

**The Federal Government
and Homelessness**

**Community Initiative
or Dictation From Above?**

By Christopher Leo and Martine August

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THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND HOMELESSNESS

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Executive Summary

The traditional hierarchical structure of federalism often results in policies that do not meet the differing needs of diverse Canadian communities. The federal government has recognized this problem and is seeking a solution. In its 1999 National Homelessness Initiative, Ottawa sets broad policy objectives, and makes funding available in pursuit of them, but claims to allow substantial scope for local determination of how those objectives are best met in each community. This approach is in operation in one component of the National Homelessness Initiative, the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI). The broad policy goal set in Ottawa is to alleviate homelessness. A “community plan” guides funding priorities and program goals are touted as being designated by the community through a consultation process.

In this study, we look at the SCPI program as it operated in Winnipeg through the summer of 2003, and analyse how well it lived up to its promises of flexibility and responsiveness.² Using government documents, interviews with officials

and community leaders, and secondary sources, the paper shows that the program in Winnipeg fell short of its promise. The mandate of the SCPI is too narrow, precluding the types of solutions that will actually work to alleviate homelessness in Winnipeg.

The priorities identified by community members and stakeholders were largely ignored, first in the creation of the community plan and then in deciding what programs would receive funding. The study shows that the federal government recognizes in theory that local communities may be best placed to come up with solutions to their own problems, but also demonstrates that the federal government has in practice been reluctant to relinquish power. It recommends changes to address these problems.

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1 Introduction

Homelessness affects different communities in different ways. In larger cities, the homeless are painfully visible — sleeping outside, lining up for food, and during cold Canadian winters, dying. In smaller cities, homelessness may be less visible, manifesting itself mainly as a housing issue, with a few of the poor on the street, but many others one paycheque away from the street or living in shelter that does not meet basic health and safety standards, and can hardly be considered a ‘home’. In cities of every size, there are scores of families and individuals in such circumstances.

Just as there is no cookie-cutter problem of homelessness, there are no cookie-cutter solutions. Homelessness, and the provision of affordable housing, is one thing in, say, Vancouver, where housing prices are sky-high, and affordability may be a problem, even for middle class Vancouverites. It is quite another in a city such as Winnipeg, where housing is priced so low that, in some neighbourhoods, homes deteriorate because their market value is too low to enable owners to recoup costs of renovation.

Although homelessness, and shortages of affordable housing, pose major problems throughout Canada, the circumstances of different communities vary sufficiently to make nonsense of the idea of a uniform national housing policy. Addressing the problem of homelessness requires a different policy in Vancouver than in Winnipeg.

The federal government appears to have recognized this reality in the following statement from Social Development Canada: “The National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) is at work helping governments and community organizations come together to alleviate homelessness. By encouraging innovative and progressive co-operation, this approach is supporting local solutions for local problems.”³

Canada’s National Homelessness Initiative (NHI), introduced in 1999, gives substance to those words, while at the same time betraying hesitancy, by putting them into action in only one part of its attack on homelessness, the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI). This program sets the broad objective of reducing and alleviating homelessness in Canadian communities, but apparently allows individual communi-

ties the latitude to determine how those objectives may best be met.

Using a community planning process, SCPI (pronounced “skippy”) is, nominally at least, guided by community stakeholders, who are recognized as being in the best position to decide what will really work to alleviate homelessness in their particular community. In Winnipeg, SCPI funds are delivered through the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative (WHHI), a single-window office housing representatives from all three levels of government, and delivering funding for housing and homelessness projects in the city.

This paper looks at the WHHI, and the programs delivered under it, paying special attention to the federal SCPI, as it is the component of the WHHI that appears to match the government’s declarations of community-friendliness with action. But, if we are to understand the significance of what is happening in Winnipeg, or anywhere else, we have to begin by trying to understand homelessness.

1.1 The Causes of Homelessness

Homelessness is popularly represented as being caused by such social ills as alcoholism, mental illness, substance abuse problems, domestic violence, and family problems, but that is a dangerous oversimplification, because it has led to policies that have worked to institutionalize homelessness, instead of addressing it.

Social problems are far less likely to bring on homelessness for a person of adequate means than for a person experiencing poverty. Often enough, it is homelessness itself that brings on alcoholism, substance abuse, health problems, and even mental illnesses.⁴ To address homelessness, it is important to see it in the wider context of lack of poverty and the affordability of housing.

Poverty is at the root of homelessness. In Canada, as elsewhere, blame-the-victim explana-

tions for it are undermined by the fact that the numbers of poor people rise and fall with the economy. Poverty statistics spiked in the recessions of 1981-82 and 1990-91 and have experienced declines at other times, including the 1996-2001 period, but the 2001 rate of 14.4 per cent was still higher than the 1989 rate of 13.9 per cent.⁵

If the 2001 poverty rate was only a little higher than that of 1989, why is the problem of homelessness conspicuously worse? The answer is that social supports have been removed. Social assistance funding and employment insurance were both reduced in the 1990s, at the same time that federal transfers to the provinces were reduced through the Canadian Health and Social Transfer (CHST).⁶

In the spirit of budgetary restraint, the federal government also withdrew all new funding for social housing and devolved responsibility for social housing program administration onto the provinces.⁷ The provinces then passed the buck onto municipalities, which do not have the financial resources to handle the job. The result, a social housing void and an affordable housing crisis, is most poignantly visible in the public suffering of people sleeping in the streets, alleys and parks of our biggest cities.⁸

Lack of Affordable Housing. Homelessness is caused fundamentally by a lack of housing that the poor can afford.⁹ In Canada, the supply of affordable housing options has been dwindling because accommodations that the poor can afford are not profitable. In such cities as Toronto and Vancouver, rooming houses, old apartment blocks, and cheap hotels are lost to condominium conversions and demolitions. In the more typical case of cities that are not growth magnets, affordable housing is lost as neighbourhoods decay and homes deteriorate beyond the point of habitability.

The construction of new low-rental apartments has not occurred in decades because it

does not turn a profit for developers.¹⁰ Many low-income Canadians have no choice but to live in deteriorating, inadequate older housing. The cost of renovating this housing is prohibitive, and often exceeds the market cost of the home.

The result is a serious shortage of affordable housing. Although the numbers have improved since 1996, in 2001 there were 1.2 million Canadians living in housing they could not afford.¹¹ In Winnipeg, nearly one in four households is experiencing affordability problems. This number is much higher in the inner city, where a large, deteriorating housing stock and a disproportionately impoverished population combine, in the worst cases, to leave neighbourhoods powerless in the face of inexorable decline.

Deinstitutionalization. The abandonment of mentally ill people to life on the streets, which contributed to the rise in homelessness during the 1980s, also stems from the government's failure to maintain needed social supports. Deinstitutionalization of mental health patients during the 1960s and 1970s was supposed to be followed by the establishment of community health care programs to assist those patients that were released. However, non-institutional and community care programs did not receive enough funding to enable them to fill the gap left by the closure of institutions. The result has been that Canada's most vulnerable citizens, those with mental health problems, are often left with no choice but to live on the streets.¹²

1.2 Addressing homelessness

Poverty, lack of affordable housing, social problems, de-institutionalization of the mentally ill: How can a problem with such deep and diverse roots be addressed? There is widespread agreement among advocates for the homeless that attempts to house them must begin with the alleviation of poverty and the restoration of the social

safety net, so that no one in Canada will end up on the streets.

Since that objective is unlikely to be fully achievable, at least in the short term, an alternative demand is the reinstatement of federal funding for social housing, and a redoubling of rehabilitation efforts. Finally, for those who are currently homeless, it is argued that support services must be provided, to help them find their way back into mainstream society. For people with mental illnesses, permanent supports are needed to assist them in day-to-day living.

Advocates like to think of homelessness as occurring on a 'continuum, from relative to absolute homelessness'.¹³ 'Absolute homelessness' denotes people living on the streets or in emer-

Poverty, lack of affordable housing, social problems, de-institutionalization of the mentally ill: How can a problem with such deep and diverse roots be addressed?

gency shelters.¹⁴ Designated as 'relatively homeless' are people living in inadequate homes, meaning ones that are overcrowded or not affordable; that do not offer safe access to water and sanitation; that lack security of tenure or weather protection; that are unsafe, or lack accessibility to jobs, education, or health services.¹⁵

The ideal policy, it is argued, is one that uses a variety of policy instruments — income supports; rent supplements; the provision of affordable housing; services tailored to the exigencies of mental illness, substance abuse and family dysfunction — to move people along the continuum from absolute homelessness, through relative

homelessness to secure tenure.

The literature of advocacy does not look kindly upon temporary or partial solutions. Homelessness shelters only “reinforce and perpetuate homelessness,” it is argued.¹⁶ Providing shelter, food banks, emergency services, or even housing, without addressing the more deeply rooted problems of poverty and the social ills that accompany it, is little better than a revolving door back into homelessness. These views, as we will see, are not only reflected in the literature of advocacy. They are widely held by those who have practical experience in dealing daily with the problems of homelessness and poverty.

We begin Section 2 with a look at the WHHI, describing what it is, and enumerating the programs that are delivered by federal, provincial and local governments under the initiative. In Section 3, we turn to the SCPI, starting with an overview of the objectives and mandate of the program, and an evaluation of it.

We show that it has a narrow mandate, focusing on absolute homelessness, but not addressing in any serious way either relative homelessness, or the need to move homeless and near-homeless people along a continuum toward secure tenure. We then examine the process that brought the program in Winnipeg into being and show that it was not responsive to the local stakeholders, as its mandate requires.

In Section 4, we consider the implications of our findings, and the lessons to be learned from them.

2 The Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative

The Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative is a three-year tripartite partnership “created to help redevelop housing in designated inner-city neighbourhoods, and to provide services to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless”.¹⁷ It is housed in a single-window office, located in downtown Winnipeg that provides a “one-stop shop” for community groups or other parties seeking funding. Having all three levels of government under one roof makes it easier for both community groups and the different levels of government to share information and co-operate.

Although housing and homelessness are seemingly inseparable issues, they are treated as distinct, and are funded by different levels of government. Funding for housing comes from the province and the city, while the federal government funds projects for the homeless under the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI). The tri-level jumble over which the WHHI presides comprises 10 programs.

2.1 City of Winnipeg Programs

The City of Winnipeg funds housing projects through the five year, \$7 million dollar Housing Improvement Fund, comprising five different programs, which must be located within one of the city’s fourteen designated Major Improvement Zones¹⁸ and which try to increase the supply of affordable housing by covering a portion of the costs of maintaining and revitalizing older neighbourhoods.

2.2 Provincial Government Programs

The Manitoba government has one program delivered under the WHHI, the Neighbourhood Housing Assistance program (NHA). This is one of six initiatives that make up the province's Neighbourhoods Alive! long-term strategy for neighbourhood revitalization and the maintenance of affordable housing. The objective of the NHA is "to contribute to the revitalization of housing in declining neighbourhoods by supporting home ownership and renovation initiatives of community groups."

2.3 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Programs

The Residential Rehabilitation Assistance (RRAP) program¹⁹ could reasonably have been classified as federal, provincial or local, because it is cost-shared by the province and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), a federal crown corporation, and delivered by the city through WHHI. The Province, through Manitoba Family Services and Housing, covers 25%, while the CMHC puts in 75% of funding for RRAP projects.

The goal of RRAP funding is to "restore inner-city neighbourhoods, make housing safe and secure, and to preserve valuable urban housing stock". RRAP offers financial assistance through partially or fully forgivable loans used for rehabilitation and repairs.

2.4 Federal Government Programs

Under the National Homelessness Initiative, the federal government committed \$753 million over three years to three major programs and two smaller ones, to address homelessness. The three major ones were:

- Supporting Communities Partnership

Initiative (SCPI)

- Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS)
- Youth Employment Strategy (YES).

Ten million dollars of the total allocation were set aside for research and for the Surplus Federal Real Property for the Homeless Initiative (SFRPHI), the purpose of which is to use surplus federally owned properties for homeless shelters or services.²⁰

The Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative is the cornerstone of the NHI. Of the \$753 million dedicated to the NHI, the SCPI was allotted \$305 million over three years (2000-2003). Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) funds the program. The majority of funding (80%) was set aside for ten 'eligible communities', in which there was significant homelessness. The remaining 20% were allocated to smaller Canadian communities that could demonstrate need. Winnipeg, one of the ten, was given \$10.8 million over the three-year funding period.

SCPI is the component of the NHI that is meant to be responsive to local conditions in each community. SCPI supports extensive community consultations and involvement, leading to the production of a plan, unique to each community, to provide a focus for homelessness efforts.

To be approved for SCPI funding, a program must be in line with the priorities set out in the community plan. It must also fit the SCPI mandate, and must meet terms and conditions set by the Treasury Board. This means that the program's administrators are confronted by the daunting challenge of serving three masters. Through the SCPI, the federal government contributes up to 50% of the costs for eligible projects. The rest of the funds must be found within the community.

Funding for the SCPI ended in March 2003, but has been renewed for another three years (2003-2006). The funding has been reduced from \$305 million to \$238 million over those three

years.

*Youth Employment Strategy.*²¹ The federal government's three-year commitment to the problem of homeless youth totalled \$59 million in NHI funding over three years with no requirement for matching funds from the community. In communities with a community plan, projects receiving youth homelessness funding must be in line with the goals set out in the Plan. Winnipeg received \$1.7 million over three years from this fund.

Urban Aboriginal Strategy. In recognition of the fact that Aboriginal people are over-represented in Canada's homeless population, \$59 million NHI dollars (over three years) were allocated to the existing Urban Aboriginal Strategy. The UAS was created in 1998 to bring together a number of federal departments and improve their effectiveness in serving the Aboriginal community. Like YES, but unlike SCPI, UAS allocations do not require a matching community contribution. However, they must be in line with Community plan goals if they are in one of the ten SCPI 'eligible communities'.²²

Winnipeg has the largest Aboriginal identity population of Canadian cities, with 8.4% of the city population (55,755 persons) identifying themselves as Aboriginal in 2001.²³ Because of this, the city received a large allotment of UAS funds, \$10.8 million over three years. Although funding for this program was wrapped up in March of 2003, the federal government has created a new Urban Aboriginal Homelessness program (UAH) for the years 2003 through to 2006, committing \$45 million.

3 The Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative

Since the SCPI avowedly constitutes the government's best attempt to shape a federally funded homeless initiative according to local knowledge and community priorities, we turn now to an evaluation of the program and its implementation to see whether Ottawa has delivered on its good intentions.

3.1 Focus of SCPI: Absolute Homelessness

The SCPI has five short-term objectives, which were to be met in the three-year period from 2000 to 2003.²⁴

1. Alleviate absolute homelessness by increasing shelter beds.
2. Use a "continuum of supports" approach to reduce homelessness. As we saw in Section 1.2, this is the approach widely recommended by advocates for the homeless.
3. Strengthen community capacity by bringing service providers together and developing a plan to serve homeless people.
4. Build partnerships among all stakeholders (private sector, non-profit sector, volunteer sector, all levels of government, labour organizations).
5. Expand knowledge of homelessness through research.²⁵

To meet these objectives, NHI funding is available for projects that fall into one of five categories. The five categories that are approved for NHI funding are: sheltering facilities (building or renovation), support facilities (soup kitchens, food banks, clothes/furniture depots), provision of support services (counselling services, life skills

training, health and education services), capacity building (community planning, training), and public awareness.

All of these funding categories focus on alleviating 'absolute homelessness' in communities. They do not address relative homeless, and they offer no concrete provisions for moving homeless people from absolute through relative homelessness into secure tenure (See Section 1.2 above.)

In other words, though the SCPI's second objective talks the talk of homelessness advocates, the overall program does not walk their walk. In practice the program institutionalizes homelessness, rather than seeking strategies for moving as many as possible out of those woeful circumstances. As this section shows, these shortcomings did not escape the notice of homelessness advocates in Winnipeg.

Nor did it escape the notice of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, which concluded in 1999 that, in order to alleviate homelessness in Winnipeg, efforts must be concentrated on rehabilitating older housing stock to increase the supply of affordable housing for low-income households.²⁶ Both the FCM findings and those of Winnipeg-based research led to the conclusion that the homelessness problem there is primarily a matter of inadequate housing and insufficient means to pay for shelter, or 'relative' homelessness.

This is not to say that absolute homelessness is absent in Winnipeg. One emergency shelter admitted 1,563 clients in 2001-2002, with each person coming in an average of 14.3 times.²⁷ However, both national and local studies concluded that the bulk of resources for fighting homelessness should be directed towards "transitional and permanent housing options" for those who are most in need.²⁸

3.2 The community planning process

In support of its stated objective of tailoring programs to the different requirements of different communities, SCPI conditions require that funding be conditional upon the development of a community plan, created through consultations with service providers, all three levels of government, the voluntary sector, and members of the community.²⁹ Based on recommendations by members of the community, the Community plan must articulate the priorities for reducing and alleviating homelessness. The plan must recommend actions, identify service assets and gaps, and act as a framework to direct federal funding and community action.

Completed community plans are submitted

The SCPI's second objective talks the talk of homelessness advocates, but the overall program does not walk their walk.

to the HRDC and approved by the Federal Coordinator on Homelessness. Once this occurs, the Plan is used to assess whether or not homelessness projects are eligible for funding under the NHI.³⁰ It is up to communities whether they choose to implement a 'shared' model or a 'community entity' model to administer SCPI funds. Winnipeg adopted the more common 'shared' model of delivery, in which HRDC staff partner with a community advisory body to decide which projects receive SCPI funding. Ideally with this model, an advisory body chosen from within the community reads project proposals and recommends for funding those which are best in line with the community's goals as set out in their plan

TABLE I | The Nine Components Required In a Community Plan

Component	Description
1 Geographic Area	Area over which funding applies
2 Objectives	Objectives that are expected to be achieved by the end of the SCPI funding period (March 31, 2003). Objectives must be compatible with that of the SCPI.
3 Community Plan Development Process	An explanation of the process that led to the development of the community plan. Must include a list of who was involved and steps taken to ensure inclusiveness.
4 Assets & Gaps	Using a continuum of supports approach, list all existing supports and services for homeless people (assets) and what is needed (gaps).
5 Priorities	Identification of priority issues by the community. Using assets & gaps, identify what issues must be addressed to best alleviate homelessness in the community.
6 Sustainability	Because funding expired in March, 2003, the plan must articulate how projects proposed will be sustained after the funding period.
7 Evaluation Strategy	Outline methods that will be used during and after the funding period to determine if Community plan has met its stated objectives
8 Communication Strategy	A strategy to detail how information in the plan will be communicated to interested parties in the community and on how annual reporting to the community will be done.
9 Community Financial Contribution	Identification of confirmed non-federal funding sources to match federal funds 50/50.

SOURCE National Secretariat on Homelessness. *The National Homelessness Initiative: A Guide to the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative*. Available On-line: http://www21.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/publications/commguide/commguide_e.html

and the objectives of SCPI.

In the less common ‘community entity’ model, an incorporated body is established which becomes responsible for selecting proposals and administering the SCPI program. An existing organization or the municipality may become the community entity. In Edmonton, the existing Edmonton Housing Trust Fund (EHTF) was the ‘community entity’ that administered SCPI in Phase I. The EHTF’s tasks were to “seek donations, solicit project proposals, analyze submissions and fund projects to address the priority needs [in the Community Plan]”³¹

In both models, a community plan outlining the community’s priorities is required. In order to be approved, plans must include nine elements, which are set out in Table I.

3.3 The community plans in Winnipeg

A community plan for the homeless in Winnipeg, written in May 2000 and updated the next January, was only the first of two competing plans. Although the first plan claims to have been developed through “the collaboration of many stakeholders”,³² it was in fact rejected by a formidable

coalition of those stakeholders.

Citing “a lack of grassroots community involvement in the development of [the first community plan],” representatives of 36 community groups involved in service delivery to homeless people prepared the similarly-named *A community plan on homelessness and housing in Winnipeg*, which was published in September 2001. In order to avoid confusion, we will refer to the plans by their years of publication: the 2000 plan and the 2001 plan.

The Community Partnership for Homelessness and Housing (CPHH), led by a so-called reference group, whose members are listed in Table II, agreed that the 2000 plan was not ‘community-owned’.

The community planning process leading to the creation of the first plan, which one participant called frustrating, involved multiple meetings, beginning in September 1999, with different groups showing up each time. Progress was slow, and eventually the HRDC called in a consulting firm to write the plan so it could be sent off for the necessary approval to get funds flowing from Ottawa.

Of the nine elements required for SCPI approval, eight were absent or not well articulated in the 2000 plan, so it was necessary to involve the community in writing an addendum which would include these elements. To this end, the HRDC held a meeting in January of 2001 at the Masonic Temple in Winnipeg. The room was full of long-time front-line service providers, people who had been working to help the poor and the homeless for years.

David Northcott, chair of the CPHH’s reference group and head of Winnipeg Harvest, a food bank, reported that the community members and service providers were not being listened to, or asked for advice, but “lectured to” on the “academic definitions of homelessness.” A few representatives were so irritated that they decided to take

TABLE II CPHH Voluntary Reference Group Leadership & their Affiliations

Member	Group Affiliation(s)
David Northcott (Chair)	Winnipeg Harvest, Executive Director
Joan Dawkins	Main Street Project, then Executive Director
Paul Johnston	Macdonald Youth Services
George Munroe	Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg, Vice-President
Larry Wucherer	Neeginan Development Corporation Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development
Rhonda Longboat	Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Housing Advisor Sweet Grass Circle Inc.
Stirling Ranville	Manitoba Metis Federation

SOURCE SCPW, *A community plan on Housing and Homelessness*. Winnipeg: SCPW, 2001, i.

matters into their own hands.

