

FEDERAL CONSERVATIVES PUT LOTS OF CASH ON THE TABLE FOR SOCIAL HOUSING WILL ONTARIO PROVIDE ITS SHARE OF MATCHING FUNDS?

The federal government yesterday tabled what they hope to be a budget to stimulate Canada's ailing economy, on the one hand, and a stay of execution from being overthrown by a coalition of opposition parties, on the other. Either way, with the tabling of the budget, social housing is playing a dominant role as it now forms part of this new budget and the coalition's agenda should the budget be defeated.

Included in the budget are the following for social housing:

- \$1 billion over 2 years for renovations and energy retrofits for up to 200,000 social housing units
- \$400 million over 2 years for new low-income seniors units
- \$75 million over 2 years for new supportive housing for people with disabilities

The above is on top of the announcement made by the government during the election campaign (and recently confirmed) of \$1.9 billion to extend the Affordable Housing Initiative (AHI), the Homelessness Partnership Initiative (HPI) and the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP).

Included as well is up to \$2 billion over 2 years in direct, low-cost loans to municipalities for housing-related infrastructure projects such as sewers, water lines, and neighbourhood regeneration.

"This is quite positive news for the social housing sector and will hopefully attain the government's goals of stimulating spending and creating jobs," said Hugh Lawson, President of ONPHA. "It also appears that the mindset of the federal Conservatives about social housing has changed. If so, this is a good step to them taking ownership of their national role."

But while this would all seem to be good news, much of what happens next rests on three key milestones – passage of the budget by the opposition parties, Ontario providing matching money and cutting through red tape that would otherwise stall the flow of cash to community groups.

"We've only seen part one so far," said Sharad Kerur, ONPHA's Executive Director. "We're confident that the budget will pass so the key question will be whether Ontario's Finance Minister, Dwight Duncan, will come through with the matching funds in the upcoming provincial budget."

To date ONPHA continues to work on several initiatives in collaboration with the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada (CHFC), the Social Housing Services Corp. (SHSC) and the Service Manager Housing Network related to the affordable housing program, asset management and capital financing that will assist non-profit housing providers to take advantage of the new funding being made available through the federal budget.