



Housing Assessment
Resource Tools
(HART)

Final Evaluation for the Housing Assessment Resource Tools (HART) Project

November 2023

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations:

AHMA	Aboriginal Housing Management Association
AMR	Average Market Rent
BC	British Columbia
CMHC	Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
FLI	Federal Lands Initiative
HAF	Housing Accelerator Fund
HART	Housing Assessment Resource Tools
HNA	Housing Needs Assessments
NHS	National Housing Strategy
RFP	Requests for Proposals
UBC	University of British Columbia



1.1 Purpose of the Evaluation

The Housing Assessment Resource Tools (HART) project based at the University of British Columbia (UBC), is funded by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) through the Housing Supply Challenge: Data Driven Round, to develop simple, replicable, comparable, evidence-based, and equity-focused tools for housing needs assessment, land assessment, and property acquisition, with the intention of improving policy outcomes at all levels of government.

The goals of the project are to provide:

- **Housing needs assessment data, broken down by income categories, household size, and select demographics, for all municipalities, regions, provinces and territories, and Canada overall**
- **Mapping of well-located government-owned land suitable for the development of non-profit housing, for thirteen government partners across Canada**
- **Legal and policy toolkits to guide acquisition of properties for affordable housing**
- **Training materials on the aforementioned tools**

The purpose of this final evaluation is to understand from HART's key stakeholders and partners, how the HART project has contributed to and changed the Canadian housing policy discourse through provision of the three tools and mutual learning. The findings from this evaluation explore potential policy implications or levers at the federal, provincial and municipal levels to enable continued and increased uptake of the HART tools. The interviews with key stakeholders and partners point towards potential directions for HART's next phase of work, with a recommendation for continued funding from the CMHC.

This evaluation was carried out by HART's team through confidential individual or group interviews with members of the Advisory Committee and government partners, who were asked pre-defined questions regarding:

- The use of HART tools in their respective organizations,
- The advantages or disadvantages of HART tools or methodologies,
- The role of the federal or provincial government in contributing to meeting affordable housing needs through housing needs assessments, land assessments, property acquisition, and overall tracking methodologies, and
- The future role of the HART project.

1.2 Summary of Key Findings

Interview findings conclude that the HART project has contributed invaluable research tools that have supported local governments and housing sector organizations and has broadened the national discourse on affordable housing needs, land assessment, and property acquisitions. Furthermore, HART's research outputs have potential to be adapted and leveraged to continue researching into affordable housing solutions in Canada. Interviewees underscored the continued need for HART's expertise, with the following comments.

1. HART's [Housing Needs Assessment \(HNA\) Tool](#) has been a very useful support to local government and housing sector organizations, especially stressing the need for consistent guidance from governments on measuring and reporting housing need through provision of funding and disaggregated data, reporting templates or criteria, and inclusion of new data variables in the national census.
2. HART's [Land Assessment Tool](#) has mainly been used to reframe and streamline organizational activities, in tandem with internal land assessments, or for advocacy efforts. Participants stressed the usefulness of having more land assessment tools, with recommendations that the federal government contribute through funding, capacity-building strategies, and data sharing.
3. HART's [Property Acquisitions Tool](#) has called attention to the benefits of and processes towards successful property acquisitions for affordable housing. Nevertheless, strategic property acquisitions are contingent on federal and provincial leadership through funding, creating a dedicated national, multi-sectoral organization, dialogue and data-sharing to municipalities and housing sector organizations.
4. The current methodologies for tracking housing need, supply, demand, and completions require improvement through federal guidance on housing need reporting, inclusion of new data variables to capture currently excluded populations, and investment in disaggregated data collection.
5. The HART project has several potential future directions, which include directly supporting local governments and housing sector organizations in: providing housing needs and land assessments; serving as a forum for peer learning and discussion; supporting federal and provincial governments; and supporting housing and data advocacy. Additional new directives include: (a) expanding land assessments to more municipalities; (b) spearheading innovative analysis and tools that integrate housing needs and land assessments; (c) adapting assessments with additional layers of research and data; and (d) contributing to legal and policy analysis on future affordable housing options.

Housing Needs Assessments

A.1 HART's Housing Needs Assessment has been used as a companion or foundational tool for advocacy work, and for the evaluation or tracking of housing need.

2. The HNA Tool has been leveraged for a wide range of advocacy efforts.

3. Local governments and organizations currently use multiple definitions of affordability, and interviewees noted the potential need for more complex or nuanced income-based definition.

4. HART's definition of affordability offers an accurate reflection of local markets, an inclusive and broad perspective, consistency with existing and historic programs, and a targeted link between income and housing.

5. The disadvantages of HART's definition include inconsistent use at the national, provincial, and municipal level or methodologies, and lack of applicability for certain housing types or sectors.

6. The federal and provincial governments should take a larger role in measuring all housing need and hidden homelessness, through provision of funding, training, Housing Needs Assessment criteria, and inclusion of new variables in the census.

Land Assessments

B.1 HART's Land Assessment or similar methodologies have primarily been used in relation to opportunity-based approaches, to reframe organizational activities, for advocacy efforts, or in parallel with internal assessments.

B.2 The federal government should encourage the use of government and non-profit-owned land for affordable housing, through provision of funding or financial incentives, strategic action, and transparency on land ownership.

Acquisitions

C.1 Property acquisitions for affordable housing have primarily been achieved through ad hoc or opportunity-based situations or have been referenced through advocacy to raise awareness of benefits.

C.2 The federal government should encourage property acquisition as a viable strategy to contribute to long-term affordable housing stock, through leadership, targeted funding, and creating a dedicated national body.

Tracking Housing Completions

D.1 Current methodologies of tracking housing need, supply, demand and completions need to be improved at all levels of government, through renewed federal leadership.

Future Needs

E.1 HART has a significant role in supporting governments and housing-sector organizations of all levels and sizes in maximizing data, developing targets, and completing applications or proposals to the federal government.

E.2 HART has the capacity to continually support local government and organizations in housing needs assessments and acquire or develop tools to enable further land assessments.

E.3 HART has a potential role as a forum for peer learning and communication between local governments and higher levels of government.

E.4 HART is well-placed to continue acquiring and developing innovative research and analytical tools that integrate housing needs and land assessments.

E.5 HART's work advances advocacy efforts in various categories, including data advocacy and creation of the right supply of housing.

EVALUATION BASELINE

This final evaluation is a follow-up to HART's [mid-way evaluation](#) and [Phase 1 Readiness Survey](#). This evaluation was administered in the form of interviews with ten key stakeholders in the HART project, including government partners, non-profit housing providers and members of our Advisory Committee located across Canada. The interview questions are built upon the key findings from the mid-way evaluation:

1. HART's research aims and project design are highly relevant to government partners and housing sector organizations, with projected need beyond the project's timeline.
2. The HART project is actively opening additional avenues for further research and expansion of the three tools, especially as government policy continues to evolve.
3. Partner governments continue to have internal challenges when defining affordability and income categories for housing development or housing needs assessments.
4. Zoning issues are a principal barrier to the land assessment tool, with participants stating that zoning reviews are needed prior to affordable housing project proposals, to avoid approval delays and open up more well-located land parcels for affordable housing.
5. Property or land acquisitions are a new issue for many governments.

The final evaluation sought to understand the efficacy of the HART tools and future directions.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

“ The HART project does a great job of surfacing need and targets. I hope it can be used longitudinally to measure outcomes as well, because I think that’s where the real value is going to be. ”

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3.1

A.1 HART's Housing Needs Assessment has been used as a companion tool or foundational tool for advocacy work, and for the evaluation or tracking of housing need.

HART's HNA data or methodologies have been used as a companion or foundational tool to improve existing assessments or provide a consistent framework for future assessments. When used as a framework, interviewees described how HART's HNA data or methodologies offer an in-depth overview of the local housing market, which could then be leveraged into a base of understanding for internal organizational activities. Interviewees noted the HART data was being used:

- To help develop new affordable housing strategies
- To support Requests for Proposals (RFPs)
- As a backstop to internal work on developing existing and future housing needs assessments (particularly in jurisdictions without guidance or mandates)

HART data and methods were described as a useful companion to measure and interpret housing need, sometimes alongside internal reporting methods. One interviewee described using the HART data outputs for their local municipality, as a secondary source to verify findings from their internal analysis.

The HART project provides all the data and methodologies related to HNA free and open access, which interviewees concluded was a major benefit for a comprehensive understanding of the assumptions, methods and considerations that went into developing the HART HNA Tool. This knowledge could then be leveraged to include additional indicators or assumptions as it relates to the local organization or municipality, such as a more refined analysis for smaller geographic areas or specific municipal challenges or concerns.

Examples of use of HART HNA Tool as a foundational tool for understanding housing need:

- The accessibility of the HART methodology allowed for identification of strengths and weaknesses, according to organizational priorities, which could then be supplemented with additional data collection and analysis on the part of the local government.
- The HART HNA Tool can be used for municipalities all across Canada to describe housing need using national census data with common denominators enabling longitudinal comparison within and across jurisdictions.
- The HNA data and methods point out where additional research would be helpful. For example, HART's inclusion of priority populations offered insight into where local government or organizations could refer to the local context through lived experience.
- HART data was helpful to understand affordability and core housing needs, especially given the need to communicate and advocate outside of the housing sector. Having a clear understanding of how affordability is defined was especially important for some interviewees who noted the challenges related to existing varied definitions in different markets or local governments.

A.2 The HNA Tool has been leveraged for a wide range of advocacy efforts.

Interviewees described using the HNA Tool data and findings for advocacy, especially when advocating for increased funding to meet housing needs of a particular population group or income category. One interviewee described how they advocated for additional funding to a Minister, citing a need for Indigenous affordable housing through HART's evidence-based research which substantiated the discussion. Some interviewees described using the HART income categories to build a persuasive case with local or provincial governments, who may require housing targets which are not aligned to local income, or for continued rental assistance programs due to increasing need within lower income groups, or for increased funding for the supply of co-operative or community housing to meet the number of households in need.

Several interviewees described using the HART data for advocacy in public communication materials, to provide a larger narrative or structure to understanding who is in housing need, and the corresponding need to act.

Many interviewees noted how anecdotal evidence on housing need for population groups or income categories may be substantial, but inconsistently recorded. As such, using HART's census-based data to bolster and add credibility was a huge support. For example, one interviewee described the recent migration of urban Indigenous persons on and off reserve during COVID-19, and using census-based data reinforced the case for additional support to address challenges in meeting housing need. Another interviewee described how HART's disaggregation of housing need by priority population provided an additional layer of analysis that was more specific to the local context, as opposed to describing general housing need.

“The amount of public advocacy that's happened through HART... has been tremendous in keeping up the pressure and national conversation.”



What did BC require in housing needs reports?

In 2019, the province of British Columbia required municipalities and regional districts to complete and submit housing needs reports by 2022, and every five years following (Province of British Columbia, 2021) The provincial legislation required collection and reporting of specific data variables, with the Union of BC Municipalities providing funding to support municipalities in these efforts. The reporting criteria includes information on current and projected population and corresponding housing needs, statements on areas of need (e.g., affordable housing, rental housing, seniors housing), and households in core housing need. The provincial government provided several datasets from BC Assessment, BC Housing, BC Stats, CMHC, and Statistics Canada Census for municipalities to complete the reporting requirements.

Some interviewees noted the fact that the HART HNA data was provided for both 2016 and 2021, with potential for additional census years in future, offered a wealth of possibilities regarding internal monitoring, evaluation and tracking of housing need for specific income categories or priority populations. This monitoring and evaluation could be used to better understand how internal programs or projects are meeting intended targets. One interviewee described how HART's emphasis on priority populations could be integrated into organizational monitoring on a consistent basis, and then allow for equity-based planning for affordable housing. The potential for leveraging HART data at a national scale, was also noted in reference to the National Housing Strategy's (NHS) priorities, and capacity to longitudinally monitor disaggregated housing need across Canada.

Some interviewees described how the combined benefits of using HART data as a companion piece, for advocacy work, and for evaluation or tracking, all contributed to existing or potential restructuring of organizational activities according to the outcomes.

“Does [affordability] envision something truly broader, more encompassing, which goes beyond social housing?”

A.3 Local governments and organizations currently use multiple definitions of affordability, and interviewees noted the potential need for more complex or nuanced income-based definition.

Some interviewees described using the same definition of affordability as HART's methodology, which follows Statistics Canada definition based on 30% of area median household income, while a few interviewees described using a complex income-based definition either internally according to housing program or housing type in question. For example, one interviewee noted they had shifted to an income-based definition, while maintaining an understanding that more specific definitions would have to be utilized according to internal needs to meet housing need more accurately by income category. Another interviewee described using income-based definitions when assessing ownership housing and market-based definitions when assessing rental housing, as this distinction best captured their local market and resulted in a lower price threshold for rental housing than income-based definitions.

Some interviewees described internal difficulty with defining affordability, where a local government or organization could be held to multiple definitions of affordability at the provincial or regional level, adding other complex barriers to efficient reporting and targeting, especially if previous definitions are enshrined in strategic plans.

An overarching theme that emerged during the discussion of affordability is the growing need for a more nuanced income-based definition of affordability that is inclusive enough to align with various funds, while encompassing a broader vision that is applicable to the current needs. One interviewee noted how the often-quoted debate about Canada's lack of a national definition of affordability should be tabled considering the larger challenge, which is finding and mobilizing a definition of affordability that best serves our current point in time.



How does HART define priority populations?

HART's priority populations are based on the National Housing Strategy's (NHS) Priority Groups, with adaptations because some disaggregated data was not available for census years prior to 2021 (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2022). For example, The NHS includes survivors (e.g., women and children fleeing domestic violence), and veterans, which was not collected or available at a disaggregated level to cross-examine with other variables before the 2021 census. HART's priority populations are women-led households, single mother-led households, Indigenous-led households, racialized households, Black-led households, new migrant-led households, refugee claimant-led households, household heads under 25 years, household heads over 65 years, household heads over 85 years, household heads with physical activity limitations, and household heads with mental activity limitations (Housing Assessment Resource Tools HART, 2023).



How is affordability and core housing need defined?

Statistics Canada considers affordable housing as housing costing less than 30% of a household income, before tax ((Statistics Canada, 2023). However, this definition is not exercised consistently across Canada, with municipalities and provincial governments also using a market-based definition that ties affordability to average market trends, thereby excluding lower income households who are not served by market rental. Statistics Canada considers a private household as being in core housing need, if it meets at least one of the following three requirements (1) spending more than 30% of income on shelter, (2) is living in a dwelling in need of major repairs, (3) or is in overcrowded housing, and spends 30% or more of before-tax income on median rent (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Some Canadian municipalities use more complex definitions of affordability, for example the City of Calgary considers a household to be “in need of affordable housing when it earns less than \$60,000/year and pays more than 30 per cent of gross income on shelter costs” (City of Calgary, 2023). In 2021, the City of Toronto adopted new definitions of affordability, moving from previous market-based definitions to a more nuanced understanding where affordable rental is defined using a combination of shelter costs, rent, and income (City of Toronto, 2022). York Region defines affordability differently according to ownership and rental, wherein affordable ownership is defined according to average purchase price and household income, and affordable rental is defined according to household income or average market rent (York Region, 2023).

