

Introduction

Canadians value vibrant, inclusive communities, where all people — regardless of income, ethnicity, religion or place of origin — have access to housing, education and employment. As Canada’s engines of economic growth, safe and healthy communities are essential to national prosperity. Economic development and social development are equally important to improving quality of life. Competitive communities attract creativity and talent, while supporting social inclusion and diversity, thereby enabling an enhanced quality of life and greater prosperity for all residents.

Key Principles

Communities Create Prosperity

Social development is critical to the economic vitality of our cities and communities. An inclusive and equitable society, free from poverty, discrimination and other barriers to full participation, generates the creative energy and social stability needed for a competitive economy, which in turn generates the prosperity that enables governments to support social development.

Intergovernmental Partnerships support Communities

To achieve the goal of social-economic development, the reduction and prevention of poverty, and improvement of Canada’s quality of life, all governments must work together. All orders of government must identify opportunities to work together to coordinate policies, programs and services that ensure effective, well-integrated approaches to social-economic development. This requires physical, technological and social infrastructure, which could be developed by federal, provincial/territorial and municipal governments working in cooperation through trilateral development agreements or community-based partnerships.

Municipal responsibilities and priorities include investing in social infrastructure, such as community centres to support social development. In addition, municipal governments provide essential contributions to affordable and social housing projects. Municipally owned libraries, parks and cultural or recreational facilities are essential infrastructure and should be funded as such, with programming support coming from progressive federal and provincial/territorial tax sources, rather than almost exclusively from the regressive municipal property tax, as is now the case.

FCM Policies

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

To build and sustain vibrant communities, all orders of government must invest in both physical infrastructure, such as water and wastewater systems, public transit, and streets and roads, and social infrastructure, which includes social and affordable housing, libraries, parks, recreational and cultural facilities.

Municipal governments must have the resources to plan and invest in both physical and social infrastructure, so that all community members can participate fully in society, maximizing the community’s potential. Initiatives to build community infrastructure work best with full community participation, including individuals, businesses, the voluntary sector and the four orders of government.

Canada’s rural and northern communities are essential to the country’s economic, social and environmental well-being and the health of Canada’s urban communities is directly related to the vibrancy of our rural and remote regions. Despite the critical importance of infrastructure to these communities, many face barriers to meeting their infrastructure needs. FCM is calling on the Government of Canada to continue working with municipal and provincial/territorial governments to ensure that all communities, including those in rural and northern areas, receive a fair and predictable share of new federal

infrastructure investments, and that targeted programs exist to meet the distinct and considerable infrastructure needs of rural and northern municipalities.

AFFORDABLE AND SOCIAL HOUSING

Social housing wait lists are long across the country, but at the same time, some social housing units are sitting vacant as essential repairs cannot be undertaken without reinvestment.

One in five renters spends more than 50 per cent of their income on rent, far above the 30 per cent threshold which, if exceeded, compromises the ability of a household to pay for other necessities.

Municipalities are actively working to make communities liveable by playing an essential role in ensuring affordable housing projects are constructed, repaired and retrofitted, including for newcomers, young people, lone-parents and seniors alike. Protecting and expanding affordable and social housing options is also critical to supporting the aspirations Indigenous peoples, a key contribution to dynamic cities. Long-term federal investments in social and affordable housing coupled with incentives to increase rental housing will create jobs, keep vulnerable seniors in their homes and out of the health care system, make housing more affordable for the one-third of Canadians who rent, and take the pressure off the housing market and household debt.

Canada's municipalities are ready to work with all orders of government to create healthier, more livable hometowns.

Strategies

- FCM seeks robust federal investment in social and affordable housing through the National Housing Strategy, based on the following components:
 1. Significant funding for housing solutions;
 2. Protection of existing social housing affected by expiring operating agreements, including by investing in repairs and by replacing expiring rent subsidies for low-income households;
 3. Investment in new mixed-income non-profit social and affordable housing, complemented by direct support to households;
 4. Prevention and end to homelessness;
 5. Growth and retrofit of the rental housing sector;
 6. Enablement of innovation for sustainable solutions;
 7. Support for distinct Indigenous housing needs;
 8. Support for distinct northern housing needs;
 9. Engagement of municipalities to address challenging markets; and
 10. Review of CMHC's mandate.
- The FCM's detailed position on housing is outlined in its brief submitted to the Government of Canada as part of its consultative process on the national housing strategy, which is in the pipeline. The brief, in addition to this policy statement, underscores just how important it is for government programs, strategies and initiatives in the area of housing to be more flexible, to the extent that they focus on solutions at a local level.
- FCM calls on the National Housing Strategy to be developed in a way which is comprehensive, provides long-term, predictable funding and formally includes local governments, in high-level decision making at the sector level, and but also in terms of project selection at the local level.

