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PROTECTING MANITOBA'S PUBLICLY FUNDED HOUSING

Prepared by Leah Landry on behalf of the Right to Housing Coalition in Manitoba



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Social housing is often the only housing affordable to very low- to low-income households, and its protection is vital (RTH, 2025a). Social housing is publicly funded housing owned by non-profit organizations, housing co-operatives, or the government. It is targeted to lower-income and vulnerable groups and provides rent-geared-to-income (RGI) units, meaning rents are set at less than 30 percent of a household's before-tax income. Like elsewhere in Canada, there is not enough social and affordable housing in Manitoba. Making matters worse, the current stock is at risk of shrinking due to longstanding inadequate government funding and the expiry of government funding agreements. This funding shortage leaves housing vulnerable to disrepair, conversion to higher or market-rent rates, and to sell-off (MNPHA, 2018; Annable & Barghout, 2023).

In recent years, hundreds of publicly funded social and affordable housing units in Manitoba have been sold off to for-profit companies, leaving lower-income households with few to no other affordable housing options. In addition to the loss of units and displacement of lower-income renter households, the sale of social housing results in the loss of taxpayer-funded community assets. For example, in 2018, Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation (Manitoba Housing), the government housing body, sold a 374-unit government-owned social housing high-

rise in Winnipeg to a for-profit developer (Donnelly & Levasseur, 2023). In 2023, the non-profit organization Lions Housing Centres sold a 287-unit social housing complex ('Lions Place') for seniors in Winnipeg to a for-profit residential real estate company. The funding agreement with the federal and provincial governments for this building had previously expired (Crabb, 2022).

Since the sale of Lions Place in 2023, social housing advocates in Manitoba have pushed for legislation to prevent the sale of publicly funded social and affordable housing to for-profit companies (RTH, 2025b; Smith, 2025). A precedent was set in Quebec in 2022 with the passage of Bill 37, which requires that publicly funded social housing retain its purpose and that permission be obtained from the Minister of Housing for its sale (National Assembly of Quebec, 2022). In November of 2025, under pressure from advocates, the Manitoba government followed suit with the introduction of *Bill 12, the Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act*.

On January 1, 2026, Manitoba passed *The Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act*, becoming the second province to legislate the protection of publicly funded social and affordable housing.¹ Under this new law, owners of such housing must submit an application to Manitoba Housing for the demolition, change of purpose, or sale of qualifying buildings. Qualifying buildings are those that received construction funding (including for acquisition, improvement, rehabilitation and conversion) of at least 15% of total costs and whose funding is part of an existing or new funding agreement with Manitoba Housing as of January 1, 2026. Manitoba Housing must consider the public interest by evaluating an application against its potential negative impact on either the general supply of housing or the affordable housing stock in Manitoba, and with respect to the latter, "... particularly [for] those in need of social housing" (Government of Manitoba, 2025,14.4(2), (b)). Manitoba Housing may deny or permit an application, with or without conditions, such as stipulating that rents remain affordable.

A strong aspect of the new Act is the permanent protection of qualifying buildings through a legal caveat on the land title for the property on which the building rests. The land title is a legal document that registers the ownership of the property with the government. The caveat requires Manitoba Housing's consent for the building's demolition, change of purpose, or sale by both the current and subsequent owners of the land. This is an important mechanism to keep buildings dedicated to social and affordable housing beyond the length of a funding agreement, and to preserve taxpayer-funded community assets in perpetuity.

While a positive step forward towards the protection of Manitoba's vulnerable social housing stock, several shortcomings in the new Act undermine its potential to provide robust, comprehensive protection of the social and affordable housing stock and the security of tenure for lower-income tenants. The new Act does not protect all buildings that provide social and affordable housing, provides too much leeway for the government to grant consent to its demolition, change of purpose, or sale, and provides no protection at all for tenants in instances where applications are approved.

The Act does not apply to, and therefore does not protect, the majority of Manitoba's existing social and affordable housing stock. The provincial government stated the new Act would protect only "over 5,000" existing units as of January 1, 2026 (Smith, 2025). While complete and reliable data on the quantity of social housing units in Manitoba is unavailable, to put this figure into context, there are more than 16,000 social housing units owned by Manitoba Housing and more than 12,000 owned by non-profit organizations and co-operatives (MHAH, 2024; CMHC, 2025; Annable & Barghout). Buildings excluded from the new Act are significant. For example, government-owned buildings are excluded, which make up more than half the social and affordable housing stock. Buildings with government funding agreements that expired before the Act came into force are also excluded. As of 2023, there were 5,000 social housing units in non-profit-owned buildings with expired funding agreements (Annable & Barghout). Accordingly, even if Lions Place had not yet been sold, the new Act could not protect it retroactively since its funding agreement had expired. Buildings funded solely with operating funds, such as for rent subsidies, are excluded as well. Finally, buildings funded by a government entity other than Manitoba Housing, and where Manitoba Housing does not contribute at least 15 percent of the construction funding, are excluded.

