

CITY HALL

Toronto Star

## Ottawa pledges \$1.3 billion for Toronto Community Housing repairs

By [Emily Mathieu](#) Affordable Housing Reporter

[David Rider](#) City Hall Bureau Chief  
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After decades of neglect and underfunding, the federal government has pledged to invest \$1.3 billion in Toronto Community Housing, money that will be used for badly needed repairs — such as improved accessibility.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made the announcement Friday at a TCH building on Adanac Dr. in Scarborough, with Mayor John Tory who hailed finally having a federal “partner” in an effort to address repairs to the buildings.

“We have been repairing them to the tune of more than a billion of our money for the last number of years and we just haven’t had a partner before now,” Tory said. “Now we do and we are getting on with repairs in this building this year and buildings right across the city over the next number of years.” Tory said the city is investing \$ 313 million in capital repairs this year.

Trudeau, in a release, said the funding was about “investing in the people of Toronto, and giving them the opportunity they deserve to build bright futures for themselves, their families, and their communities.”

### Have your say

What do you think about Ottawa's funding announcement for TCH repairs?

- Excellent. It's a great step towards addressing the problem.
- Nowhere near being enough for what's needed.
- I think it's too much.
- I'm not sure.

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The money is already flowing and comes through the \$ 13.2 billion National Housing Co-investment fund in the form of \$810 million in loans and \$ 530 million in grants over ten years to repair and renovate 58,000 units, according to the release.

Tory and Trudeau spoke at a 16-storey tower near Eglinton Ave. E. that, based on an internal TCH database provided to the Star’s Jennifer Pagliaro in 2017, was predicted to be in a state of “critical” disrepair by 2021. Repair work has started, a TCH spokesperson confirmed.

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That database revealed that [half of TCH housing developments](#) would hit that critical disrepair marker within a five-year period and that, at that time, 30 social housing properties were already in serious disrepair.

Community housing was downloaded to the city decades ago, when both the province and federal government decided they no longer wanted to be responsible for some 2,100 buildings worth about \$9 billion in public assets.

TCH buildings are home to 110,000 people. Every existing unit is also badly needed. By the end of 2018, the number of active applications for households looking for social housing, which includes co-operative housing, TCH properties and private not-for-profit housing, hit 100,515, according to the City of Toronto website. Of that reported total, 35 per cent were identified as being seniors.

Earlier this year, city staff projected, as part of operating budget discussions, that the repair bill for TCH properties will hit \$3.2 billion in 10 years.

Sheila Penny, vice president, facilities management, with TCH said the federal loans will be repaid through energy savings and mortgage refinancing.

"This is astounding news for our company. We are giddy over here," said Penny, who told the Star buildings are being assessed based on need with a priority on safety.

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Energy-related projects are electrical systems, walls, roofs, plumbing, heating systems and other structural repairs, said Penny. Accessibility can also mean improvements to hallways and driveways, she said.

Penny was acting as interim chief executive officer after former CEO Kathy Milsom was fired over a contract spending scandal. Kevin Marshman began as President and CEO on April 3. At that time, Sheila Penny returned to her home position as Vice President, Facilities Management.

When the National Housing Strategy was released in 2017 it came with a promise that \$40 billion would be spent over a decade to reduce chronic homelessness and that social housing stock would be preserved and expanded.

Jean-Yves Duclos, the minister of children, families and social development, said Friday's announcement was part of making good on a promise to partner with Toronto and work towards achieving those goals.

To access funding Toronto and TCH must ensure that 20 per cent of all TCH units meet accessibility standards, common-area improvements are barrier free, repairs result in a 25 per cent reduction in energy use and that 30 per cent of units cost 80 per cent or less than average market rent.

Duclos said it was unfortunate that a lack of past funding resulted in unit closures and while the new partnership is cause for celebration there could certainly be more impact with all three levels of government at the table.

Funding shortfalls is what pushed Edna Rose, now 78, from her TCH townhome of 30 years in the Firgrove community, near Finch Ave. and Jane St. Her unit was one of 133 forced to close, the residents displaced, because the walls of the 1970s-era buildings were actually crumbling.

The Star spent a year with Rose, as she navigated the trying process of applying and moving into a new TCH building.

More than a year after the move she has settled in, a change made easier by the recent addition of a concrete walkway on the sloping grass leading to her back door and ramp that means she can now move safely to and from her home. "I'm happy," she says. The reality, she adds, is "there is no better place for me."

The units Rose and her neighbours called home, along with more in Firgrove set to close and other communities long shuttered are still not salvageable and will remain permanently shuttered — a reminder of the decades of neglect from three levels of government.

Penny said this kind of funding could have been used to address major problems at Firgrove, including the failing exterior walls.

"With this fund, we are going to be fixing lots of walls."

**Correction - April 5, 2019:** This article was edited from a previous version that mistakenly said the National Housing Strategy was released in 2018. As well, a previous version said Shelia Penny, vice president, facilities management, was also acting as interim president and chief executive officer of Toronto Community Housing. In fact, Kevin Marshman became president and CEO on April 3.

With files from Jennifer Pagliaro

Emily Mathieu is a Toronto-based reporter covering affordable and precarious housing. Follow her on Twitter: [@emathieustar](https://twitter.com/emathieustar)

David Rider is the Star's City Hall bureau chief and a reporter covering Toronto politics. Follow him on Twitter: [@dmrider](https://twitter.com/dmrider)