A.4 HART's definition of affordability offers an accurate reflection of local markets, an inclusive and broad perspective, consistency with existing and historic programs, and a targeted link between income and housing.

Interviewees found many advantages with using HART's definition of affordability in their work, including the fact that it offers a more faithful reflection of local affordability without market distortions, a broad perspective that aligns with various program definitions, is consistent with existing and historic programs, and directly links income to housing need targets. A consistently cited benefit of HART's affordability definition is its capacity to reflect local affordability according to household income, as opposed to average rents which many interviewees noted would skew affordability categories higher. This data could then be analyzed and categorized to develop a target population matrix reflecting household incomes, which was cited as being more relatable and communicable in the housing sector and beyond. For example, one interviewee described how using quintiles or deciles to calculate income categories resonated less when communicating housing need for particular groups, in comparison to referencing HART's categories of low income, very low income and so forth. One interviewee noted how market-based definitions (e.g., Average Market Rent or AMR) are not inclusive of countless other financial factors, such as rent subsidies, which would exclude low-income households relying on government subsidies.

One interviewee referenced how HART's income-based definition resulted in a more nuanced understanding of where existing affordable housing is located, particularly through a comparison of multiple adjacent jurisdictions. For example, in jurisdictions or regional governments that are the result of amalgamation, HART's comparative capacity allows local governments to consider different thresholds of affordability geographically and integrate these insights into strategic planning for affordable housing.

“[Income-based affordability] does seem to reflect more faithfully what's really going on in the community and in the market.

People don't organize themselves into quintiles.”

A.5 The disadvantages of HART's definition include inconsistent use at the national, provincial, and municipal level or methodologies, and lack of applicability for certain housing types or sectors.

While most interviewees noted the usefulness of the HART data methodology for defining affordability, several people noted several challenges that impacted the capacity for more fulsome adoption of HART's tools. For example, some noted that restructuring or reframing organizational methodologies to integrate HART's data was not feasible either due to its inconsistency with existing municipal, provincial or national definitions, or due to its lack of applicability for specific housing typologies, such as co-operative housing. To the former point, one interviewee noted that keeping a consistent organizational definition of affordability is necessary to maintain coherent messaging particularly when developing and publicly communicating a housing need narrative. This concern was also echoed in the need to longitudinally measure the impact of organizational activities on housing need, which would rely on keeping a consistent methodology over time. The ease of communicating housing need was reflected in some interviewee's responses, who evaluated HART's income categories positively in its capacity to accurately reflecting housing need to income but noted its challenges in clearly communicating or adopting new definitions of affordability to the public and housing providers.

The need for keeping consistency when defining affordability was also described in reference to regional, provincial, or federal definitions or guidelines around affordable housing. For example, a few interviewees noted potential shifts in provincial guidelines towards a market-based definition or adapting the use of deciles and quintiles, which would then impact municipal-level activities. One interviewee also noted the presence of two-tier governments resulted in additional complexity. This lack of uniformity or stability in defining affordability across jurisdictions can result in housing developers being subject to several different affordability requirements or measurements, thereby impacting the ability to manage and deliver affordable housing effectively. Despite the fact that HART's tools are situated in a wider context of varied jurisdictional definitions of affordability, one interviewee noted that this challenge could be leveraged into a strength, wherein HART's tools allow municipalities to describe their housing need simultaneously at the regional or provincial level, without necessarily replacing or overhauling municipal regulatory frameworks.

Most people specifically commended HART's methodology for its capacity to define affordable rental housing, while a few interviewees noted difficulties in using or adapting its methodologies to best suit the co-operative housing sector or affordable ownership. For example, one interviewee described the lack of consistent and in-depth national census data on subsidized households in co-operative housing, thereby impacting the usability of HART's census-based tools to offer a true representation of housing need by income for the co-operative housing sector. Another described the HART categories as being useful for depicting housing need for renter households, yet more challenging when describing housing need for first-time home buyers. This capacity to measure housing need for homeownership could be critical depending on municipal housing strategies or priorities aimed at growth, and one interviewee noted the importance of this consideration in defining the income categories.

A.6 The federal and provincial governments should take a larger role in measuring all housing need and hidden homelessness, through provision of funding, training, of Housing Needs Assessment criteria, and inclusion of new variables in the census.

Many interviewees described potential avenues for federal and provincial government to move forward in taking larger initiative towards improved measurement of all housing need and hidden homelessness, including through the provision of funding or training to municipalities, providing guidance on housing needs assessments, and through the addition of new variables in national census surveys.

The provision of funding and training to municipalities: This was the most-cited action to be taken on the part of the federal government. Interviewees noted that systematic provision of funding tied to training or guidance to municipalities. Training municipalities or housing providers was described as best-practice methodologies in data collection, measuring and counting housing needs, with emphasis on defining and including priority populations. One person noted that a robust federal commitment to long-term data collection on housing need and homelessness regardless of grant funding or one-time programs would be particularly promising in ameliorating the national data landscape. To this point, one interviewee described how amid Canada's housing crisis, the federal government should be taking steps towards removing barriers for municipalities to access funding, as opposed to creating new hurdles in the form of conditional requirements.

Support for data on homelessness: Some interviewees described how the capacity for municipalities to conduct thorough homelessness counts or housing needs assessments including hidden homeless, and students is contingent on having the funding or training to do internal data collection according to a consistent and feasible methodology, preferably provided by federal government to ensure national comparability. This led into the second most cited action on the part of the federal government, which was the provision of clear guidance or templates on housing needs assessment criteria and reporting. This initiative would preclude the need for municipalities to outsource work to an external consultant, who may use differing methodologies in data collection and thereby negatively impact comparison at a national scale. For example, the Province of British Columbia required municipalities to complete a housing needs report every five years and provided funding to directly support this action. One interviewee described this action as key for supporting national comparability of housing needs over multiple time intervals.

“[Government] needs to actually deploy the data and target funding...for housing supply and affordability to match the information its getting from the project.”

Support for local data collection: Interviewees noted the importance of federal funding for data collection, citing how previously, federal government had paid administrative fees for co-operative housing providers to directly complete data collection work. This then changed, as responsibility for data collection was downloaded onto co-operative housing providers, without providing corresponding funding and regardless of internal capacity or data privacy concerns. Collecting data on priority populations in subsidized or cooperative housing is especially challenging given privacy needs and lack of capacity, especially in volunteer-led housing providers.

Provide more granular census data on housing: Federal government must take the initiative to include additional variables in census data collection, such as students, persons living in congregate housing, persons residing in co-operative housing, and persons experiencing homelessness. This inclusion would capture more variation in household types and housing situations, outside of normative definitions and potentially re-define how housing need data is collected and measured. One interviewee noted that federal leadership around census data collection on housing need inclusive of students, persons experiencing homelessness, and additional housing typologies would allow municipalities and housing providers to analyze housing need consistently over time and create more accurate projections for strategic planning.

“I think that the great thing about the HART data set is it can create a level playing field.”



How did BC support municipalities in data collection for housing needs reports?

The Province of British Columbia provided \$5 million in funding support, administered by the Union of BC Municipalities, to aid local governments in completing their housing needs reports (Union of BC Municipalities, 2023). Funding aid was provided according to the local governments' population size, with eligible expenditures including project management, data collection and research scoping, community engagement, consultant fees, and training for government staff.

LAND ASSESSMENTS

“ The [Land Assessment Tool] doesn't identify only surplus and vacant sites, but also sites with a structure. That's the kind of thinking I want to introduce in federal government's attitude around access to land. ”



B.1 HART's Land Assessment or similar methodologies have primarily been used in relation to opportunity-based approaches, to reframe organizational activities, for advocacy efforts, or in parallel with internal assessments.

HART's Land Assessment Tool was developed for thirteen government partners. We also made our methodology available for use by local governments. The tool was used for ad hoc or opportunity-based activities, for strategic approaches aimed towards different outcomes, for re-evaluating organizational activities, for advocacy efforts, or to complement similar internal land assessment work. For interviewees who had not used HART's Land Assessment Tool or similar methodologies, this was due to differing organizational priorities or varied land base that rendered systematic land assessment for affordable housing less feasible without external changes.

Interviewees who described using either HART's Land Assessment Tool or similar land assessment methodologies in an ad hoc approach, cited this as a more reactive process as opportunities arise. For example, one interviewee described a situation where a particular community was able to leverage a previously completed housing needs assessment to bolster a well-founded submission to lease well-located land parcels for housing development. Similarly, another person described how Indigenous communities have successfully pooled funds to acquire well-located land parcels in areas with substantial Indigenous presence. A few people suggested that existing views of available land parcels are limited, therefore reducing the extent to which rigorous assessment can take place. In this regard, several interviewees praised HART's Land Assessment Tool for broadening the scope of what is considered 'available' land parcels for affordable housing and introducing consistent metrics for scoring parcels.

For interviewees who described current or future strategic land assessment methodologies in organizational work, this included identifying well-located land parcels to provide for land trusts or housing providers, or selling well-located surplus land parcels to developers. The former example included using HART's methodology to assess land parcels according to its suitability for specific priority populations, in tandem with findings from HART's HNA Tool. The latter example was about land parcels which municipalities or organizations had purchased in the past, assessed according to internal criteria, and made available for housing developers.

Several interviewees described using HART's Land Assessment Tool and methodologies to reframe existing organizational activities, including re-evaluation of internal land and development opportunities to be more systematic or efficient. One person noted how HART's analysis of land parcel proximity to amenities aligned with existing municipal priorities and reduced potential staff time that would be spent evaluating parcels site-by-site. Another interviewee noted that although HART's approach was not currently integrated into organizational work, they would like to do so in the future.

Developing affordable housing on already occupied land is a sensitive topic. As such, interviewees stated that HART's Land Assessment Tool offered a sorely needed shift in attitudes or perspectives towards using government-owned land for housing, by virtue of including vacant and occupied land parcels. They hoped it would advance a more proactive way of thinking about land parcels, without necessarily relying on the overly simplistic

categorization of surplus, available, vacant, or occupied. A few people described currently integrating elements from HART's Land Assessment Tool methodology in their housing strategy, such as in bridging the gap between understanding how much housing is needed, and where this housing might be best placed. One interviewee positively described the capacity of Land Assessment Tool to move focus from strategic priorities, and towards developing action-oriented policies.

Many interviewees described using HART's Land Assessment Tool for advocacy efforts, both internally within the organization and externally to the public or to federal government. One interviewee noted that the benefits of systematic land assessment for creating affordable housing in Canada are still rooted in broad discourse, and the HART tools have helped to crystallize these advantages for continuing land assessments. These conversation points include shifting the perspective that there is no available land for housing and reconceptualizing what it means. One interviewee described this conversation as a shift towards discussing housing as infrastructure, to prioritize the planning and development of affordable housing as a necessity with infrastructure in the traditional sense. For example, conceptualizing housing as necessary infrastructure could lead to incentivizing creation of the suitable housing forms through development cost deferrals or tax breaks. One interviewee described practicing advocacy using insights from the land assessment tool more broadly, posing the larger question of how the data insights can form a narrative or action.

The challenge of varied land bases was echoed by those we spoke with, who described current land assessment processes as being less systematic or less structured according to a given set of criteria, since there are fewer land parcels to assess from the outset. As such, performing consistent assessment of land parcels according to proximity amenities, may have to be weighted in comparison to the possibility of delivering affordable housing with convenient land parcels. Partners described how HART's Land Assessment Tool could support municipalities in persuading city councils to acquire more land and build up a flexible land base to use for affordable housing.

Participants described how insights from HART's Land Assessment Tool could push municipalities towards re-evaluating how existing land use designations can incorporate housing. For example, existing single-purpose buildings and facilities can be reconsidered to allow for future multi-purpose use that includes affordable housing where appropriate.

B.2 The federal government should encourage the use of government and non-profit-owned land for affordable housing, through provision of funding or financial incentives, strategic action, and transparency on land ownership.

The most-cited actions that the federal government could take to encourage using government-owned or non-profit owned land for affordable housing, were: using federal land, encouraging multi-level and multi-sectoral collaboration, capacity-building, and introducing strategies to realize all the above. The direct use of federal land to create and develop affordable housing was mentioned by several interviewees, with some interviewees noting difficulties in the Federal Lands Initiative (FLI) that could be adapted for future similar initiatives. For example, challenges with the FLI included limited information on available land parcels and short timelines that were not reflective of the realities of developing proposals. One interviewee described how smaller municipal land bases provided an opportunity for provincial and federal governments to lead by example by using their own land. The discussion of varied municipal land bases (in terms of size or suitability) led to the potential of federal mandates around municipalities having targets or strategic plans for their land parcels.

Multi-sectoral collaboration in developing affordable housing was noted as especially important when planning housing with wrap-around services that would benefit priority populations. One interviewee described how the housing sector should not be the only actor, and how vital collaboration between multiple ministries is to successfully deliver housing for youth, for seniors, for Indigenous persons, or for households with mental health and addiction challenges. This collaboration should be committed through long-term budget planning, as one interviewee described the difficulties of negotiating funding commitments for housing every year. Multi-level government collaboration was referenced in relation to maximizing government-owned land (municipal with provincial or federal) in a pilot project, to develop expertise for future work. For example, one interviewee described how in two-tier governments or single-tier municipal governments, housing development requires the collaboration of regional government to coordinate sewer and water infrastructure. A few interviewees also described the role of the federal government in supporting capacity-building for housing providers, particularly not-for-profit organizations. This includes support in the development process, such as servicing, planning and conceptual design, so that housing providers with less experience or smaller portfolios can be scaled up.



What is the Federal Lands Initiative?

The Federal Lands Initiative is a \$200 million fund announced in 2018 by the Canadian government, intended to support the use of 4,000 surplus federal property for affordable housing, by making assets available at discounted costs (Government of Canada, 2023). The surplus federal assets are identified and assessed with due diligence, for future use as affordable housing. Proposed projects must meet three requirements: affordability, energy efficiency, and accessibility. Since the Federal Lands Initiative was introduced, several interviewees mentioned areas of improvement for the next iteration, for more efficient and effective processes towards leveraging government-owned assets for affordable housing.



Who holds land title data in Canada?

Land title data collection and registry varies across Canada. In most provinces and territories registry data is held by private companies or government, where title information is available for a fee with multiple caveats, including limitations on publishing parcel boundaries or owner names. In Ontario, land title data is collected and managed by Teranet, a private company (Teranet, 2023). In Alberta, land title data can be ordered from the Alberta Registries Spatial Information System (SPIN2) contingent on title searches already knowing the land identification number code, title number or legal descriptions (Government of Alberta, 2023). In Québec, the provincial government operates the Registre foncier du Québec en ligne, which includes all transactions since 1830 (Gouvernement du Québec, 2023).

An overarching theme of federal leadership was introducing strategies that included all the aforementioned initiatives, to signify federal prioritization of government-owned land as a viable approach for creating affordable housing. Several interviewees described how federal directives that explicitly list using and maximizing government-owned land, would incentivize municipalities and housing providers to dedicate resources to this effect.