HOMELESSNESS

While we have made strides to prevent and reduce homelessness, more needs to be done. As of 2014, the average occupancy rate at Canada's emergency shelters had risen to over 90% — an increase of almost 10 percentage points since 2005.

As homelessness is also a top concern for municipalities, especially as it relates to Indigenous people who are overrepresented among those without a home and those in precarious housing situations. While homelessness in Canada is linked to the lack of affordable housing, it often involves other issues, such as education, employment, substance abuse, and mental illness.

Action on homelessness should be evidence based and coordinated with municipal, federal, provincial and territorial initiatives on homelessness, housing, health, skills development and other areas of social development. The cost of not dealing with homelessness is socially and economically significant. Services for chronically homeless people, for example — including shelters, police and ambulance services, and addiction counseling — are costly. Investment in supportive and transitional housing to help people acquire housing and retain it is a cost-effective use of taxpayer dollars and has been shown to improve conditions for the chronically homeless.

Strategies

In its recommendations for the National Housing Strategy, FCM calls for increased investment in measures to prevent and end homelessness through the existing federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS). With this additional investment, more communities should be able to access funding through HPS. Equally, local communities should have more flexibility around funding decisions, including on whether or not they wish to fund programs that use a Housing First approach. Placing restrictions around the types of programs local communities can fund with HPS dollars limits innovation and the emergence of new solutions.

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEES

Successful immigration and refugee settlement is central to the future growth and economic security of Canada. According to Statistics Canada, immigration was responsible for two-thirds of Canada's population growth between 2001 and 2006, and 100 per cent of our country's net labour force growth will come from immigrants by 2011. Newcomers have enriched the social and cultural environment of Canada's cities and communities.

In response to the Syrian refugee crisis that has been building in that region since 2011, the federal government has committed to welcoming 25,000 Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) by the end of 2016. Recognizing the municipal role in providing key services and support that help set all new refugees on a path to greater success, local governments have stepped in to lead local responses. In September 2015, FCM and the Big City Mayor's Caucus established a Refugee Resettlement Task Force to encourage and share new and best practices to support the influx of new refugees at the municipal level. A toolkit on municipal leadership in refugee resettlement has been developed as the outcome of the Task Force.

Municipal governments help to attract and integrate newcomers by providing essential community services, including libraries, public transit, childcare, recreational facilities, and, in some jurisdictions, affordable housing. Immigrants who find themselves unemployed or underemployed often turn to the local government for help. Despite their significant role in immigration and refugee settlement, municipalities are often not consulted on immigration policy or programs. Municipalities must be engaged when immigration policy and programs are discussed. Municipal participation in federal-provincial/territorial discussions on immigration will produce a mutual understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all orders of government and help coordinate government services.

Strategies

- FCM will continue to liaise with relevant federal departments and national stakeholders to identify opportunities and challenges to the Syrian refugee resettlement process and provide the most up to date information to members.
- FCM will join, as appropriate, with immigrant resettlement and housing sectors stakeholders to raise concerns to the federal government about the immediate and long-term impact lack of affordable

housing available to meet the needs of this surge of refugees, particularly as it relates to the end of federal assistance after 12 months for government assisted refugees.

- FCM will urge the Government of Canada to recognize and support the broad range of settlement services provided by municipal governments and work to expand Resettlement Assistance Programs into more cities and communities across Canada.
- FCM will work with the Government of Canada to ensure that municipalities participate fully in the development of immigration policy.
- FCM will work with the Government of Canada to make the process for approving foreign credentials more efficient and accessible.

CANADA'S AGING POPULATION

Canadians 65 and over are the fastest-growing age group in the country and will have a significant and growing impact on municipal services in coming decades.

Aging in Place, the strategy that encourages people to remain in their homes as they age and stay engaged with their communities, is the growing preference of seniors and governments. This will require investments in housing, transit, recreation, social engagement, and physical infrastructure. Much of this investment will fall to municipalities and coincide with declining government revenues as more people leave the workforce.

However, these investments will yield net savings for federal, provincial and territorial governments by helping seniors lead healthier lives, reducing health-care costs and government transfers. Without these new investments, municipal costs resulting from an aging population will have the same effect as a download of federal and provincial/territorial responsibility to municipal governments.

Strategies

- FCM will strengthen its policy and research work on the impact of the aging population on municipal governments.
- FCM will work with the Government of Canada to ensure that municipalities have real input into federal policies on aging that affect their communities.

