

The Housing Strategy for Saskatchewan Provincial Action Plan 2011-12



**Saskatchewan
Ministry of
Social
Services**

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LEADING UP TO NEW ACTION

Housing Supply

Although Saskatchewan has experienced housing pressures in the past, the growth of the province has accelerated these challenges since 2007. In 2008, the Government of Saskatchewan commissioned a Task Force on Housing Affordability to find solutions to the issue of affordability. Since that Task Force, Government accomplished much to address the affordability issues in Saskatchewan beyond its regular ongoing activity in housing.

In response to housing supply, the Government of Saskatchewan has:

- Responded to demand for affordable housing through the new construction or acquisition and renovation of affordable housing units. This is in addition to the private sector increase in construction of rental units. Since November 2007, 800 rental units have been completed. An additional 1,100 new units are currently in development;
- Assisted low-income homeowners and landlords renting to low-income tenants by helping them to complete repairs necessary to improve the health, safety and energy efficiency of over 3,000 households;
- Committed federal-provincial funding that has allowed groups of municipalities to engage in regional planning activities and enhance their regional planning capacity through the Planning for Growth Program. Twenty-two projects were approved in 2010-11, representing 158 municipalities;
- In partnership with the federal government, committed funding to municipalities through various capital and operating programs. This funding will lead to the construction of over 4,000 priority infrastructure projects to build local capacity to accommodate growth;

- Cost-shared with the Government of Canada to improve the existing government-funded housing portfolio in Saskatchewan;
- Invested in over 500 student housing units at the University of Saskatchewan, SIAST in Prince Albert, Northwest Regional College in Meadow Lake, and NORTEP in La Ronge;
- Improved the processing time of subdivision applications, where the Ministry of Municipal Affairs is the approving authority, by implementing changes to reduce application processing and installing a new electronic system to expedite subdivision applications;
- Adjusted the Provincial Land Use Policy to give priority to the market when disposing of surplus land and/or properties; and
- Partnered with Habitat for Humanity of Saskatchewan to develop 70 homeowner units in select communities across Saskatchewan.

Housing Affordability

In response to housing affordability, the Government of Saskatchewan has:

- Increased rental housing supplements and shelter allowances by indexing them to the cost of living;
- Increased the income thresholds for seniors who wish to apply for social housing;
- Indexed personal tax brackets and indexed them to the national rate of inflation;
- Reduced the education portion of property taxes to make owning a home more affordable; and
- Fully committed the Saskatchewan Home Energy Improvement Program (SHEIP), making housing more energy efficient.

Barriers to Housing Affordability

In response to barriers to housing affordability, the Government of Saskatchewan has:

- Amended the Residential Tenancies Act to extend the notice period for rent increases to six months;
- To increase the availability of skilled labour, approved a recommendation for the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission to ensure there are two apprentices to one journeyman;
- Promoted the apprenticeship model to the public sector to increase the number of apprentices; and
- Expedited the recruitment of immigrants trained in trades through the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (SINP).

Understanding of Housing Issues

In response to understanding of housing issues, the Government of Saskatchewan has:

- Expanded the SHC Board of Directors to a board of “not less than five persons,” in order to bring in expertise from various sectors and increase transparency;
- Encouraged municipalities to implement Official Community Plans to better help communities plan and address housing issues;
- Included Residential Development as a provincial interest in the proposed Statements of Provincial Interest Regulation under *The Planning and Development Act*, 2007; and
- Begun work with municipalities to develop information tools and resources to address housing and resource issues.

The Task Force identified that problems and solutions to housing challenges must go beyond bricks and mortar. Despite implementing over 80 per cent of the recommendations of the Task Force, it is evident that more work is required than just focusing on affordability. There is a need for broader solutions that consider supply, affordability, planning and partnerships among the different housing sectors for the long term.

INTRODUCING THE 2011-12 PROVINCIAL ACTION PLAN

Under the Housing Strategy for Saskatchewan, the Government of Saskatchewan will create annual Provincial Action Plans. The plans will include actions that have immediate results as well as actions that will require work over multiple years. All Government of Saskatchewan actions will support improvements to the housing environment through the long term.

Through consultations with the housing sector, the message was strong and clear: the housing sector must improve the way we work together. The new Saskatchewan is growing. As a sector, we need to change the way we operate because we are no longer acting in a province with a stable or declining population.

Government actions in the first year of this eight-year strategy have a strong focus on increasing the housing supply, promoting partnership and improving the way we approach housing. The actions government will take in 2011-12 are responsive to what the housing sector in communities across Saskatchewan told us. Each action builds our role in this strategy, which has been created as a roadmap for the entire housing sector.

Each year, the Government of Saskatchewan will determine which strategy objectives it will address within an annual plan. Actions will be tracked and reported on an annual basis. In some cases, the actions may carry over into future years and become part of the way we work with our partners across the housing sector.

Strategic Direction 1 – Action to Increase the Housing Supply

The Government of Saskatchewan took an immediate step to increase housing supply across the province prior to the release of the Housing Strategy for Saskatchewan. It was critical to advance the Saskatchewan Advantage Housing Plan to ensure supply was created this building season. It is anticipated these new initiatives will increase the housing stock by 4,600 housing units over the next five years.

Examples of how the Government of Saskatchewan encourages new housing supply include direct investment in affordable housing projects in partnership with the federal government, supporting long-term community planning, and improving utility servicing processes.

Under this strategy, the Government of Saskatchewan actions for 2011-12 will continue to support the creation of additional housing supply across the province.

Objective 1.1 Develop new rental housing, high density housing and housing attainable for first time owners

Action 1: Deliver Headstart on a Home

Lead: Crown Investments Corporation

Expected Result: Municipalities and their partner developers are supported to create a minimum of 1,000 new homeownership opportunities for moderate-income households over five years

Action 2: Deliver the Affordable Home Ownership Program

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: 800 grants equivalent to the education portion of the property tax for five years to a maximum of \$5,000 over the next five years are provided to municipalities to support new homeowners to purchase a newly constructed home

Action 3: Deliver the Rental Construction Incentive

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: Municipalities and developers create 3,700 new rental units through the provision of a grant of up to \$5,000 to municipalities to match municipal grants or incentives provided to developers for each eligible new rental unit constructed

Action 4: Work with the municipal sector to develop options for a long-term, predictable and sustainable approach to infrastructure funding

Lead: Ministry of Municipal Affairs

Expected Result: A long-term approach is established to better enable municipalities to effectively plan and sustain community growth

Action 5: Redesign Saskatchewan Housing Corporation's Secondary Suites Program

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: The program is improved to increase participation and have the largest potential impact on the number of units created

Action 6: Identify barriers to the creation of new rental housing and solutions to increase new rental development

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: Rental property owners, residential builders and government will initiate discussions to jointly identify immediate and long-term strategies to increase the rental stock

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

Objective 1.2 Prioritize activity to zone and service land so it is available for residential development

Action 7: Review the success of the Saskatchewan Infrastructure Growth Initiative

Lead: Ministry of Municipal Affairs

Expected Result: If future opportunities arise to support similar types of programming that could provide incentives to municipalities to support new housing lot development and higher density housing, they will be considered

Action 8: Develop workshops and online resources co-ordination with applicable provincial, federal and municipal partners on the strategic linkages between municipal planning authority for residential development and municipal infrastructure planning to provide an appropriate level of servicing

Lead: Ministry of Municipal Affairs

Expected Result: Housing policies are established in Official Community Plans to encourage a range of housing options compatible with surrounding land uses which make best use of existing and planned infrastructure

Action 9: Deliver the Northern Residential Subdivision Program

Lead: Ministry of Municipal Affairs

Expected Result: Grants are provided to municipalities to create new serviced residential lots

Action 10: Implement the Summit Action Fund with \$6 million to support innovative housing initiatives

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: Projects that incorporate housing innovations identified by the housing sector

Action 11: Identify options for the housing sector to undertake housing development so economic growth is not constrained

Lead: Enterprise Saskatchewan

Expected Result: Options are discussed with the housing sector, broader industry and Enterprise Regions to increase housing that supports growth

Action 12: Identify most likely growth areas in co-ordination with industry and governments