At their table, they began sharing ideas about what could be done to really help homeless people in Winnipeg. In so doing, they pursued one of the goals of the SCPI, which had been previously thwarted by the program’s own bureaucracy. Eventually, the HRDC Regional Director stopped the presenters from speaking, and allowed the members of the community to continue their discussion. It was at this meeting that the CPHH was formed.³³

The CPHH collaborated with the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg (SPCW), which had received \$35,000 from the SCPI to research Winnipeg homelessness, and developed the 2001 plan. An “Aboriginal reference group” was also created as a sub-group of the CPHH to ensure

TABLE III Working Groups for 2000 community plan on Homelessness in Winnipeg

Working Group	Focus
Second Stage Housing	Addressing the continuum of service for people to become stabilized and graduate to a normalized living environment
Outreach	Examine service gaps, how service providers network and share information, and how additional outreach services can augment resources in high-needs areas.
Community Development	Ensure community-based involvement in programs and services being provided, hold community forums in inner-city neighbourhoods
Coordination & Integration	Examine existing services to identify program gaps, duplication and coordination
Administrative Simplicity	Ensuring easy access, with a <i>Single Window</i> approach to program delivery

SOURCE *A community plan for the Homeless in Winnipeg*. May 2000, 2.

that the Plan would be responsive to problems faced by the Aboriginal population.

The process of community consultation leading to the creation of the second plan was characterized by the consistency and thoroughness that was lacking in the first plan. The CPHH met “on several occasions” between February and June of 2001, and a community forum was held on June 26th, 2001, where “community residents, organizational representatives and government representatives were invited to participate in group discussions regarding the priorities to address homelessness and housing issues in Winnipeg”.³⁴

The SPCW conducted interviews with representatives from 34 Winnipeg community organizations involved with housing or outreach services, and also collected data and statistics on housing, poverty, and other areas relevant to understanding homelessness. The final plan is a result of contributions at the community forum, priorities set by the CPHH and the Aboriginal reference group, information from the interviews, and the findings from SPCW research. Not only was the consultation process leading up to this plan inclusive, the recommendations reflect a

community consensus as to what is required in order meaningfully to address the problem of homelessness in Winnipeg.³⁵

3.4 Comparing the plans

A comparison of the two plans, and of the groups that created them, supports this evaluation. The CPHH was a genuinely broad cross-section of stakeholders. The same cannot be said of the groups or individuals involved in the production of the 2000 plan, because, though it styled itself as ‘broad-based’, the plan includes no record of who was involved in the process.

The plan was created from the recommendations of five Working Groups, and claims that “a list of names of those who participated in this process is attached as is a list of the membership of the five Working Groups”.³⁶ This list is not attached, and has not been seen or heard of by officials at the WHHI office.³⁷ The five working groups that were involved in laying the basis for the 2000 plan were to look closely into issues that had been identified as priorities at an initial Plenary Workshop in September 1999. The focus

of each Working Group is detailed in Table III.

The claim that the community picked out these five categories as priorities is suspect, since permanent affordable housing is absent. The 2001 “community-owned” plan recommended that “the majority of our energy and resources...be used to ensure...adequate transitional and permanent housing options are available and accessible for those most in need”.³⁸ It is unlikely that the community’s concern about affordable permanent housing suddenly arose in the one year between the two plans. More likely HRDC officials who wanted the plan to stay in line with the SCPI’s narrow mandate kept them out.

Although the 2000 plan purports to be ‘made in Winnipeg’, it does not seem to be based at all on the Winnipeg situation. There is no accompanying research to show the extent of the homelessness problem, no mention of who was involved in creating the plan, no description of the problems facing Winnipeg, no references, and no recorded author.

The recommendations in the plan focus mostly on networking and administrative simplicity among stakeholders. Three of the five Working Groups (Outreach, Coordination & Integration, Administrative Simplicity) focused on issues facing officials and community leaders, rather than on ways to help those actually suffering from homelessness, and the majority of the plan’s recommendations were for changes that would benefit service providers. It is important, of course, for those people who are working to help the homeless to be able to do so effectively, but one would expect a plan on alleviating and reducing homelessness to focus primarily on those who are suffering, and what can be done to help them.

The 2001 plan does this and offers concrete recommendations to make it happen. It focuses primarily on housing, recognizing that in Winnipeg, the key to reducing homelessness is making housing more available and affordable for

those who need it most, and improving the quality of substandard accommodations. This focus is made clear in the Plan’s objectives:

Objectives of the 2001 community plan:³⁹

1. Identify the people who are in need of housing resources *the most*
2. Identify the *gaps* in housing resources
3. Increase the availability of safe, affordable, appropriate housing...
4. Improve the coordination of housing resources between governments and the community⁴⁰

The rest of the 83-page report, though obviously based on a great deal of research, experience and careful thought, suffers from unfocused editing. It also lacks targets specific enough to allow for a subsequent evaluation of whether the program’s objectives have been met. Following are the main recommendations gleaned from a careful reading of the entire report:

- Increase the stock of permanent affordable housing in general, and for Aboriginal people specifically. Increase the availability of bachelor units, and two, three and four bedroom units.
- Offer more supported transitional housing for people with mental illness and also for people leaving hospitals or the correctional system. Include life skills training for people to live on their own.
- Increase the supply of emergency housing for youth and transitional housing for youth who are reaching the age of 18.
- Establish a central housing registry
- Stop demolishing homes in inner-city areas
- Increase funding for renovation of existing homes, while maintaining affordability
- Construct 5900 residential housing units over the next five years

TABLE IV WHHI Funding Commitments: Program Areas

National Homelessness Initiative Funding by Project Type		
Emergency Shelter & Support Facilities	\$6,719,840	47.9% of NHI funding
Transitional & Supportive Housing Facilities	\$4,995,069	35.7% of NHI funding
Support Services & Capacity Building	\$2,283,351	16.3% of NHI funding
Non-Federal WHHI affordable housing projects		
Affordable Housing	\$7,331,360	95% of non-federal WHHI funding
SOURCE See Appendix II		

- Provide sustained funding for organizations in order to reduce their need to compete with each other for funding
- Ensure the participation and representation of the affected community on all committees, working groups, and partnerships.

These recommendations make it clear that to solve the homelessness problem in Winnipeg it is solutions for relative homelessness, not warehousing for the absolutely homeless, that constitutes Winnipeg’s most pressing priority. Community leaders took the view that affordable housing options must be increased, more transitional housing offered for people to move to a more stable situation, and supported housing made available to people who cannot make it without help.

3.5 Following the money

Did these priorities become the program implementation guidelines for the SCPI in Winnipeg? In other words, did the program follow the community leadership provided in the 2001 plan, or did the federal government set its own course? WHHI officials were reluctant to answer that question clearly. Asked whether they were guided

by the 2001 plan, they responded that both it and the 2000 plan were used. That answer alone demonstrates ambivalence on the part of federal officials regarding their commitment to community involvement.

We can go beyond their vague assertion, and determine what actually happened by following the money, looking at what projects have been approved for funding. If the second plan is being used, then projects that aim at the creation of secure housing for the absolutely and relatively homeless will have been funded. If the majority of funding is allocated to remedial solutions targeting absolute homelessness, then it will be clear that the SCPI has not lived up to its billing as a community-driven program, and reveal that the federal government has ignored the community’s recommendations.

Table IV lists projects that received funding from federal NHI programs. Since these breakdowns were unavailable from government sources, we have obtained them by undertaking our own careful analysis of each individual funding decision that we were able to document, drawing on news releases, information on the NHI web site and other government documentation. Of the \$13,995,260 we were able to capture in

that analysis, by far the largest portion (47.9%) of the funds went to emergency shelter and support facility projects. Transitional and supportive housing projects received 35.7% of the recorded NHI funding, capacity building and support services received 16.3%.

A small amount of NHI money did end up in housing renovation, not by virtue of a federal government allocation of SCPI funds, but because two funding recipients, West Broadway Development Corporation and Jobworks, were able to use the renovation of a total of seven houses as an opportunity to give job training to young people. This allowed them to represent these renovations as capacity building and get them funded with federal Youth Employment Strategy funds.

In other words, to the very limited extent that federal funds went to the development of affordable housing, they did so only by being represented as something other than creation of affordable housing, and by bypassing SCPI—the program that was supposed to be responsive to community demands.

Of the total funds in our analysis that were distributed through the WHHI, (including not only federal, but also provincial and municipal programs), \$7,331,360 was allocated to projects that were designed to increase the stock of affordable housing. None of these projects, however, were funded by federal homelessness (NHI) dollars. Funding came either from the city, the province, or from the RRAP program.

Although community groups have agreed that it is important to fund emergency shelters, soup kitchens, and the like, their representatives have emphasized that these measures do not reduce and alleviate homelessness. The 2001 Winnipeg community plan made it clear that housing is a priority in Winnipeg, and that the quality and affordability of housing must be addressed if the homelessness problem is to be alleviated. Our figures show that the federal government has not

TABLE V WHHI Funding Commitments: Levels of Government

Level of Government	WHHI funding over three years (2000-2003)
City of Winnipeg Programs	\$4.2 million
Province of Manitoba – NHA	\$6 million
Federal NHI Programs – SCPI, UAS, YES	\$23.5 million

funded the types of projects recommended in the ‘community-owned’ community plan, and thus has not lived up to its claim of being responsive to local conditions.

Luckily, in Winnipeg, the three levels of government have come together under one roof through the WHHI. This has allowed housing and homelessness efforts to be co-ordinated, and as Table IV shows, had resulted, by April 2003, in over seven million dollars being put into affordable housing projects. However, these programs are not enough.

Only at the federal level are there sufficient financial resources to make a meaningful difference. Table V shows the amount of funding offered by each level of government over the same three years for housing or homelessness initiatives. It is clear where the greatest resources lie. There is no level of government that is adequately filling the social housing void left behind when the federal government dropped out in the 1990s, and no government but the federal government well-placed to fill it.

4 Conclusions

We began by arguing that different circumstances in different cities make nonsense of the idea of a national housing policy. We lauded the federal government for its apparent recognition of this reality when it decided that, in dealing with the problem of homelessness, it would take the lead from community stakeholders in each city. We also noted the government's hesitancy about the concept, as manifested in its application only to the SCPI, one part—albeit the biggest—of the National Homelessness Initiative.

In establishing the SCPI, the federal government set itself the objective of drawing significantly on community resources to shape the program and its implementation in each city. That objective only makes sense if it is based on the belief that the community has the necessary expertise and leadership to play such a role. In retrospect, it is clear that that belief was lacking.