DIVERSITY, CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Municipal governments can play a lead role in fostering respect and equality for all residents while enhancing the diverse nature of their communities. Municipal governments must make equity a basic tenet of their own operations and seek the same commitment from their partners in the public and private sectors. FCM is committed to cultural diversity in accordance with the multiculturalism policies of federal, provincial and territorial governments, as well as the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

FCM urges its members to affirm the equality of all residents, both in municipal government and in all aspects of community life. FCM will encourage municipal governments to develop policies and programs that foster social inclusiveness and support diversity.

Moreover, arts, culture and heritage improve the ability of municipal governments to influence local economic development by attracting and retaining a skilled and talented workforce. FCM supports deeper funding for this sector. For example, many communities have properties of significant heritage value. Preserving and redeveloping these sites can be powerful catalysts for revitalizing neighbourhoods. FCM supports the use of tax credits and legislation to protect heritage properties.

Strategies

- FCM will continue to support the mandates of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination (CMARD) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES AND CHILDCARE

Many young people are sedentary, with unhealthful diets and weight-related health problems. Many of these issues are related to the socio-economic circumstances in which they live. Together, these factors can lead to serious long-term health problems. Governments, businesses and service providers should take coordinated action to offer healthful alternatives to young people and their families.

FCM recognizes that childcare is sometimes the exclusive responsibility of the provinces or territories, while in other cases it is a direct municipal responsibility. Nevertheless, FCM supports a national approach to the early development and care of children and believes that such an approach need not lead to jurisdictional disagreements.

Strategies

- FCM supports national long-term, sustainable funding for recreation and open-spaces infrastructure.
- FCM calls on the federal, provincial and territorial governments to work together so that every family has access to quality pre- and post-natal care, early learning and child care services, and parenting supports. The agreement would necessarily be flexible to meet provincial, territorial and, where applicable, municipal priorities.

MUNICIPAL-INDIGENOUS RELATIONS

Approximately 60% of Indigenous people in Canada – Inuit, Métis and First Nations – live in urban areas. Many FCM member municipalities are engaged in policy and programming for urban Aboriginal residents and are working in partnership with urban Indigenous leadership. Municipal elected officials are increasingly speaking about the need for municipalities to support reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and governments to address the complex socio-economic issues, often rooted in Canada's history of colonialism and the residential school legacy.

The 94 Calls to Action from the historic Truth and Reconciliation Commission lays important foundation for municipal-Indigenous relations. FCM continues to urge federal, provincial and territorial governments to work more closely with municipal governments and Aboriginal governments and organizations to deal with the challenges faced by Aboriginal people in our urban communities.

Positive relations between municipal governments and Indigenous governments are rooted in pragmatic cooperation, including service-delivery agreements, joint meetings and Aboriginal representation on relevant boards and agencies, as well as the joint pursuit of social and economic development opportunities. FCM's award winning Community Infrastructure Partnership Program (CIPP) and Community Economic Development Initiative (CEDI) are forging stronger and more fruitful relationships between municipal and First Nation neighbours through shared economic development strategies. These partnerships help reduce costs associated with providing services, enhance social and economic development, and build capacity within both First Nations and municipal governments.

Municipal-Indigenous relationships will prosper, if they are based on mutual respect and open communication. This can yield tremendous social, cultural and economic benefits for both communities, as demonstrated by the success of the CIPP and CEDI programs.

Strategies

The renewal of the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) represents an important opportunity to improve federal support for Indigenous people living in cities and communities. Having worked with Indigenous organizations in developing them, FCM recommends a renewed UAS include the following components:

- a. Increased operational funding, and establish new funding for local Aboriginal organizations and service providers;
 - b. Inclusion of capital funding for the renovation and construction of community and cultural spaces;
 - c. Reinstatement of funding for urban Indigenous coalitions in order to help strengthen local leadership and linkages between municipal governments and improve delivery of municipal services;
 - d. Inclusion of funding to existing and new local Indigenous organisations in order to build local capacity and empower local decision-making;
 - e. Program flexibility so that funding meets local needs and priorities;
 - f. Provision of long-term, predictable funding so that service delivery organizations can plan and deliver appropriate services based on local needs.
 - g. Assurance of culturally appropriate programs and services that meet the needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis;
 - h. Consideration of the programs and services being delivered by municipalities in order to seek alignment support those services where appropriate; and
 - i. Assurance that funding meets the needs of Indigenous people residing in small-urban municipalities, rural areas and the North;
- Through the Urban Aboriginal Working Group and the SED Committee, FCM will continue to share municipal knowledge, initiatives and best practices to strengthen the capacity of local governments in their work to support indigenous peoples.
 - FCM will continue to strengthen its relationships and collaborate with Indigenous leaders and Indigenous organizations regarding the needs of urban Indigenous people.

Approved March 2017

Standing Committee on Social-Economic Development