The importance of sustained funding or financial incentives from federal government to municipal and provincial government or housing providers was noted by several interviewees. The discussion of funding was particularly relevant in light of the fact that the scale of Canada's housing crisis has escalated since the NHS and Federal Lands Initiative were introduced in 2018, and therefore requires commensurate financial aid to appropriately address housing need. One interviewee who had raised the issue of smaller municipal land bases resulting in less flexibility to develop large-scale affordable housing, emphasized how increased funding to municipalities could enable them to acquire well-located land parcels for strategic planning of housing development. Similarly, another interviewee noted that the high cost of land as a barrier to strategic land assessment or acquisition for affordable housing. As such, the direct provision of land or funding to acquire suitable land would be a vast contribution towards the financial feasibility of affordable housing projects.

Finally, some people observed that systematic land assessment for affordable housing is highly dependent on increased transparency or data-sharing on land ownership nationally. Currently, there is no national infrastructure for collecting and publishing data on land ownership, as each province and territory has unique practices and repositories to store land title information. For example, in some provinces like Ontario, some land title data is held by an entity external to the government, while in British Columbia, land title data is collected and managed by the Land Title and Survey Authority (LTSA) with information available for public reference (Province of British Columbia, 2022). One interviewee noted the British Columbia land title database could potentially be adopted as a standard operating model at the national scale, to provide more transparency and clarity, not only for land assessment but understanding overall market evolution. The current variability in data access leaves some provinces or territories at a significant disadvantage for conducting in-depth land assessment, particularly if municipalities are already limited by smaller land bases. One interviewee noted that in provinces where land title is held by private companies, data privacy restrictions can be maneuvered by introducing long-term consultant agreements on data-sharing. For example, companies or municipalities would be held to the same standard in terms of criteria, to share summary data on land parcel ownership, as opposed to raw data or parcel boundaries.

How does the cost of land affect affordable housing creation?

The common perception that there is no available land for affordable housing, especially in urban areas, is a misconception that hinders maximizing underutilized land parcels for affordable housing. As such, the high costs of developing affordable housing are a significant barrier that can be mitigated through leveraging land supply by unlocking vacant and occupied parcels for below-market costs. Land costs can "exceed 40 percent of total property prices," and even reach as high as 80 percent in large cities (McKinsey Global Institute, 2014, p. 7).

ACQUISITIONS

Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust, Toronto Property Acquisitions for Affordable Housing



3.3

C.1 Property acquisitions for affordable housing have primarily been achieved through ad hoc or opportunity-based situations or have been referenced through advocacy to raise awareness of benefits.

While most interviewees were familiar with property acquisition strategies for affordable housing, only a few described currently exercising an acquisition strategy or policy in organizational activities. Furthermore, existing acquisition activities primarily occurred as the opportunity arose, as opposed to having a strategic plan or acquisition targets. One interviewee described how organizationally, previous property acquisitions have been assets already held by co-op or non-profit organizations as opposed to acquiring out of the private sector. For example, residential buildings that have challenges with mortgage payment arrears, vacancies, or structural failures, are some characteristics of potential buildings for acquisition. However, in a BC context, strategic property acquisition from both private and non-profit market for affordable housing is more likely, through the introduction of the BC Rental Protection Fund. One interviewee noted this provincial program as an ideal platform to integrate the HART Property Acquisition Tool, primarily through raising awareness of types of suitable properties and creating better informed proposals. This is particularly important when developing acquisition targets or narratives, to understand the household demographics such as income and rents. Another interviewee described previous successful opportunity-based acquisitions for housing and mixed-use facilities and pointed to the potential of acquisition strategies tied with the legislative power of right of first refusal, that would allow for more efficient activities. Some people described supporting housing providers and stakeholders in acquisition processes, without necessarily acquiring buildings under the city housing portfolio. For example, one interviewee noted that the municipality provides support to partners in the form of funding or expertise to expedite the acquisition process.

Most interviewees described using HART's Property Acquisition Tool in an advocacy approach. Examples include through raising awareness of financial benefits of acquiring existing affordable buildings as opposed to new build, through highlighting potential rent stability provided through acquisition model as opposed to new construction, and by targeting potential buildings strategically through pre-defined criteria or database. One person pointed out that often the lack of funding for non-profit housing providers to acquire properties is due to the perception that non-profit housing providers have less experience or capacity to manage older buildings. However, this is not necessarily the case, as the building portfolio of non-profit housing providers tends to be older buildings with capital repair costs. As such, HART's Toolkits and reports can override the obstacle that property acquisition has too high a price tag compared to new construction.

Several people mentioned the challenges of property acquisition as a significant barrier to implementing any strategic or opportunity-based activities. Risk was a frequent factor in deciding the feasibility of property acquisition, as one interviewee noted the financial, health and safety, and reputational risks associated for a municipality to acquire existing assets. The short timelines to act, and the resulting reduced window for feasibility studies or due diligence, sets back already restrictive timeframes for municipalities to acquire buildings.

C.2 The federal government should encourage property acquisition as a viable strategy to contribute to long-term affordable housing stock, through leadership, targeted funding, and creating a dedicated national body.

Interviewees described the potential role of the federal government in supporting acquisition of existing properties for affordable housing, with the majority pointing towards active leadership through introducing new strategies, fostering dialogue, encouraging data or information sharing at a national scale, and an overall need for funding. Federal leadership in supporting property acquisition is also needed in championing acquisitions as a practical and attainable approach to contribute to affordable housing stock. One interviewee described the lack of information or federal guidance on the financial benefits of property acquisition for affordable housing, that is undermining the potential uptake of acquisitions into housing strategies.

One person described the importance of dialogue between and within multiple sectors towards facilitating successful property acquisitions. For example, a thorough understanding of the types of buildings suitable for acquisition requires market-based intelligence and information through the private sector's cooperation. However, these relationships and engagement opportunities need to be actively encouraged for acquisition to be perceived as a viable strategy with far-reaching benefits. One interviewee noted the regional or provincial silos that characterize information-sharing, and the opportunity for a central housing operation to facilitate regular collaboration and conversation between different sub-sets of the housing sector, such as Indigenous housing providers or cooperative housing providers.

Funding to support acquisition strategies was described as a critical factor, with the introduction of dedicated federal funding for acquisition would underscore its prioritization for municipalities and housing providers to move towards. This would also hopefully overrule hesitation or misconceptions about its viability. One interviewee described how existing levels of investment at the federal level are not enough to meet the housing need, particularly considering the initial public interest surrounding the NHS. Another noted that federal funding for capital and operational fees needed to be tied to federal policies that framed acquisition in the broader scope of the housing crisis, to describe its contribution to the right type of supply commensurate to existing need. Funding was also referenced as seed matching at the provincial level, fund pooling from multiple levels of government, or targeted funding that would fill the gaps in acquisition proposals. One interviewee described the difficulties with acquisitions where most funding comes from a nationally designed fund program, which may have conditions not applicable to local markets. The addition of federal funding through seed matching could allow for locally initiated program design with the financial contribution of federal dollars. Fund pooling was also discussed, as a flexible form of funding that municipalities and housing providers could tap into as needed. For example, one interviewee described the challenge of funding acquisition and underwriting proposals without knowing the full scope of financial costs or resources. A fund pool could alleviate this initial concern, by ensuring funding availability in advance. Another interviewee described the existing reality of piecemeal grant funding in the housing sector, wherein multiple one-time funding programs need to be reframed as long-term sustained funding to truly meet the scale of housing need.

