
Knowledge Translation in Action: Creating Policy Change through Housing Research

Presented by: Debbie Thompson, MSc

February 28, 2013

Overview

- A little about my work in housing sector
- This presentation informed by my review of Housing Policy in 2012 for Positive Living, Positive Homes
- Framing the issue in Canada
- Some considerations when advocating for policy changes
- Things I've learned working in the housing business
- Questions/Discussion

Federal policy highlights

1946

1963

1970

1992

1996

Policy Decisions

Canadian Housing and Mortgage Association established, with focus on programs to enable home ownership in post war housing shortage

Major public housing investments

Capital gains tax exemption for owner occupied properties (loss of tax revenue)

The Home Buyers' Plan and First Home Loan Insurance Program introduced (home ownership became more accessible)

Responsibility for social housing shifts from federal to provincial and territorial governments - some provinces then devolved this to municipal governments

Context: Framing the issue

Observations about Canadian Housing System

- Most Canadians access housing through private market (renters & owners) – Canada has high home ownership rate (creates imbalance)
- Availability and cost of residential land in each region vary considerably
- Building condos and houses for private market yields larger profit compared to rental units
- Federal transfer payments have declined steadily over the past 20 years (impacting provincial services such as education & social programs, etc.)

Context: Framing the issue cont'd

Observations about Canadian Housing System

- End of 25-50 year housing subsidy agreements for non-profit housing and co-ops will result in loss of below market rents
- About 90,000 units of housing get some form of provincial or federal government subsidy in BC

Federal Government role Diminishing:

- Historically housing policy was initiated and driven at the federal level
 - Human Resources and Social Development (HRSD) is main federal player responsible for housing matters
 - CMHC accountable to Parliament through HRSD
 - Established CMHC programs such as Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program are now managed at provincial level (except Yukon and PEI) – and requires matched funding from provincial government
 - CMHC now interacts at the provincial level (e.g. with the Province of BC through BC Housing)
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Context: Framing the issue cont'd

Provincial and Municipal Role Grows:

- Provinces initiating housing policy (e.g. BC launched *Housing Matters*, 2006)
- Province through *BC Housing* interacts with municipalities and not-for-profits, etc by providing financing options, rent subsidies, capital/operating funding – though operating funding very limited in current economic market
- **Successful partnership:** *BC Housing* successfully partnered with the City of Vancouver and Streethomes Foundation (City leveraged land) for funding commitment to create over 1000 supportive housing units in Vancouver (2010)

Context: Framing the issue cont'd

Provincial and Municipal Role Grows:

- Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) includes about 2000 communities across Canada and interacts at the federal level to advocate for more stable rental housing
- Health Authorities in BC provide supportive housing and portable subsidies for example *Vancouver Island Health Authority* and *Vancouver Coastal Health*

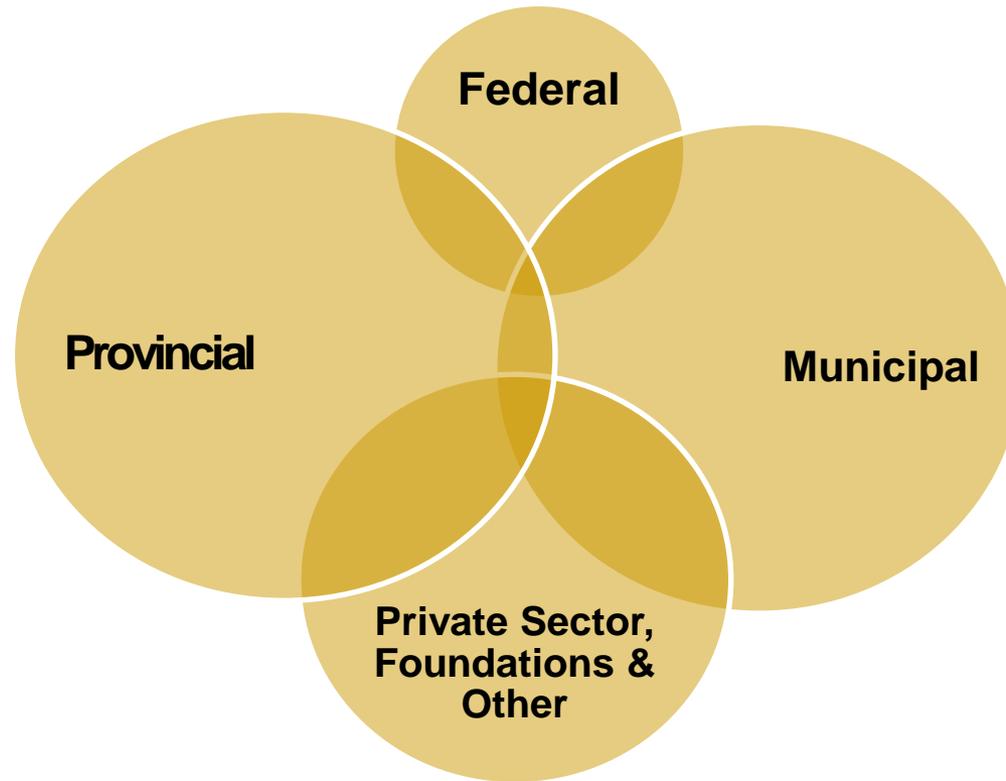
Context: Framing the issue cont'd

Another result of reduced federal government involvement:

Private Sector Role Increases:

- **Raising the Roof** – national homelessness advocate - education and partnerships funded by private companies and Ontario Trillium Foundation
- **Habitat for Humanity** – national affordable home ownership building program (through local affiliates); Some funding from CMHC; also interacts with provincial governments, private sector and private donors
- Role of charitable groups increasing (e.g. United Way, Salvation Army, churches)

