

Housing and construction

Chapter 14

Housing starts in Canada in 1977 declined to 245,724 units from the 1976 record level of 273,203. Housing completions, however, increased from 236,249 to 251,789 units. Although the number of dwellings subsidized by direct loans under the National Housing Act (NHA) was lower than in 1976, those financed by private lenders under NHA mortgage insurance agreements, and with additional funds from assisted homeownership and assisted rental programs, more than doubled in 1977.

The federal government and housing

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Although the federal government entered the housing field in 1918 when it made money available to the provinces for re-lending to municipalities, the first general piece of federal housing legislation was the Dominion Housing Act passed in 1935. This was followed by national housing acts in 1938 and 1944. The present National Housing Act, defined as an act to promote the construction of new houses, the repair and modernization of existing houses and the improvement of housing and living conditions, was passed in 1954.

In general the federal government, through successive housing acts, has attempted to stimulate and supplement the market for housing rather than assume direct responsibilities that belong to other levels of government or that could be borne more effectively by private enterprise. The aim has been to increase the flow of mortgage money and to encourage lenders to make loans on more favourable terms to prospective home-owners. Almost half the country's 7.5 million dwelling units have been built since the first covering legislation. About one-third of these were financed under the housing acts.

All provinces have complementary legislation providing for joint federal-provincial housing and land assembly projects, and most have enacted housing legislation.

Ministry of State for Urban Affairs (MSUA)

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Since its creation in 1971, MSUA has been identifying and analyzing settlement and urbanization problems of federal concern and developing policies to improve the quality of life in Canadian cities.

Under the British North America Act, responsibility for Canada's municipalities and matters of local concern rests with the provinces and their municipal governments. But federal government policies, programs and projects affect the pattern, quality of life and economic base in Canadian settlements. Results must be beneficial to urban areas, and federal initiatives should take into account objectives of the provinces and their local governments.

MSUA works with other federal departments to incorporate and integrate urban concerns into federal policies and programs. Urban policy units provide MSUA with expertise and interdepartmental policy liaison, and collect and analyze information to define Canada's urban issues and their relevance to the federal government. Directorates in this work include human environment, settlement patterns, natural environment and resources, urban economy, metropolitan community development, non-metropolitan community development and urban networks.

Ministry operations units co-operate with the provinces and municipalities so that federal programs can respond to their objectives. Through intergovernmental and interdepartmental liaison MSUA learns about provincial and municipal urban development plans and in certain cases encourages and financially supports initiatives; it also provides financial help to organizations and institutions concerned with the future of urban Canada.