The conversation about federal funding and seed matching was also linked to the issue of stacking multiple sources of existing funding, to allow municipalities and housing providers to take advantage of provincial and federal grants simultaneously. One interviewee noted how federal funding to support acquisition is not necessarily a new initiative, citing how historically, many cooperative housing providers were able to build up portfolios through leveraging federal funds and resources dedicated to this effect. However, the introduction of similar funding initiatives or programs to support acquisition for affordable housing would need to be much more substantial than previous iterations, given greater need and higher costs.

The need for strategic and targeted funding was also highlighted given the costs associated with planning work, feasibility studies and building condition assessments prior to acquisition even occurring. This includes the information and data necessary to evaluate potential assets for acquisition, such as barriers to development with servicing or environmental and energy considerations. As such, property acquisition may be tied to various related costs for demolition, decontamination, renovation, to ensure the assets' longevity and affordability.

Many interviewees described the need for a national multi-sectoral organization arms-length of government, that is dedicated to managing and underwriting funds for property acquisition. This would allow for flexible use according to the local contextual needs, without being beholden to a national program design or federal timelines. One interviewee described this succinctly, citing how municipalities and housing providers are more frequently calling for federal investment into a sector-led acquisition program that could leverage capital without being reliant on ongoing government commitment. The collaboration of multiple organizations in the housing sector into a national arms-length organization could leverage existing knowledge into a cohesive organization facilitating strategic acquisitions. Potential sector-based organizations include the Canadian Housing Renewal Association, CHF Canada, or the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness; organizations with similar mandates that are serving various subsets of the population. One interviewee described this process as allowing the municipality or housing provider to perform due diligence and assessment work before available properties enter the market, thereby assessing both organizational

capacity and building feasibility in advance. Another person referenced past federal funding programs, where complex application portals and short timelines resulted in challenging processes for municipalities or housing providers who are already overburdened. Another interviewee described a national organization dedicated to property acquisition, functioning as a national housing authority to oversee administration of acquired properties. In this scenario, the alternative might be countless local housing authorities with varying portfolios of acquired units over time, potentially leading to continued inconsistencies in data collection and reporting.



How has the federal government supported housing co-operatives?

Housing co-operatives became more prevalent in the 1960s in Canada, to address affordable housing need in tandem with community values and volunteership. In 1968, the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada was formed, signaling the growing role of co-operatives in providing housing relative to public housing. The federal government began supporting housing co-operatives in 1973 by creating a national co-op housing program, through an amendment to the National Housing Act. The historical relationship between federal government and the co-operative housing sector has been characterized by varying phases of investment over time, including a significant reduction in financial aid during the 1990s and more recently in the 2022 federal budget promising to launch a Co-operative Housing Development Program. The figure below describes the number of federally assisted affordable housing units completed from 1946 to 2019 in Canada, and its relation to the overall housing stock.



Figure 1 Federally Assisted Affordable Housing Units, 1946 - 2019. Chart by Brian Clifford, from *The Tyee*.



What is the BC Rental Protection Fund?

The BC Rental Protection Fund is a \$500 million initiative announced in 2023 and provides one-time capital grants to non-profit housing organizations to support acquisition of affordable residential buildings and ownership co-operatives, with the aim of preserving affordability (Rental Protection Fund, 2023). The Fund is managed by the newly created Housing Protection Fund Society, which operates externally from government and is a partnership between three major provincial housing sector organizations: The BC Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA), Co-operative Housing Federation BC (CHFBC), and the Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA). The Rental Protection Fund will operate in a three-stage process: (1) applicant pre-qualification which will evaluate organizational readiness, (2) property pre-qualification which will evaluate property eligibility for the Fund, and (3) acquisition proposal during which formal proposals must be submitted with due diligence.

TRACKING HOUSING COMPLETIONS

D.1 Current methodologies of tracking housing need, supply, demand and completions need to be improved at all levels of government, through renewed federal leadership.

The challenge of thoroughly tracking housing completions to better match supply with housing demand was described as an issue at all levels of government, with an overall need for federal leadership to establish a set criteria or methodology for consistency. Interviewees described several avenues for the federal government to improve existing methodologies of tracking housing completions, including well-timed funding, federal provision of guidance for housing needs assessments, training, and addition of new data variables or indicators to national census surveys.

Most people that we spoke with agreed that federal and provincial governments should provide long-term funding support to municipalities and housing providers for data collection, analysis, and reporting on housing needs consistently. For example, one interviewee referenced the challenges of reporting data for funding proposals, according to CMHC requirements, wherein some data variables required hiring consultants or re-evaluating internal organizational data to match CMHC categories. A few people praised the CMHC's HAF for dedicating financial resources to scaling up municipal capacity for creating affordable housing but pointed out the need for consistent data collection on program outcomes. The importance of well-timed funding was also raised by a majority of interviewees, who pointed out the tight deadlines associated with data collection, reporting, and documentation after receiving CMHC funding. The role of both federal and provincial governments in providing funding support was emphasized, as most interviewees noted the limited fiscal tools of municipalities in comparison. For example, one interviewee described how their municipal housing needs assessment data showed the need for more provincial and federal investment. Improved data collection or management systems was also noted as an area for investment by federal and provincial governments, to set up and deliver centralized tracking systems. Other suggestions included (1) for every data-associated request on the part of federal or provincial government, there could be a commensurate investment or contribution; (2) a dedicated funding source for this data collection, as opposed to funding programs which may come with additional conditions; and (3) associated training tools to support municipalities in consistent data collection and reporting.

The discussion of federal funding provision was tied to federal guidance and leadership on consistent housing needs reporting. One interviewee described the importance of consistent housing needs reporting by municipalities for supporting investment and funding proposals especially, amongst a wealth of other benefits. Recalling the challenges associated with data collection and reporting according to CMHC program conditions, a majority of interviewees described how beneficial federal leadership through a housing needs assessment template or criteria would be to municipalities.

Many interviewees described the complexities of tracking housing completions and households in core housing need since this is highly contingent on federal leadership through including new or additional disaggregated data variables into the national census survey. This would allow consistent and long-term reporting on the same variables, thus supporting municipalities in tracking housing needs to better target housing supply. For

example, some interviewees noted the addition of data variables to support intersectional analysis of Indigenous households, data on immigration and temporary student visas, building permit tracking, and inclusion of alternative forms of housing (e.g., student housing, rooming houses). Several interviewees described the complexity of consistent data collection on specific demographic profiles. However, the activities of data collection and investment need to go hand in hand with data dissemination, as evidenced when one interviewee described the reality of data availability and ordering custom data from Statistics Canada, which has its own associated caveats and timeframes. As such, the ability for municipalities to leverage existing census data is diminished by the capacity to order, access and analyze data within a set timeframe. The addition of existing data variables used by municipalities was also mentioned in housing typologies. For example, some municipalities will collect and include data on rooming houses or SRO's as contributing to the overall housing stock, while CMHC's definition of housing typologies may not. This variability in defining data variables could lead to undercounting of housing supply over the long-term, which is a great concern for municipalities, especially when developing non-traditional housing programs. One interviewee described this gap between data availability and ability to report, wherein the information being asked of municipalities and housing organizations is not often feasible to report according to CMHC requirements, for lack of the right systems or tools in place.

HART'S ROLE

“ The HART data is super helpful, and hopefully more people start to build a consensus that this is the dataset that really zeroes in on the challenge. ”



What is the Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF)?