This is obvious both from the fact that program conditions prejudged the question of how resources should be distributed as between absolute and relative homelessness, and from the apparent belief of federal officials that a community participation process could be successful only if it were carefully orchestrated by them. Obviously they believed that it was up to them to organize meetings, bring in “experts” to instruct the community on the whys and wherefores of homelessness, and predetermine the categories of investigation leading to community recommendations.

The 2001 community plan demonstrates that Winnipeg in fact has a wealth of expertise in the problems associated with homelessness, and that local homelessness advocates, with the help of the SPCW's leadership, are perfectly capable of organizing an investigation, carrying out a consultation, and producing recommendations. Clearly, the community involvement component of the

SCPI was not well managed. Instead of trying to determine in advance whether Winnipeg's assault on homelessness should emphasize absolute or relative homelessness, and trying to orchestrate the process of community involvement, the federal government would have been better advised to let the community organize its own process and determine the program emphasis for itself.

Since, as we found, unfocused editing and the lack of specific targets were the main shortcomings of the 2001 report, the federal government's objective of letting the community lead would have been better served by hiring an editor to work with the community in clarifying the report, and assigning an official to discuss specific targets with community leaders, than by trying to “guide” community groups in the production of a report tailored to federal government preconceptions about what is best for Winnipeg.

If the federal government screws up its courage to the point of accepting that the best expertise in local matters is likely to be local expertise, it should also consider further applications of the concept. If local advocates for the homeless are best qualified to work out how to address each community's homelessness problem, why not consult local Aboriginal leaders on UAS, youth workers and representatives of young people on YES, housing advocates on RRAP?

This is not a rhetorical question. It is easy to agree that local knowledge is key to making good decisions about local matters. In the European Union, the principle of subsidiarity holds that a decision must be made or activity performed at the lowest level of government possible.⁴¹ But this is more easily said than done, for a number of reasons.

4.1 Regulation vs. performance

In a sense, subsidiarity is the flavour of the month. The governments of major Canadian cities have

called for greater local self-determination as they face growing difficulties in meeting demands for services and infrastructure.⁴² A number of provincial governments have tacitly acknowledged the justice of the case for the enhancement of community self-governance by passing legislation designed to increase the powers of municipalities to act without seeking provincial approval.⁴³

On the other hand, dismay over the effects of government cutbacks and down-loading on low-income communities and on the integrity of the social safety net is leading to calls for the federal government to become more involved in the setting of standards and the financing of programmes. These calls, in addition to being very much in evidence in the policy arena, are well founded on both current research and historical experience.

But, some might argue, we can't have it both ways. The most significant challenge to the principle of subsidiarity takes the form of a dilemma: Can the federal government maintain national standards while drawing strongly on local knowledge in the resolution of local problems?

There is no one, simple answer to all individual instances of such questions, but the answer we are posing in our approach to this problem proposes a principle that ought to be applicable in many such individual instances. Our principle is best expressed in the planning literature, where the contrast is drawn between a *regulatory* and a *performance* approach to land use control.

The performance approach involves the substitution of a clear statement of objectives for a lot of detailed regulations. In the case of SCPI, the federal government could have substituted a single performance measure for a plethora of regulations, quite simply by articulating the program's objective as that of addressing homelessness through the application of a plan formulated by local stakeholders, in co-operation with federal officials.

It may well be that Vancouver and Toronto find themselves so overwhelmed with the numbers of homeless people spending the night on the streets that their main focus would have to be on shelters, social assistance and harm reduction. Local stakeholders ought to be well qualified to determine that. In Winnipeg, where there is less absolute homelessness, but perhaps a higher percentage of substandard housing and low incomes, it is relative homelessness that is seen by those who understand the problems best as the priority. If they can pull together to produce a credible program with clear criteria of evaluation — perhaps with some help from federal officials — they should be allowed to do so.

If local advocates for the homeless are best qualified to work out how to address each community's homelessness problem, why not consult local Aboriginal leaders on UAS, youth workers and representatives of young people on YES, housing advocates on RRAP?

But there are other reasons, besides the use of regulatory rather than performance standards, why the federal government might be disinclined to make a serious effort to consult the community.

4.2 Bureaucratic constraints

A bureaucratic career is measured by numbers of people supervised and size of budget. As a result, each department tends to cling tenaciously to its employees, and to guard the boundaries of

its sphere of responsibility jealously — unless, of course, there is an opportunity to expand them. It seems likely, therefore, that some careers hang on the maintenance of the policy-making and implementation functions that we argue should be localized.

There is evidence that departmental boundaries play a role. Jack Layton, who, before he became leader of the federal New Democratic Party, had some success in advancing the homelessness file on behalf of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, had this to say about the NHI:

...almost half the money went to expanding [RRAP], some funds were earmarked for Aboriginal initiatives, and the rest was reserved for community-based plans to deal with the worst consequences of homelessness. Explicitly excluded was any possibility that the funds could be used for actual housing. [Claudette] Bradshaw [the federal co-ordinator for homelessness] repeatedly argued that she was not, after all, the minister of housing.⁴⁴

Layton's exasperated comment: "How could a minister working on homelessness walk away from providing affordable housing?" The question is reasonable, but it is unlikely anyone knows the answer in full. The bureaucratic constraints to community involvement in the formulation and implementation of federal policies have yet to be investigated. It is an important item on the research agenda of the future.

4.3 The political constraint: Visibility

The most important political constraint to genuine subsidiarity is the oft-repeated complaint of federal politicians and public servants that the federal government is the taxing level of government and the provinces the spending level. At election time,

incumbent politicians want to take credit for visible achievements, and joint programs exact a visibility tax. That is why public works are regularly decked out with large signs featuring the logos of all governments that have contributed funds.

