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MEDIA RELEASE



Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada
Ontario Region

For Immediate Release

Wanted: Affordable Homes in Northern Ontario

Tight markets and low rental production makes affordable housing hard to find in North

(Toronto, September 15, 2011) - Authors of a newly released report on housing issues are calling on provincial candidates to focus on creating affordable homes for more than 152,000 households on housing wait lists across Ontario.

The 2011 edition of *Where's Home?*, authored by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA) and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada Ontario Region (CHF Canada Ontario Region), analyzes 22 separate housing markets and highlights the need for more affordable rental housing across the Province.

This year's report shows that it is increasingly difficult for low and modest income people in Northern Ontario to find affordable rental housing options that are appropriate for their families. Vacancy rates in North Bay (2.1%), Timmins (1.7%), and Thunder Bay (2.2%) are all below the 3% vacancy rate threshold - meaning tenants have fewer choices for rental housing and that rent increases taking place after a unit is vacated are higher in Northern Ontario than in other areas.

"While vacancy rates vary from region to region in the North, one thing that is consistent is the relatively inadequate amount of rental housing production," says Sharad Kerur, ONPHA's Executive Director. "While areas like North Bay and Sudbury have seen modest increases in rental housing over the past few years, it is still nowhere near enough to make up for almost non-existent rental housing development between 1996 and 2006. In some areas the situation is even more serious - in Timmins, there has been virtually no new rental housing built in 20 years."

In addition to inadequate supply, rent levels in some areas of Northern Ontario have increased substantially in recent years.

"Low vacancy rates, increasing demand and a lack of new production is a recipe for rent increases," said Harvey Cooper, Manager of Government Relations at CHF Canada Ontario Region. "North Bay saw the greatest average rent increase in Ontario last year - a 4.1% rise, and in Sudbury rents have gone up over 25% since 2005. These are more than just numbers, for many families even a small increase in rent means a big impact on the household budget."

While this year's report brings attention to a number of troubling trends, there are bright spots that show progress can be made if communities have access to innovative ideas, government support, and sufficient levels of funding.

"While the number of new rental units being produced is not nearly enough to meet the growing demand, recent initiatives – particularly the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program (AHP) - have helped create more affordable and supportive housing for those in need," said Kerur. "Since 2005, over 8,500 of these units were created by non-profit and, to a lesser extent, co-operative housing organizations – showing that with government funding and support, communities can create more affordable homes."

In order to meet increasing rental housing demand, over 10,000 new rental units would need to be built each and every year for the next ten years in Ontario. While the need is big, so is the commitment of the organizations that make up the membership of ONPHA and CHF Canada Ontario Region.

"We know that housing is a fundamental building block of people's lives," says Cooper. "Our members want to see senior governments take a balanced approach to the creation of more affordable housing for people across the income spectrum. By combining permanently affordable co-op and non-profit housing, private sector rental, renovation programs for existing housing stock and financial tools like rent supplements to fill vacant units, we can move people off housing waiting lists and into affordable homes."

"Where's Home?" can be found on www.onpha.on.ca or www.chfcanada.coop.

For more information, contact:

ONPHA's Margaret McCutcheon: 647-400-7496 or (416) 927-9144 ext. 115

CHF Canada Ontario Region's Harvey Cooper: (416) 809-5048 (cell) or (416) 366-1711 ext. 237