

Election 2016 UNSPUN



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Ask them about Manitoba's Poorly Housed

What are provincial politicians going to do about poorly housed Manitobans? One third of Manitoba renters live in core housing need, meaning they spend over 30 per cent of their income on housing and live in overcrowded and/or unsafe housing conditions. Many do not have housing at all, as demonstrated by the 2015 Street Census that counted at least 1,400 homeless people living in Winnipeg.

When governments build housing and provide necessary supports, low income people experience improved health, education, and employment outcomes. Communities experience increased stability and safety. Public sector investment is needed as the market on its own has proven it cannot provide sufficient housing for low income people. If governments do not act, they exacerbate systemic social issues, colonialism, privilege and inequity. This affects us all, whether we acknowledge it or not. To do nothing is unjust and prevents people from escaping the cycle of poverty.

Housing supply and demand must be considered together to make serious gains for the most vulnerable people. The supply of housing available to lower income Manitobans is insufficient, and the housing available to rent is not affordable for those that need it the most. On

the demand side, low income people require income supports to access housing. The Right to Housing Coalition along with Make Poverty History Manitoba worked hard to advance the need for rent supplements set at 75 percent of median market rent. The provincial government responded with the creation of Rent Assist, an income benefit available to those on social assistance and the working poor. Even with gains made by the current NDP Government through the maintenance of existing units, new capital builds and rental support programs, thousands of rental households remain in core housing need.

Provincially, the Right to Housing Coalition has set a minimum public policy goal of 300 net new rent geared to income (RGI) units per year for the next five years. The "net" is important as although new RGI units are being built, other units are being torn down, converted to condos or non-profit providers are forced to raise rents as federal operating grants expire. It is also important to realize that 300 units is not going to come close to meeting the need. Consider that the End Homelessness Winnipeg Project goal is 300 new units just to house Winnipeg's homeless. There is also housing needed for youth coming out of care, people migrating to our cities from rural and northern Manitoba and seniors no longer able to afford

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their current housing, be it owned or rented. There are also the large families of refugees for which it is almost impossible to find four and five bedroom housing that is affordable for them. Given these realities 1,000 new units per year would not be too many, however Right to Housing has always maintained that housing is not only a provincial responsibility and we have held and continue to hold the Federal government responsible to fund at least a 2/3 share of the housing we need.

What can our provincial political parties do to solve these problems? Right to Housing is asking the parties to publicly state their housing policy intentions before Manitobans go to the polls. We challenge them to address the growing housing shortage with significant, community-led, comprehensive strategies.

It is promising that political parties are responding to community concerns regarding low income housing. At the March 23rd Make Poverty History Manitoba electoral debate, the Liberals, NDP and PCs all committed to continue Rent Assist. The Greens said they would end Rent Assist and instead provide support through a level of guaranteed income. If elected, the NDP and Greens agreed to create 300 net new RGI units of housing per year. The Liberals and PCs agreed more social housing was needed but did not commit to any specifics. Only the NDP has specified how much they would invest to maintain the public housing stock in good repair. The available details on how each of the parties would implement these commitments vary.

The parties have publicly shared components of housing policies, but aspects remain unclear. Notably the parties have not all stated they will maintain existing public units in good repair. When the question was put to them at the March 23rd debate, all candidates stated their parties would not sell off public housing to the private sector as other jurisdictions have done.

This would make these assets no longer available to benefit the public good.

The Right to Housing Coalition is asking all parties to commit long term to the future of housing in Manitoba. It is important to press all parties for clarity and action now. Ask your politicians what their party plans to do about Manitoba's poorly housed people. Following the election Right to Housing will continue to hold our provincial government responsible for their action or inaction.

Join Right to Housing on April 9, 11am for a rally at the Legislature to amplify our voices in the election!

The Right to Housing Coalition is a volunteer, non-partisan, secular housing advocacy coalition made up of volunteers, sixty supporting organizations and over 275 individual members.

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UNSPUN is the 2016 provincial election commentary from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba

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