These latter two exclusions are particularly concerning when the bulk of future social and affordable rental housing is expected to be largely funded by the new, soon-to-be federal crown corporation Build Canada Homes (BCH). BCH will fund the capital costs of new social and affordable housing across Canada, but will require operating subsidies from other levels of government to keep rents affordable for lower-income households (SHHR, 2026). It is possible that new BCH-supported social and affordable housing with subsidized rent from Manitoba Housing may not meet the eligibility requirements under the new provincial Act to protect the new buildings (unless Manitoba Housing provides 15 percent

of construction funding). This raises the question for advocates about how federally funded social housing can be protected going forward.

The new Act does not provide strong enough guardrails to prevent the provincial government from consenting to the demolition, change of purpose or sale of qualifying buildings to the for-profit sector. Firstly, the authority to consent to an application resides with the public crown corporation, Manitoba Housing, rather than, more appropriately, with the provincial Minister responsible for housing. In the past, Manitoba Housing has sold off its assets, and there is no guarantee it will not do so again. Unlike the Minister, Manitoba Housing officials are not democratically elected and are less directly accountable to the public. Decisions made by Manitoba Housing, without political oversight, are largely removed from public scrutiny. Shifting this authority to the Minister would increase transparency and accountability. Secondly, the criteria for evaluation of an application do not explicitly stipulate the preservation of the existing social and affordable housing stock. To be truly protective, the criteria must require no net loss in the number of units in the existing social and affordable housing stock.

Finally, the Act makes no provision for the protection of lower-income tenants residing in social and affordable housing buildings that are approved for sale, demolition, or a change of purpose. Tenants are at risk of being displaced into unaffordable housing in a market with few to no affordable options, or even into homelessness. For tenants who lose their existing housing, the new Act should require the government to ensure that alternative and comparable non-market² housing at the same rent, acceptable to the tenant, is secured in advance.

Social and affordable housing advocates in Manitoba have successfully pushed their government to provide concrete protections for social and affordable housing through legislation that imposes constraints on demolition, change of purpose, and the sale of publicly funded buildings. While legal protection has a limited purview, as it cannot address the underlying issue of inadequate public funding that puts social housing and its tenants at risk, it is nonetheless a vital safeguard for preserving the existing social and affordable housing stock and protecting publicly funded investments. As it stands, the new Act in Manitoba will likely make a modest contribution to protecting this housing stock, but to have a significant impact, it should be strengthened in several key areas:

- There should be more comprehensive criteria for qualifying buildings that bring the majority of units under its protection.

- Consent for demolition, change of purpose, or sale should rest with the Minister and be contingent on there being no net loss of existing social and affordable housing units.
- Finally, tenants in impacted buildings should be guaranteed placement in alternative, affordable, non-market housing.

While progress has been made at the provincial level, housing advocates must turn their minds towards the question of how new federally-funded housing can be protected, to safeguard the future of Manitoba and Canada's social and affordable housing stock and the lower-income households reliant on it.

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Notes

- 1 The new legislation has a different definition of social housing, which is not necessarily rent-geared-to-income. It is described as “adequate, affordable and accessible housing for individuals or families of low income that is offered at below-market rate or otherwise supported or subsidized by [Manitoba Housing]” (14.1). This article therefore uses the terms “social and affordable housing” to make the distinction between social housing, housing owned by the government, non-profits or co-operative and where rents are below 30% of before tax household income, and affordable housing, any housing where rents are set below the market rate.
- 2 Non-market refers to the ownership of housing, either by a government entity, a non-profit organization or a co-operative.

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About the author

The Right to Housing Coalition is a group of individuals and organizations concerned about housing insecurity and homelessness experienced by low-income renters in Manitoba. Leah Landry is a researcher with the Right to Housing Coalition. She extends her sincere thanks to coalition members Erika Wiebe and Lynne Fernandez for their collaboration in the preparation of this report. The Right to Housing Coalition is a group of individuals and organizations concerned about housing insecurity and homelessness experienced by low-income renters in Manitoba.

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