Lead: Enterprise Saskatchewan

Expected Result: Communities, regions and industry have quality information and data to identify future housing needs and prepare for growth

Action 13: Collaborate with post-secondary institutions and identify options to address current and future student housing issues

Lead: Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration with the support of the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: Increased knowledge of student housing needs and the best solutions to meet those needs

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2

Strategic Direction 2 – Action to Improve Housing Affordability

Currently, the Government of Saskatchewan offers various initiatives that improve housing affordability for the people of Saskatchewan. Examples include the Saskatchewan Rental Housing Supplement, social and affordable housing programs, funding

of new development and renovations to create affordable housing supply, and repair programs to maintain housing that is affordable for low-income people.

Under this strategy, the Government of Saskatchewan has identified actions for 2011-12 that will work to improve housing affordability into the long term.

Objective 2.3 Maintain the most affordable housing – the existing housing stock

Action 14: Redesign Saskatchewan Housing Corporation's suite of repair programs

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: Improve programs that have the greatest potential impact to extend the life of housing that is affordable for low-income people through a simplified process for applicants

Action 15: Partner with Habitat for Humanity on a pilot project to complete energy upgrades to seven homes in Regina and Saskatoon through the Home Energy Legacy Project

Lead: SaskEnergy

Expected Result: Significant energy efficiency upgrades will be completed for low-income households including new high efficiency furnaces, other high priority energy efficiency upgrades and new low-flow toilets

Action 16: Deliver Saskatchewan EnerGuide for Houses to assist existing homeowners in making energy efficiency improvements

Lead: SaskEnergy with the support of Crown Investments Corporation

Expected Result: Reduced utility costs and greenhouse gas emissions for households

Action 17: Deliver Energy Efficiency Rebate for New Homes to builders and homeowners

Lead: Ministry of Environment with the support of SaskPower and SaskEnergy

Expected Result: New homes are built to be energy efficient, resulting in reduced utility costs and greenhouse gas emissions

Objective 2.4 Streamline processes to speed development aimed at housing that is affordable

Action 18: Streamline the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation rental development program process

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: Reduction in time to develop housing funded through programs for people in housing need

Action 19: Identify programs and initiatives delivered by government that have the potential to support housing affordability

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: Creation of inventory of government programs created that have an impact on housing affordability in order to identify the ability to adapt them to increase housing affordability

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

Strategic Direction 3 – Action to Support Individuals and Families in Greatest Housing Need

The province currently supports the needs of those most vulnerable and in greatest housing need through services and income supports. Such services include safe shelters for women and families

fleeing violence and regularly indexed shelter allowances for Social Assistance recipients.

In 2011-12, the Government of Saskatchewan will continue to support individuals and families in the greatest housing need.

Objective 3.1 Address gaps in supply, services and income supports along the housing continuum for greater availability of housing targeted for low-income and vulnerable people

Action 20: Renegotiate bilateral agreements under Investment in Affordable Housing 2011-2014 with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: Increased ability to meet provincial needs through housing investments that are cost-matched with the federal government

Action 21: Renew the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation Social Housing Program

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: Social housing eligibility will be targeted to reach those with the greatest housing need

Action 22: Co-ordinate with community-based organizations to identify ways for a more seamless process to secure appropriate housing for vulnerable populations

Lead: Ministry of Social Services with the support of the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: Identification of ways to streamline housing options for individuals and families who are having trouble finding stable housing

Action 23: Complete an annual survey of rental rates in the market in communities with populations under 10,000 people

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation with the support of the Ministry of Social Services

Expected Result: Improved indexing of Saskatchewan Social Assistance Program shelter rates and the Saskatchewan Rental Housing Supplement rates

Action 24: Work with Northern communities to identify housing needs and improve Saskatchewan Housing Corporation programs targeted to Northern residents

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation with the support of the Ministry of First Nations and Métis Relations

Expected Result: Increased understanding of need and relevance of government housing programs targeted for the North

Action 25: Increase co-ordination with the federal government and local communities on homelessness initiatives

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation with the support of the Ministry of Social Services

Expected Result: Increased partnership and collaboration on projects to understand homelessness and support those who are homeless

Objective 3.3 Support the availability of the appropriate type of housing and complementary supports to individuals and families with housing need

Action 26: Review the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation repair programs for low-income seniors and persons with disabilities

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: Improvements are identified in order to redesign programs to better meet the needs of seniors and persons with disabilities

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4

Strategic Direction 4 – Action to Enhance Strategic Planning for Housing

The province currently supports planning by providing financial support to municipalities to undertake community planning through Planning for Growth. In addition, the province provides community

planning support and provision of information and expertise about housing to communities and local organizations.

