New funding dedicated to strengthening community housing in Canada

University of Alberta expert in human geography and urban planning leads newly funded project on community housing.

By Katie Willis on July 18, 2019

Funding announced for a new research project designed to address the question of how best to meet the needs of both tenants and providers in the community housing sector. Image credit: Lewis Kelly. CC by 2.0

Community housing currently provides 16 per cent of all rental units in Canada—and the need for this housing is on the rise, according to human geography and urban planning expert Damian Collins.

Now, Collins, a professor in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, has received funding for a new research project, designed to address the question of how best to meet the needs of both tenants and providers in the community housing sector. The project, known as the Collaborative Housing Research Network, has received funding from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to complete his project.

What is the focus of your new research project?

The Collaborative Housing Research Project focuses on strengthening the community housing sector, so it can continue to meet the needs of low- and moderate-income families across Canada. The project is jointly funded by CMHC and SSHRC.

The community housing sector includes social housing as well as other types of not-for-profit housing, such as co-operatives. It provides about 16 per cent of all rental units in Canada.

This sector is important because home ownership is priced out of the reach of a large proportion of families, and in many areas rents are increasing faster than wages. In this context, community housing provides low- and moderate-income Canadians with access to affordable and good-quality homes.

What does resilient community housing model look like?

Our goal is to identify ways to improve the resilience of the community housing sector. This is important because the sector currently faces a range of challenges. Demand for community housing is increasing as more families experience affordability challenges. Those families are also becoming more diverse, with varying household sizes and needs. In addition, community housing providers are increasingly expected to meet social and environmental goals. They must also manage their assets—which often include aging buildings with deferred maintenance.

Why is this an important focus for Canadians?

In 2017, the federal government released Canada’s National Housing Strategy: A Place to Call Home. It states that every Canadian has the right to an adequate, affordable home.

To achieve this goal, Canada requires a resilient community housing sector that is inclusive of diverse tenants, accessible to persons with disabilities, backed by solid federal-provincial funding agreements, and environmentally friendly.

The strategy acknowledges the problems with aging buildings and commits funds for repair and renewal of 300,000 existing units.

The project was developed in cooperation with the community housing sector, including Capital Region Housing in Edmonton.

Source: Faculty of Science