In the 2022 budget, the federal government announced the \$4 billion Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) that would award incentive funding to local governments, based on proposals that would “remove barriers to housing supply, accelerate the growth of supply and support the development of equitable, affordable, and low-carbon and climate-resilient communities” (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2023, p. 3). Applications were processed through two streams: Large/Urban for communities in ten provinces with a population of 10,000+, and Small / Rural / North / Indigenous for communities in the territories, Indigenous communities, or in the provinces with a population of under 10,000. Communities that receive funding are required to submit either a current (within two years of 2022 budget) or new housing needs assessment. To support communities in this requirement, the CMHC provided an optional online template. This is a significant step at the federal level, both towards recommending consistent data collection and reporting on housing need, and with reporting tied to the provision of funding for affordable housing.



3.5

E.1 HART has a significant role in supporting governments and housing-sector organizations of all levels and sizes in maximizing data, developing targets, and completing applications or proposals to the federal government.

All interviewees described the ongoing need for HART's support to local governments and housing-related organizations, both within the current scope of support with data and funding proposals, but also expanding to include developing realistic targets for housing development. Many interviewees noted the ability of HART to directly support with municipalities or organizations who have less capacity to complete housing needs assessment work, and spoke positively of HART's current user-friendly interfaces, along with the potential for improvement in this regard. A few interviewees noted that the accessibility of HART's methodologies for land assessment and housing needs assessment are extremely helpful for streamlining internal work.

This ability to support low-capacity organizations was also mentioned in reference to CMHC funding programs, wherein smaller organizations need additional support to fill out applications, whether this is in data collection and analysis or understanding the information being asked by CMHC. One interviewee described HART's how-to guides as user-friendly tools for breaking down complex data collection or analysis methodologies and processes that are needed for CMHC applications or reporting. Another interviewee described potential support in the form of online training either directly with organizations or in a self-paced format, allowing organizations to maximize the tools developed by HART. For example, one interviewee mentioned the positive impact for newer staff members who attended HART's workshop explaining housing needs and interpreting census data.

The ongoing communications aspect of HART's tools was also noted, with a couple of interviewees noting the potential communications exercise in demonstrating to local government officials, how HART's tools can be leveraged for internal evaluation and analysis without upending organizational definitions or research efforts. Another interviewee pointed to HART's role in supporting provincial government, if municipalities are using HART's housing needs data or methodologies in a common framework, then provincial government can assess proposals or data outputs at a level playing field using common denominators. A few people pointed out HART's role in supporting local governments to develop realistic targets, referencing the challenges with leveraging existing data to meet the requirements of CMHC funding programs. CMHC's reporting requirements might assume

“Instead of government questioning whether the community housing sector has the capacity, there should be investment in working together to build that capacity.”

that a given unit will always house specific priority populations or households below a certain income, while housing providers or municipalities cannot always guarantee this will be the case.

Another interviewee described a situation where CMHC reporting required municipalities to break down housing targets by type, which did not correspond fully to municipal housing categories and required a complete internal evaluation of existing building data. This example of ad hoc building data evaluation according to CMHC requirements could result in countless different categorizations and definitions of housing portfolio, jurisdiction by jurisdiction, negatively impacting consistent tracking over time. As such, one interviewee described this as a potential avenue for HART to facilitate communication between local government and CMHC, to ensure that different data reporting requirements from federal and provincial government do not place additional strain on local government.

A frequent comment was that HART's tools have already served as a reliable foundation for implementing new or adapting existing municipal activities to better develop affordable housing strategies. One interviewee noted that the transparency of HART's data and methodologies was a huge benefit to understanding and adapting the processes as needed. For example, adapting the land assessment considerations of proximity amenities to suit internal organizational priorities, such as amenities that would be prioritized by seniors versus those by younger adults or single-parent families. It was suggested that HART's land assessment methodology could be adapted for specific municipal contexts, such as presence of underused contaminated land which is currently excluded from the analysis. Altogether, the HART tools have provided a transparent and relevant methodological infrastructure for municipalities to underpin organizational work, and there is a continued need for HART to produce foundational work to measure and assess housing needs.

E.2 HART has the capacity to continually support local government and organizations in housing needs assessments and acquire or develop tools to enable further land assessments.

Interviewees described the headway that HART's tools have already made in measuring and assessing housing need consistently and with capacity for comparability across Canada. Considering the currently disparate mandates at the provincial and federal level regarding housing needs assessment criteria or templates, HART's methodologies allow for integrating updated data and new data variables over time, to create a structured outline for future housing needs assessment templates. For example, one interviewee noted that the Province of British Columbia's currently mandated housing needs reports does not have particular requirements regarding the reporting of housing need for priority populations. Additionally, British Columbia's current housing needs report criteria only ask if consultation with priority populations has occurred, without mandates as to the systematic inclusion or engagement with priority populations. One interviewee noted the value of HART's Housing Needs Assessment data, along with the potential implications for consistent tracking and data outputs over time, contingent on the ability to add census data over multiple time intervals. Additionally, HART's Housing Needs Assessment data insights provide municipalities or organizations with priority areas or starting points for more in-depth internal data analysis and research.

Many interviewees pointed out the usefulness and relevance of HART's Land Assessment Tool for direct targeted policy and programming that addresses topical research questions. HART's publicly accessible land assessment methodology can also expand to other local governments, subject to data availability. One interviewee described the potential benefits from regularly updating existing land assessment maps with recent data or policy development, to ensure their viability and use as living documents. This may require acquiring or developing tools to enable an expanded number of land assessments, particularly considering the significant amount of data collection and analysis that is required, notwithstanding the contextual considerations for unique jurisdictions.

“If the federal government will be asking for housing action plans or housing need assessments beyond the Housing Accelerator Fund, I think that HART is well-placed to be a good continuing resource.”

E.3 HART has a potential role as a forum for peer learning and communication between local governments and higher levels of government.

Several interviewees positively described HART's government partner meetings and opportunities for peer learning between local governments and housing organizations, and described how HART could take leadership in facilitating forums for ongoing housing research and policy discourse. For example, one interviewee noted the benefits of learning from what peer governments are doing to create affordable housing and understanding what is or is not working. Another interviewee noted the positive impact of HART's events bridging gaps between academic research and practice for local government, academia, and housing-sector organizations. Another interviewee pointed out the benefits of hearing how HART's tools have been leveraged in other jurisdictions, to bring insights into how similar initiatives can be approached in their own municipality or organizational work. In this sense, HART's existing work and future role is to leverage existing housing research networks, through organizing conferences and presentations. For example, one interviewee mentioned the HAF and the potential for HART to organize events learning from successful HAF applications to disseminate innovative ideas for future similar initiatives. The role of HART as a communicative bridge was also mentioned in relation to CMHC's funding timelines, wherein HART could be inserted earlier into the process of CMHC program development, to provide sector knowledge or voice potential concerns.

“[HART] has bridged that gap you don't often see bridged between academia and practice.”

E.4 HART is well-placed to continue acquiring and developing innovative research and analytical tools that integrate housing needs and land assessments.

HART has already furthered innovative research to conceptualize solution-based, accessible, and operable tools, and a majority of interviewees pointed to HART's potential to continue this work. For example, updating existing land assessment maps and developing new land assessments with recent datasets or policy developments to broaden the research methodologies. Another interviewee how HART's existing tools could evolve with additional layers of innovative research. For example, a few interviewees proposed the consideration of school properties and assets into land assessment for affordable housing, which could redefine what is considered 'available land' and broaden the possibilities for municipalities with seemingly small land base. There is also potential for HART's existing tools on housing needs and land assessment to be integrated and make direct links between what type of housing is needed, and what land parcels can accommodate this housing creation. For example, one interviewee described the potential of evaluating the gaps between housing supply and demand to highlight growth areas across the country. One interviewee noted the wide-ranging applicability of the HART tools, not only for local government and housing-sector organizations, but also to federal government and the CMHC in longitudinally evaluating housing outcomes or housing need to better shape funding programs accordingly.