The obvious answer to the problem of visibility is the pat one that good policy also plays well at election time, but perhaps the real answer is awareness. Community groups, struggling to get a difficult job done with limited resources, will generally opt to tell the federal government whatever it wants to hear, because that is the quickest and easiest way of getting the money they need. Wider public dissatisfaction with the failure of policies to respond to the most pressing needs will send a clearer message.

Our evaluation covers Phase I of the National Homelessness Initiative. At this writing, Phase II is underway, and, with any luck, there will be future federal government programs to address homelessness and the need for affordable housing. The lessons of Phase One can be put to work in the development of better administrative procedures. Substantial local involvement in the formulation and implementation of local programs will not be easy to achieve, but our findings suggest that it is worth the effort.

Notes

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- 2 We make no attempt to report on developments after the summer of 2003. Our purpose, rather, is to look critically at the way the federal government has organized the homelessness initiative, and to consider whether there is anything to be learned regarding the meaningful and effective involvement of the local community.
- 3 Canada, Department of Social Development, "National Homelessness Initiative: Working Together". On-Line. Available: http://www21.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/home/index_e.asp, 8 February 2004.
- 4 Tom C. Allen, *Someone to talk to: Care and control of the homeless*, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2000) 18, 20.
- 5 National Council of Welfare, *Poverty profile 2001*. (Ottawa: 2004).
- 6 National Housing Policy Options Team 6.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Jack Layton, *Homelessness: The making and unmaking of a crisis*, (Toronto: Penguin / McGill Institute Books, 2000), 132.
- 9 Murphy 20.
- 10 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *Understanding Private Rental Housing Investment in Canada*, (Ottawa: CMHC, 1999) 29.
- 11 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *2001 Census Housing Series: Issue 4 Canada's metropolitan areas*, (Ottawa: CMHC, 2004).
- 12 Barbara Murphy, *On the streets: How we created homelessness*, (Toronto: J. Gordon Shillingford Publishing Inc., 2000), 20. National Housing Policy Options Team 7, Layton 7.
- 13 Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, *A community plan on housing and homelessness in Winnipeg*, (Winnipeg: Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2001) 5.
- 14 National Secretariat on Homelessness, (n.d.), *Terms and conditions for the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative*, 2.
- 15 Layton 25.
- 16 H. Peter Oberlander and Arthur L. Fallick, *Shelter or homes: A contribution to the search for solutions to homelessness in Canada*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1987) 11.
- 17 Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative, (n.d.), "Building partnerships building neighbourhoods", Pamphlet. A copy of this pamphlet is in the author's possession and may be consulted by contacting the author at christopher.leo@shaw.ca.
- 18 City of Winnipeg, *Draft Housing Implementation Framework*, (Winnipeg: City of Winnipeg, 2000).
- 19 Information on RRAP is available on the CMHC website: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *Programs and Financial Assistance*. On-line. Available at: <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/prfias/rerepr/>. Accessed: 7 June 2003.
- 20 Government of Canada, *Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative: Community Guide*, (2000) 9.
- 21 Ibid. 7.
- 22 Ibid. 7-8.
- 23 Michael Mendelson, *Aboriginal people in Canada's labour market: Work and unemployment, today and tomorrow*, (Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 2004) 9.
- 24 Government of Canada 6.

- 25 There was provision for research, both within the SCPI fund and in the SFRPHI fund, referred to at the beginning of Section 2.4. One of the five objectives for SCPI between 2000-2003 was to “develop a base of knowledge, expertise and data about homelessness and share it among all concerned parties and the general public”. (Ibid.)
- 26 National Housing Policy Options Team, *National Housing Policy Options Team paper: Municipal profiles*, (Ottawa: Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 1999) 46.
- 27 Main Street Project Inc., *Annual Report, 2002-2003*.
- 28 Social Planning Council of Winnipeg ii-iii.
- 29 Government of Canada 18 & 17.
- 30 In the ten “eligible communities”, all NHI programs, not just the SCPI, require projects to be in line with the community plan. In other Canadian communities, this is not necessary.
- 31 Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing (EJPCH), *Edmonton Community Plan on Homelessness*, (Edmonton: EJPCH, 2000) 34.
- 32 Social Planning Council of Winnipeg 19.
- 33 David Northcott, Personal Communication, 18 June, 2003.
- 34 Social Planning Council of Winnipeg 3-4.
- 35 David Northcott.
- 36 *A community plan for the Homeless in Winnipeg (Addendum)*, 6.
- 37 This information could not be obtained from Winnipeg’s City Facilitator on Homelessness or from the author of the 2000 plan.
- 38 Social Planning Council of Winnipeg iii. Italics added.
- 39 Social Planning Council of Winnipeg 7. Italics added.
- 40 Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, *passim*.
- 41 Alan Norton, *International Handbook of Local and Regional Government*, (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1994) 28-31.
- 42 Christopher Leo and Susan Mulligan, “Rethinking Urban Governance in the 21st Century.” (Paper presented to the Urban Affairs Association, Washington, DC, April 2004).
- 43 Joseph Garcea and Edward LeSage, eds., *Municipal Governance in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford, forthcoming).
- 44 Layton 188-89.

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Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative.

Building partnerships building neighbourhoods.

(Pamphlet). A copy of this pamphlet is in the author's possession and may be consulted by contacting the author at c.leo@uwinnipeg.ca.