



More housing research needed to solve crisis in housing supply, units gained/lost and equity

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Canada badly needs more housing research, and more housing researchers, to grapple with the housing crisis facing the country, says Canadian Housing Evidence Collaborative (CHEC) Director Jim Dunn.

Participating in a [panel conversation](#) on housing Nov. 23 at the Canadian Research Data Network (CRDCN) Conference in Hamilton, Dunn called for the creation of a system of national housing statistics and initiatives to encourage the development of more researchers.

“There's a big human resources capacity problem that we have,” Dunn said. “We are data rich and intelligence poor.”

Dunn, who is also Associate Dean, Research, Faculty of Social Sciences at McMaster University, said there has been very few new researchers in the housing area since the federal government pulled out of housing in the early 1990s. Although fellowships are now being offered, there isn't a path to develop students in housing research because there are so few professors and courses in the field.

“My concern is that, if you're giving out postdocs, those PhD students had to have come from somewhere and there's nowhere for them to come from,” he said.

“I've been doing housing research for over 25 years, and it has always been a struggle for me to find others doing housing research in Canada and so I've gone to Europe, the US and so forth. And there's just so much greater capacity in those places.”

Also sitting on the panel was:



- Josee Begin, Assistant Chief Statistician, Social, Health and Labour Statistics Field at Statistics Canada;
- Ima Okonny, Chief Data Officer, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC);
- Aled ab Iorwerth, Deputy Chief Economist, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC);
- Moderator, Daniel Silver, Professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto.

The CRDCN is a premier research and training platform for over 2,000 researchers in the quantitative social and health sciences in Canada, headquartered at McMaster University. The theme of this year's three-day conference was Leveraging Data, Research, and Policy Collaborations.

With the creation of CHEC three years ago, headway is being made in the encouragement of both research and researchers. But there is much more work to be done, said Dunn.

CHEC is releasing a housing intelligence platform early in 2024 to address three specific problems faced by the National Housing Strategy (NHS), he said.

The first problem is that there is not currently an accurate way to count the number of units that have been built under the NHS. The housing intelligence platform will include a 10-year time series of how many units have been built under various housing programs.

"If there's a bucket of affordable housing units, we want to know how many are going in the top of the bucket that are new," Dunn said. "At the same time, we know there's an



enormous loss of housing that's happening; there's a big hole in the bottom of that bucket.”

Dunn said we need to know what is being lost so that we have an accurate read of need and can design systems and policies to stop the loss, replace what is needed and keep people housed.

The losses are the result of a system where most modestly priced, intermediate, low-rent housing is provided by the private sector.

“There's been enormous pressures through financialization, reno-eviction, and so forth,” said Dunn, noting that the drive for profit is a big motivator for landlords to upgrade affordable units and evict tenants to get around rent controls and charge higher rent. Research indicates that 11 affordable units are lost for every new unit that is added, he said.

Thirdly, the NHS has important goals related to equity and it identifies 12 vulnerable groups.

“We need to know, when a new unit is built, who's behind the door so that we can actually identify whether those equity goals are being met. And we don't have data for that either,” Dunn said.

The CRDCN plays an important role in providing access to this data but the job can't be done without more researchers, with the right training, the CHEC director said.