



# HOUSING STARTS HERE

Volume One : November 2009

## MESSAGE from the Minister



Welcome to our very first edition of *Housing Starts Here* – Housing and Urban Affairs’ new quarterly newsletter. As you know, this past spring marked our one-year anniversary as a stand-alone Ministry. In that short time, we have firmly positioned Alberta as an innovator and a national leader in addressing the growing social and urban issues of affordable housing and homelessness.

Our impact as a Ministry is magnified by the relationships we foster with municipalities, other levels of government, private industry and non-profit organizations. This newsletter is an excellent opportunity to connect with Albertans and our industry partners.

*Housing Starts Here* will keep Albertans informed about our progress on major strategies like Alberta’s 10 year plan to end homelessness. It will also give updates as the Ministry moves forward with new initiatives.

This newsletter will also create a better understanding of our policies and programs that support lower-income Albertans to access and maintain safe, sustainable and affordable housing.

Thank you for your excellent work on behalf of Albertans and for your continued interest and commitment to addressing the issues of affordable housing and homelessness.



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## ALBERTA’S 10-YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS

Alberta made history this year by becoming the first province in Canada to create a 10 year provincial strategy to end homelessness. *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*, is based on the premise that ending homelessness will only occur when we shift focus from finding people a place to sleep, to finding

people a place to live. Alberta’s plan puts the housing needs of homeless individuals and families first. It then provides the right services needed to address the inherent causes of homelessness – whether it’s an addiction, mental or physical health issues. This approach is called “Housing First” and is the foundation of Alberta’s plan.

While we will continue to provide support to emergency shelters, our goal is to have a client move into permanent housing within 21 days of entering a shelter.

It is recognized that the causes of homelessness are as diverse and complex as the individuals themselves.

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## Alberta will invest \$400 million to develop 2,700 housing units for homeless Albertans

Without an address or identification, people face considerable barriers to finding or accessing the help they need to change their lives.

Supports for one chronically homeless individual can exceed \$100,000. These include shelter costs, ambulance trips, hospital stays and in some cases costs incurred through the justice system.

By using "Housing First", studies have shown the cost to house a homeless individual with supports can be reduced to about \$35,000.

On April 23, the province announced \$400 million in capital to support the development of 2,700 housing units for homeless Albertans, over the next three years. This year we will invest

\$100 million in capital and another \$32 million to move 1,000 homeless Albertans from the street into housing. This action will make a profound and positive difference in the lives of very vulnerable people.

To find out more about affordable housing and homelessness as well as *A Plan for Alberta*, visit [www.housing.alberta.ca](http://www.housing.alberta.ca).

## CANADA ALBERTA AGREEMENT BOOSTS AFFORDABLE HOUSING FUNDING

On June 25, the province and the federal government announced a joint investment to develop new affordable housing units and renovate existing publicly owned housing in Alberta.

Both levels of government signed an amendment to the Canada-Alberta Affordable Housing Program Agreement and announced \$387 million over the next two years.

The province owns 26,000 social housing units and most are over 26 years old.

The renovation funds will be used for large scale improvement to these units such as: replacing doors, windows, and roofs or upgrading plumbing, electrical, and ventilation systems. The provincial contribution of \$45 million was matched by \$45 million from the federal government.

This September over \$11 million worth of eligible repairs were approved and housing stock is being evaluated to determine next year's retrofit and renovation budget.

## HUA HELPS SHELTERS PREPARE FOR H1N1

Housing and Urban Affairs worked with Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health and Wellness to develop an *H1N1 planning guide* to assist agency staff who work with the homeless and other at risk vulnerable populations.

The guide contains information on the prevention, resources and preparation needed to respond to a potential outbreak of H1N1 and other seasonal flu. These guidelines are being used by shelter operators and other homeless serving organizations.

The guide includes advice on communication during a flu outbreak, how to stop or slow the transmission of the virus and the organization responsible for various tasks.

Meetings were held in Calgary and Edmonton to review the *Planning Guide* with front line workers.

For complete and up-to-date information on H1N1 and the flu season, please visit Alberta Health Services at: <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/658.asp> or Alberta Health and Wellness at: <http://www.health.alberta.ca/health-info/influenza-H1N1.html>.

## HOUSING AND URBAN AFFAIRS 2008/2009 ANNUAL REPORT

is now available. The report contains an overview of the ministry's work in its first year. It can be viewed or downloaded on-line at [http://www.housing.alberta.ca/am\\_index.cfm](http://www.housing.alberta.ca/am_index.cfm)

## Housing and Urban Affairs allocated \$100 million to develop affordable housing in 39 Alberta municipalities, this year.

