing. This change would significantly increase the number of women who could receive the assistance they need to live in adequate, affordable housing.

"There are other benefits to a portable shelter subsidy. It is administratively convenient and can be allocated as a direct cash transfer or tax credit. This eliminates the discriminatory consequences of lengthy waiting lists and other restrictions of social housing." (The Pink Book, Volume 2, 2007)

[Ontario] Social Housing Services Corporation:

The government should "increase the choices for victims of family violence to find safe housing by providing portable provincially funded housing allowances equivalent to RGI subsidies [as provided in public housing]."

"This would allow families to be housed wherever it is appropriate rather than wait for the first available social housing unit. This increases the choices for families to remain close to schools, family and friends, while protecting the need to remain isolated from the abuser. At the same time it reduces pressure on the social housing stock to serve those with the least resources." (Snakes and Ladders: Ending Poverty Traps by Rebuilding Livelihoods in Social Housing, 2007)

City of Ottawa:

"The existing housing stock provides the majority of low cost housing options to the residents of Ottawa." One of the goals of the Housing Strategy is to "advocate to the provincial government for increases in rent support and subsidy programs, including rent supplements paid to landlords and housing allowances paid directly to tenants to enable them to continue to afford their housing. (City of Ottawa Housing Strategy, 2007)

Various Provinces:

Between 2005 and 2007 a number of provinces demonstrated their views of the value of portable housing allowances by introducing new programs or expanding existing housing allowance programs:

- Saskatchewan brought in a housing allowance for low-income families and people with disabilities known as the Saskatchewan Rent Supplement Program.
- British Columbia expanded its housing allowance program for seniors, SAFER, doubling the money being invested to help 15,000 seniors.
- Manitoba tripled the number of households eligible for allowances
- BC has again doubled its funding, and has again doubled the households being helped, by adding 15,000 low-income working families to the BC housing allowance program
- Ontario introduced the ROOF program to assist 35,000 low income working families