Under this strategy, the Government of Saskatchewan has identified various actions for 2011-12 that will promote and support planning for housing across the province.

Objective 4.1 Plan for housing at both the community and regional level

Action 27: Explore methods and sources to provide support to municipalities targeted at enhancing regional planning for housing

Lead: Enterprise Saskatchewan with the support of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: Increased planning for housing at the regional level

Action 28: Improve Municipal Information Data Portal web pages to include housing market trends, planning tools and resources

Lead: Ministry of Municipal Affairs with the support of the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: Increased availability of quality information and resources for the municipal sector to plan for housing

Action 29: Investigate opportunity to partner with industry to link information on housing availability to the proposed Enterprise Geographic Information System (GIS) and SaskBiz

Lead: Enterprise Saskatchewan with the support of the Information Technology Office

Expected Result: If feasible, increased availability of quality information will be provided to the housing sector and broader industry

Action 30: Redesign the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation Encouraging Community Housing Options (ECHO) initiative to provide financial support for communities and regions to leverage other resources to develop long-term housing plans

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: More communities and regions will have housing plans developed

Objective 4.2 Increase accuracy and availability of data and expertise about housing
Action 31: Provide assistance to address regional housing issues and support regional housing planning initiatives
Lead: Enterprise Saskatchewan Expected Result: Increased co-ordination and ability to leverage housing resources between communities within a region
Action 32: Redesign the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation Research Program to include housing sector representation and identify long-term housing research priorities
Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation Expected Result: Formation of a committee that is representative of the housing sector and development of research initiatives that support housing strategy objectives
Action 33: Partner with the City of Saskatoon to do an inventory of rental stock in the city including the rental stock owned by SHC, non-profits and the private market
Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation Expected Result: Availability of information to determine the shortage of supply by type, location and price to be used as a benchmark for planning and performance
Action 34: Create a partnership across government to share and make available relevant data and information related to housing and growth regions across the province
Lead: Enterprise Saskatchewan with the support of the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation Expected Result: Increased co-ordination between government Ministries, Crown corporations and agencies and increased availability of quality data for the housing sector
Action 35: Undertake and share the results of the SHC Small Communities Rental Market Survey on an annual basis
Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation Expected Result: Increased knowledge and availability of data on the rental market for communities and regions, private sector and government

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 5

Strategic Direction 5 – Action to Communicate, Collaborate and Educate

The province currently enhances communication by regularly participating in meetings with representatives of Saskatchewan municipalities. The province also collaborates with community-based housing providers to

ensure compliance with agreements and sustainability in the shape of funding, guidance, and support.

Under this strategy, the Government of Saskatchewan has identified actions for 2011-12 that will enhance and promote communication, collaboration and education.

Objective 5.1 Increase public and sector awareness of housing issues and needs across the continuum and the proven practices and solutions

Action 36: Create an online hub of housing information

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: Increased ability for housing stakeholders to access and share relevant and quality information, data and resources

Objective 5.2 Increase partnerships to leverage financial and human resources

Action 37: Establish and support the initial Housing Action Teams under the Housing Strategy for Saskatchewan

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

Expected Result: Housing Action Teams that are representative of the housing sector to drive actions within the strategy

Objective 5.3 Communicate proven practices as a resource to help the housing sector

Action 38: Analyze activity in other jurisdictions that have experienced high levels of growth

Lead: Saskatchewan Housing Corporation with the support of Enterprise Saskatchewan

Expected Result: Identification of potential solutions or innovation that could alleviate pressures in Saskatchewan

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