E.5 HART's work advances advocacy efforts in various categories, including data advocacy and creation of the right supply of housing.

Both municipalities and housing-sector organizations alike pointed to the contributions HART's tools and the research project overall have lent to advocacy efforts pushing for additional data collection, data transparency, and evidence-based funding for targeted housing supply. As noted earlier, HART's data-based tools spotlight the continued need for disaggregated data collection that can be accessed without significant resource costs to municipalities or local organizations to accurately report housing need or complete land assessments. This data advocacy includes improved data collection on counting housing needs inclusive of unhoused populations and students, and for data transparency on land title to advance thorough land assessments.

Many interviewees described how HART's tools show direct links between local housing need by income categories, the corresponding maximum affordable shelter costs, and the housing supply that municipalities should be targeting to meet this need. For example, one person mentioned how HART's data insights for a particular community pointed out the need for more housing supply targeting very low-income households. Another interviewee described how HART's tools and associated materials are timely, thorough, and well-researched documents that directly support advocacy pitches to higher levels of government. HART's land assessment maps describe well-located government-owned land parcels for affordable housing, according to CMHC's proximity measures database. One interviewee noted how HART's land assessment maps reduce lengthy analysis process for local organizations and municipalities significantly and point towards municipalities with significant amounts of suitable land to advocate for affordable housing creation or transit-oriented development funding. Several people highlighted the clarity and user-friendliness of HART's data methodology and tools, particularly when used for advocacy by those who may need additional support in data analysis and interpretation. One interviewee described how the HART research overall has advanced and continued public discourse, through evidence-based data that advocates for action on housing need. In addition, another interviewee noted how HART's research has emphasized the fact that housing needs cannot be mitigated by provision of general housing supply, but rather, of the right kind of supply based on data insights.

CONCLUSIONS

Several conclusions have emerged from the findings of HART's final evaluation interviews with members of the Advisory Committee and government partners.



1. The HART project and research outputs have significantly contributed to and advanced the national discourse on affordable housing, including the development of standardized housing needs assessment criteria, calling for strategic policies tied to land assessment and property acquisition, and overall policy creation at the federal and provincial levels.

The HART project's intended objectives to develop simple, replicable, comparable, evidence-based, and equity-focused tools for housing needs assessment, land assessment, and property acquisition have been achieved and have strengthened HART's role in developing highly influential tools to further Canadian housing policy. HART's HNA Tool has not only supported local governments and housing organizations in consistently measuring housing need, but also served to reinforce recommendations for guidance from governments on reporting housing need through funding, reporting criteria, and disaggregated data collection. To this end, integrated findings from the HNA Tool, the Land Assessment Tool and Property Acquisitions Tool all point to broader policy implications at the federal and provincial levels towards strengthening affordable housing supply.

2. HART's tools, its corresponding insights, and applicable uses all advocate a need for greater leadership at the federal and provincial levels, towards achieving greater data transparency, improved disaggregated data collection and establishing data-sharing practices that would enable continued housing needs assessments, land assessments and property acquisition strategies.

An underlying theme throughout both the development and application of HART's tools is the quality and accessibility of necessary data to accurately assess housing need inclusive of hidden homelessness, to track housing need and supply, to facilitate assessments of government-owned land for affordable housing, and to empower informed property acquisitions strategies. The HART HNA Tool uses national census data to develop insights on housing need by income category, household size, and priority population. Nonetheless, census data on core housing need excludes several demographic groups (e.g. students,

farm workers, hidden homeless) that would have a sizeable impact on how longitudinal data on housing need is measured and interpreted. Similarly, methodologies on tracking housing supply and completions require significant improvement through federal guidance, to enable thorough affordable housing strategies. Finally, the development and implementation of the Land Assessment Tool and Property Acquisitions Tool is contingent on accessible, up-to-date and disaggregated data on land title and building-level characteristics, for which there is currently no national standard or consensus. This evaluation found that improved data transparency and collection would enable further use of or adaptations to the HART tools, particularly in line with broader federal policy aims.

3. The HART tools and expertise presents a valuable opportunity to expand the project mandate in several potential directions, that would continue developing research and outputs supporting governments and housing sector organizations across Canada in affordable housing development.

This evaluation has identified a continued future need for the HART project and expertise, put forth in various roles and functions. This includes continued directives, such as directly supporting local governments and organizations in housing need and land assessments respectively, serving as a channel for housing discourse and peer learning across Canada, supporting federal and provincial governments in policy evaluation and creation, and overall advocating for improved data collection. Several new directives include expanding the scope of land assessments to include more municipalities, developing innovative research that integrates and / or adapts housing need and land assessments, and contribute to legal and policy analysis on affordable housing in Canada.



APPENDICES

5

Appendix A. Evaluation Questions

1. Can you describe your involvement in HART?
 - 1.1. When did you first hear about it?
 - 1.2. Have you attended monthly partner meetings?
 - 1.3. In what other ways have you interacted?
2. Our Housing Needs Assessment Tool breaks down census-reported core housing need by income categories, household sizes, and priority populations (e.g., women-led, Indigenous households).
 - 2.1. Can you tell me if you have used this data in your work, and if so, how?
 - 2.2. HART has been using the CMHC definition of “affordable” in the National Housing Strategy - 30% of before-tax area median household income - and Core Housing Need because they are simple to calculate.
 - 2.2.1. What definition or definitions do you use in your work, and if so, how?
 - 2.2.2. What do you see as the advantages or disadvantages of using this definition as opposed to one based on market rates?
 - 2.3. We have been using five income categories (very low, low, moderate, median, and higher) instead of income quintiles or deciles.
 - 2.3.1. Does your organization use income categories, and if so, which ones?
 - 2.3.2. What do you see as the advantages or disadvantages of using the HART approach?
 - 2.4. Although Core Housing Need is evidence based, comparable in Canadian communities and replicable (used in Canadian census since 1991), it is more difficult to find measures on homeless people, students, and those living in congregate housing (rooming houses, long-term care homes) who are in housing need.
 - 2.4.1. What do you think the Canadian government can do to help municipal and provincial governments produce consistent ways to measure all housing need?
3. HART has worked with 12 governments to develop a Land Assessment Tool, which allows governments to identify well-located government land that can be used for scaling up social housing.
 - 3.1. Have you used this approach through your organization, and if so, how?
 - 3.2. We have discovered numerous barriers to land assessment, including costly and opaque land assessment data in some provinces and reluctance of some governments at all levels to lease their land at low or no cost to non-profit housing providers.
 - 3.2.1. What do you think the Canadian government can do to encourage use of government and non-profit owned land for social and affordable housing?
4. HART has developed a Property Acquisitions toolkit. Is your organization interested in furthering property acquisition as an approach to scale up permanently affordable non-profit housing, and if so, how?
 - 4.1. There are barriers to this approach, such as the absence of a national acquisitions program and lack of open data on land ownership.
 - 4.1.1. What do you think the Canadian government can do to encourage acquisition of properties for long-term affordable housing?
5. HART has received further funding from the CMHC to assist municipalities to develop Housing Accelerator Fund bids, with a particular focus on Housing Needs Assessments.
 - 5.1. How do you think the HART project can best help support municipalities and municipal partnerships?
 - 5.2. It is difficult to track new housing completions as well as the existing stock in relation to costs of housing, number of bedrooms, and ability to serve priority populations (e.g., people with cognitive or development disabilities, people with mental health or addictions disabilities).
 - 5.2.1. What do you think the Canadian government can do to encourage better matching supply with housing demand?
6. Do you have any other comments on the HART project?

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