### PREPARING FOR FUTURE GROWTH IN FORT McMURRAY

On September 26, the province announced it is preparing for the next phase of growth by moving forward on new residential, industrial and commercial developments in Fort McMurray.

Over the next five years, the province will invest more than \$241 million to develop land in the Parsons Creek and Saline Creek Plateau areas adjacent to Fort McMurray. \$166 million will be used to complete an innovative new residential

development at Parsons Creek. The remaining dollars will bring utilities and roads to the Saline Creek Plateau area making future residential, commercial and industrial developments possible. Housing and Urban Affairs will be responsible for the development of Parson's Creek.

Phase One of Parsons Creek will include more than 2,000 new housing units and will be home to an estimated 6,500 residents. A full 20 per cent of the homes will be

designated as affordable housing, with rents at least 10 per cent below market rate.

"This funding will make a real difference in the lives of many families living in Fort McMurray, said Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, Yvonne Fritz. "The Parsons Creek Development will provide low to moderate-income families with a safe and secure place to live and contribute to building a strong community."



Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, Yvonne Fritz, Premier Ed Stelmach and Melissa Blake, Mayor of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo answer questions from the media.

In addition to building more affordable housing at Parsons Creek, the province is committed to making the community both environmentally sustainable and healthy. Green technologies, like alternative energy sources, are being explored and features like extensive parks and walkable neighbourhoods will be included in the plans. The goal is to put Fort McMurray at the forefront of innovative urban design. Public consultations on the preliminary plans for Parsons Creek began in October.

### PROVINCE DEVELOPS THOUSANDS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING UNITS FOR ALBERTANS

Thousands of Alberta families and individuals are able to access safe and affordable housing, thanks to the affordable housing program.

In the past two years, Housing and Urban Affairs (HUA) has supported the development of close to 6,000 affordable housing units throughout the province. The ministry is on track to support the creation of 11,000 new housing units by 2012.

HUA provides funds for affordable housing through municipal block funding and grants through a Request

for Proposals (RFP) process.

This year the province will provide \$100 million in block funding to 39 Alberta municipalities and \$90.3 million through requests for proposals.

HUA relies on partnerships with municipalities, community based organizations, and the private sector to develop affordable housing.

The ministry has developed some unique partnerships. For example, Alberta became the first province to partner with Habitat for Humanity to make affordable

homeownership possible for low-to-moderate income Albertans.

Sharon, a single mother of two, says homeownership through Habitat for Humanity has been a blessing for her family.

"I'm grateful to Habitat for Humanity for making my families dreams and prayers come true and giving me peace of mind and safe, affordable housing," she says.

Before moving into her new home the working mom was spending 60 per cent of her salary on rent every month.

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*Alberta will contribute \$32 million to help homeless people access housing and supports to address the underlying causes of their homelessness.*

"We lived in a town house... and I was barely living pay cheque to pay cheque." she said.

Sharon's mortgage payment is based on approximately 30 per cent of her total income.

Alfred Nikolai, President and CEO, of Edmonton Habitat for Humanity says affordable housing can transform people's lives.

"A home provides dignity and self esteem, which is an essential part of being in our society, he said. "There is no more direct way to help someone than by helping them get a safe and secure home."

Sharon says she will always be thankful to Habitat for Humanity for helping her realize her dream of affordable home ownership.

Sharon and her sons moved into the 100th Edmonton home this summer.



Mary Cameron, (left) Chair of Habitat Edmonton's Board of Directors, and Alfred Nikolai President and CEO of Habitat for Humanity are presented with a plaque by Minister Yvonne Fritz during the 100th Edmonton home celebration.

## CREATING A PATHWAY TO PERMANENT HOUSING IN CALGARY

In 2007, the Alex Community Health Centre, supported by Housing and Urban Affairs, established a Pathways to Housing program in Calgary. This innovative program provides housing, access to medical and psychiatric care, and case management services to homeless Albertans who are most at-risk. In some cases, these services may also relate to employment and life skills.

Pathways to Housing is led by program director Dr. Pam Thompson and it works with clients one-on-one to assist them in meeting their goals. Instead of leaving clients to navigate a complex system of community agencies and services on their own, the Pathways team works

with clients to help them remove their barriers to independent, successful living.

Pathways is also the first in Calgary to work specifically with people leaving correctional facilities. In June of this year, Pathways launched a second team to meet the needs of homeless and mentally ill people who have a history of involvement with the criminal justice system. Instead of returning to homelessness and the environment that led to criminal behaviour, the team intervenes and helps break the cycle by providing a home and the tools needed to make lasting change.

For more information on this program, visit the website at [www.thealex.ca/pathways](http://www.thealex.ca/pathways).

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