Housing policy interactions



Context: Framing the issue cont'd

Housing equals Health

- Homelessness associated with elevated levels of HIV/AIDS and other risk behaviours among IDUs is influenced by living conditions and lack of resources (Song, Safaeian et al, 2000)
- *“Cities or countries with the most success in controlling, averting or reversing HIV epidemics among IDUs have adopted interventions in keeping with WHO endorsed principles of effective public health.”*
These interventions are community based and pragmatic, resulting in user friendly and accessible services (Ball,1998)
- Housing not only a social determinant of health it is a structural intervention that could reduce HIV transmission (Aidala et al, 2005)

Advocating for Policy Changes

- **Key consideration: Lack of National Housing Policy** - politically driven, typically changing with each new government or election, and often tied to short-term programs
 - **Example:** Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding was renewed in 2008 for 2 years, then 2011 for 3 years – expected to end on March 31, 2014
 - The consequence of no single national housing policy is a variety of provincial and local initiatives that may not be sustainable and in fact are tied to economic and housing market conditions (e.g. housing activity in recession (Hulchanski, 2003))

Advocating for Policy Changes

- **Key consideration:** Partnerships between the three levels of government are limited partly due to lack of clear strategy and political will
 - **Observation #1:** Likely unrealistic to expect federal intervention for PLHA because of the size of the issue – partnerships on a provincial-municipal or municipal-local-private sector level more likely – important to note that healthcare, which is inextricably linked to housing is provincial jurisdiction
 - **Observation #2:** In recent years, federal government funding typically has required greater financial commitment from provinces
 - This practice may result in federal government delaying funding and redirecting citizens that complain about inaction to provincial governments (Hulchanski 2003)

Advocating for Policy Changes

- **Key consideration:** Partnerships are limited partly due to lack of vision and political will between the three levels of government
 - **Successful partnership from USA:** NYC's supportive housing system for PLWHA is complex and unprecedented and includes funding from the federal level (HUD), state level (e.g. New York State Homes and Community Renewal) and city level (e.g. NYCHA)
 - HIV/AIDS epidemic in NYC galvanized politicians, activists, etc.
 - Approximately 107, 177 living with HIV/AIDS in NYC (75% 40 or older)
 - HIV/AIDS Services Administration (HASA) links medical care & housing
 - Federal funding linked to number of people with HIV/AIDS
 - Championed by Governor Anthony Cuomo and Mayor Michael Bloomberg

More considerations when advocating for policy changes:

- **Key consideration:** How proposed policy can impact the experience of stigma associated with HIV/AIDS
 - HIV/AIDS status can compound issues of racism, gender, immigration status, etc.
 - HIV-exclusive housing may not be the best solution for all - portable rent subsidies could offer an effective, appropriate alternative
 - HIV-exclusive housing faces challenges in smaller communities – however there are successful examples in larger urban centres such as Vancouver (McLaren House); Toronto (Fife House); Ottawa (Bruce House) etc.

More considerations when advocating for policy changes:

- **Key consideration:** At times provinces better positioned to contribute direct funding and leverage partnerships with private sector – however over time this fosters gaps among provinces
 - **Observation:** In the mid-80s to mid-90s, Ontario successfully produced approximately 50,000 units of social housing
- **Key consideration:** Aboriginal and First Nations disproportionately represented in homelessness statistics and many identified in core housing need across Canada. Therefore, it is important to consider their needs particularly in urban settings (off-reserve)

More considerations when advocating for policy changes:

- **Key Consideration:** Within existing policy frameworks or program descriptions, people living with HIV/AIDS seldom identified as a priority population
 - Opportunity for ASO, researchers and people with HIV/AIDS, to join forces with other special interest groups (e.g. people with mental illness and addictions) in advocacy for inclusive, sustainable housing
 - Within housing developments we need to advocate for inclusion of features to address challenges associated with chronic health issues, aging, mobility, protection of privacy, special medical considerations, etc.
 - When positioning the need for policy changes – it's important not to be perceived as creating competition among special interest groups/ marginalized populations

What does it mean to advocate for policy change & move research into action?

- Position evidence for affordable and supportive housing as driver for policy changes
- Be flexible and open as policy change may come “from the bottom up” and “from organizations doing things differently”
- Identify champions and people with political capital
- Partner with other special interest groups
- Create political pressure and buy-in

10 Things I've learned working in the housing business:

1. Homelessness is an attack on people's dignity, self-respect and choices
2. Important to position homelessness as a significant economic cost (e.g. policing, health care etc.)
3. Income distribution and employment are significant enablers to addressing housing affordability
4. People at risk of homelessness, including those with HIV/AIDS, require access to safe, affordable, permanent housing - for some this means:
 - ❑ Specific structural features required in the design
 - ❑ Onsite clinical supports and/or
 - ❑ Needles, crack-kits, alcohol, etc., available and accessible onsite

10 Things... cont'd

5. Housing and homelessness requires relentless political pressure from citizens and the political will of elected officials
6. Don't always need purpose-built housing – important to explore how existing properties (e.g. vacant buildings) can be leveraged
7. No one housing solution fits all needs and users must be included in the planning
8. Must link housing with health, employment and food security – this is a challenge as these fall under different government departments and levels

10 Things... cont'd

9. Create incentives for developers to include a percentage of social housing in new developments
10. Living wage and increasing social assistance/disability rates can reduce income disparities

In closing, housing will have a tremendous impact on many of the chronic health issues and stressors experienced in urban and rural communities across Canada.

These issues need to be championed by those communities, researchers, service providers, public health officials and policy makers.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION