

Canadian Housing Survey – Cycle 4 Content Consultation

Submission to Statistics Canada and the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation

November 15, 2023

About CCHR

CCHR is Canada's leading registered charitable organization working to advance the right to adequate housing. For 35 years, we have worked tirelessly at the intersection of human rights and housing, providing free services to renters facing evictions and human rights violations to remain housed, providing education and training about housing rights across Canada, and advancing rights-based housing policy through research, policy advocacy, and law reform.

CCHR makes extensive use of Canadian housing data sources, including the Canadian Housing Survey (CHS), in our research and policy analysis work. We have firsthand experience of the value of CHS data as well as of data gaps. Some of our formal research work involves identifying and helping to fill housing data gaps.

Introduction

The CHS is a very valuable data source that we use extensively in our work. We appreciate the opportunity to provide input on the content that will be used in Cycle 4 of the CHS.

The CHS proposes to add five themes to its coverage: Human Rights-Based Approach to Housing; Adequate Housing (as defined by the United Nations (UN)); additional content to advance GBA+ analysis; new content on experience of discrimination in housing; and additional content on housing transitions. CCHR supports the inclusion of all five of these themes.

Canada is in the midst of a nationwide housing crisis. Adequate, affordable housing stock is being lost at an alarming rate. Households are losing their homes in record numbers, and experiencing inadequate housing or homelessness. In this context, it is crucial to collect robust, detailed data regarding households' loss of adequate housing, especially as a result of unaffordability. Our recommendations focus on those issues.

Recommendations

1. Capture all housing loss due to unaffordability

Affordability is a core element of adequate housing. More data is needed on the reasons that people lose their homes due to unaffordability.

The current CHS asks respondents why they moved from their previous dwelling (PAC_Q45). The available answers do not adequately capture households which moved because they could not afford the rent.

In some cases, households living in unaffordable housing miss rent payments and are evicted, either formally or informally, by their landlord. Those households can answer "01: Because you were forced to move by a landlord." However, some households move prior to missing rent payments, because they recognize that they will not be able to afford the rent. Others move after receiving an eviction notice, but may nonetheless consider themselves to have chosen to

move. These households are not captured by answer 01, and the question currently does not have any other answer that captures their circumstances.

We therefore recommend that PAC_Q45 be updated to include answers for all households that moved because their rent was higher than they could afford, and not only those which were forced to move by their landlord.

2. Capture the causes of housing loss due to unaffordability

Further, we recommend that where a household indicates that they moved due to unaffordable housing costs, the CHS should ask follow-up questions about the cause of the unaffordability. At a basic level, there are six reasons why a household may be unable to pay its rent:

- The household suffered a temporary loss of income;
- The household's income decreased permanently;
- The household incurred temporary extra expenses such as emergency expenses;
- The household's non-rent expenses increased permanently;
- The rent increased; or
- The rent was never affordable to the household in the first place.

Each of these causes of housing loss calls for different policy interventions. In order to effectively respond to the housing and homelessness crisis, it is crucial that policy-makers have better data on the causes of housing loss in Canada.

3. Capture housing loss due to other housing inadequacies

Affordability is only one of the elements of adequate housing. The other six elements are: security of tenure; availability of services; habitability; accessibility; location; and cultural adequacy.

The current available answers to PAC_Q45 partially speak to some of these elements. We recommend that the answers be updated to directly capture circumstances where a household was not able to stay in their home because their housing was inadequate in regards to one of more of these elements. For example:

- Security of tenure: the household moved because their lease expired or they otherwise lost the legal right to occupy the housing;
- Availability of services: the household moved because they lacked basic services such as heat or potable water;
- Habitability: the household moved because their housing was not adequately maintained or repaired;
- Accessibility: the household moved because their housing was not accessible to household members with disabilities;

- Location: the household moved because they were cut off from employment opportunities, schools, or other services;
- Cultural adequacy: the household moved because their housing was not suitable for their cultural identity.

4. Expand the “Previous dwelling costs” module

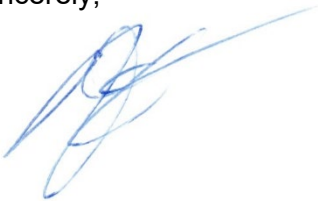
The “Previous dwelling costs” module is included in the list of modules that the CHS is considering for removal. We recommend keeping this module in the CHS. As discussed above, we crucially need better data on housing affordability and loss of affordable housing. This includes data on whether households in transition are able to find more affordable housing, or whether moves are resulting in escalating unaffordability or inadequacy.

Most of the answers to the current PAC_Q45 assume that households typically move in order to improve their housing situations. That assumption may not be warranted, especially in a housing crisis when many households may be moving into worsening housing situations. We recommend adding questions to better capture households’ change in housing circumstances, for better or for worse.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on Cycle 4 content, to help collect data that will inform policy responses to Canada’s ongoing housing crisis. We would be happy to provide further input and discuss our recommendations.

Sincerely,



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