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Report Highlights Urgent Affordable Housing Need *Ontario needs bold strategy to help households in need*

(Toronto) While the economic situation in Ontario may be improving, low and modest income households across the province still struggle to access the most crucial and basic aspect of economic and personal success – a safe and affordable home.

The 2010 edition of *Where's Home?* authored by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA) and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada Ontario Region (CHF Canada Ontario Region), analyzes 22 separate housing markets across Ontario and highlights the urgent need for more affordable rental housing.

“While the recession in Ontario appears to be easing, low and modest income households continue to struggle when it comes to finding an affordable home,” said Sharad Kerur, ONPHA’s Executive Director. “In the years ahead, unemployment will remain significant and housing affordability problems will likely become an even bigger issue in many Ontario communities.”

Where's Home? 2010 shows that despite modestly rising vacancy rates, average rents in Ontario increased at a rate three times higher than inflation in 2009 and overall, rental costs are rising faster than tenant incomes.

“Accessing a suitable home is out of reach for many average working people in the service industry and manufacturing. Many of these workers will be forced to make tough choices – pay rent they cannot afford or leave their community. This has negative implications for themselves, their families and the local economy,” said Harvey Cooper, Manager of Government Relations at CHF Canada Ontario Region.

The most recent Census research from 2006 indicates that 20% (1 in 5) of Ontario tenants are spending more than half of their income on housing. Given the recent economic downturn, it is likely that future Census data will show an increase in this troubling statistic.

“At least 261,000 households in Ontario are spending half of their income on housing and are forced to make daily choices between rent and other necessities, like food,” says Kerur. “Longer line-ups at your local food bank are directly related to high rental housing costs - food bank users spend an average of 65% of their income on housing. People living in this bracket are often one layoff, illness or tragedy away from homelessness.”

Organizations and individuals across Ontario understand the urgent need to address the province’s affordable housing shortage and as a result are anxiously awaiting release of the Ontario government’s long-term affordable housing strategy. Collaborative groups like the Housing Network of Ontario have developed 5 tests against which the provincial strategy can be measured to ensure that the strategy works for real progress on affordable housing issues – for communities, families and the economy.

“Recent government initiatives show that the Province understands the central role of housing to people’s lives and the economy, now is the time to act” says Cooper. “Our research indicates that to meet the demand for rental housing in Ontario, we must build 10,000 units of purpose-built rental housing every year for 10 years – over the last decade we have averaged only a third of this. We hope that the housing strategy will provide the tools needed to build more community-based housing.”

ONPHA and CHF Canada Ontario Region want to see senior governments take a balanced approach to the creation of more affordable housing, combining permanently affordable non-profit and co-op housing, private sector rental, renovation of existing social housing, as well as rent supplements to fill vacant units - all targeted to primarily meet the needs of the 142,000 households on social housing waiting lists.

“Housing is fundamental to success in every aspect of our lives,” said Kerur. “We understand that the Province is facing major challenges in the years to come. Meeting those challenges will require a bold vision that promotes economic prosperity, poverty reduction and sustainable urban growth – promoting access to affordable housing is the foundation of success in all three of these areas.”

“Where’s Home?” can be found on www.onpha.on.ca or www.chfc.ca. For more information, contact:

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