

National Policy and Community Initiative:  
Mismanaging Homelessness in a Slow Growth City<sup>1</sup>

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*Résumé*

Cet article s'appuie sur les ordonnances de Barnes et Ledebur pour montrer que la politique du gouvernement fédéral devrait se tourner d'avantage vers ceux qui parlent en faveur et à propos des régions à centres urbains. L'étude examine un moyen d'apporter une aide du gouvernement national aux programmes qui ont pour but de soulager les sans-abri, tout en évitant une dictée des priorités de la communauté par le gouvernement. De telles ambitions étaient implicites lors de l'Initiative Nationale des Sans-abri de 1999 instauré par le gouvernement fédéral canadien. Le gouvernement fédéral s'était alors fixé un objectif politique important afin de soulager les sans-abri et de mettre à disposition des fonds pour atteindre cet objectif. Ceci donnait donc une plus grande liberté de décision au niveau local sur le comment atteindre au mieux le but que chaque communauté s'était fixé.

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Dans un premier temps, un des composants de L'Initiative Nationale des Sans-abri, l'Initiative Promouvant le Partenariat entre Communauté, semblait s'annoncer comme un exemple particulièrement prometteur dans cette optique. Un plan rédigé par la communauté était alors censé instaurer des priorités de financement et des idées de programme. Cependant, le mandat de l'IPPC avait été écrit pour régler les problèmes que pouvaient rencontrer les grands centres urbains tels que Vancouver et Toronto, des aimants à croissance avec un secteur de l'immobilier en plein essor. Ces conditions de financement se sont avérées trop minimes pour la ville de Winnipeg dont la croissance est faible, dans la mesure où les différentes solutions qui sont en fait plus adaptées à aider les sans-abri là-bas sont exclues. Les priorités données par les membres de la communauté et les dépositaires étaient pour la plus part ignorées, d'abord lors de la rédaction du plan de la communauté, et ensuite quand il fallait décider quels programmes seraient financés.

Nous pensons que le gouvernement fédéral reconnaît l'importance de l'initiative locale en théorie, mais dans la pratique il hésite quasiment à renoncer à son contrôle et, en conclusion, nous offrons quelques suggestions pratiques pour remédier à cette situation.

**Mots clés :** Logement, les sans-abri, développement urbain, gouvernement à différents échelons

### *Abstract*

This paper builds on Barnes and Ledebur's injunction that federal government policies should be "opened up to voices that speak for and about" urban-centred regions. The study investigates an attempt to provide national government support for programs to alleviate homelessness while avoiding central-government dictation of community priorities. Such ambitions were implicit in the organization of the Canadian Federal government's 1999 National Homelessness Initiative, in which the federal government set a broad policy objective, to alleviate homelessness, and made funding available in pursuit of it, allowing apparently substantial scope for local determination of how the goal might be best met in each community.

One component of the National Homelessness Initiative, the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), appeared, at first glance, to offer a particularly promising example of this approach. A community-written plan supposedly guided funding priorities and program goals. The mandate of the SCPI, however, was written to address the problems of such centres as Toronto and Vancouver, growth magnets with hot housing markets. The conditions of funding proved too narrow for slow-growth Winnipeg, precluding the types of solutions that are most likely actually to alleviate homelessness there. The priorities identified by com-

munity members and stakeholders were largely ignored, first in the creation of the community plan, and then in deciding which programs would receive funding. We find that the federal government recognizes the importance of local initiative in theory, but has in practice been reluctant to relinquish control, and conclude by offering some practical suggestions for letting go.

**Key words:** Housing, homelessness, multi-level governance, urban growth

## INTRODUCTION

Although technology and economics have forced a change in how we understand the relationship between the national state and the urban-centred region, we have yet to figure out what that means in terms of governance. Whether or not globalization has “hollowed out” the national state (Jessop 1993), it is clear that a panoply of national government measures once supporting the economies and welfare of cities—protective tariffs, regional development programs, generous welfare and unemployment compensation schemes—have been seriously impaired in a world of free trade and instant communications. To that extent, the national state has suffered reduced circumstances.

As for the urban-centred region, Jane Jacobs (1984) has proven to be a good prophet, because there is now widespread acceptance of her long-standing contention that economic strength is most fundamentally determined, not by the strength of the national economy, but by the disparate strengths and weaknesses of a series of cities (Barnes and Ledebur 1998). If we consider the effect of the global economy upon the national state together with its effect on the urban-centred region, we can see that there has been a fundamental, technologically- and economically-based shift in their relative positions. The national state has been diminished in significant ways, while the economic centrality of the urban-centred region has been enhanced—or at least become more evident.

A large body of sociological theory, from Marx through Gramsci to Alain Lipietz (1989) and Bob Jessop (1990), agrees that important technological and economic changes have important implications for social and political organization. If all the forests that have been sacrificed to these and similar theories have produced propositions that help us to understand the world around us, then the changed circumstances of the national state and urban-centred region ought to have consequences for governance.

Barnes and Ledebur (1998, 135) put it more concretely than anyone else: “Even the most closely guarded roles of the federal government—monetary, fiscal, and trade policy—should be opened up to voices that speak for and about the [regional economic commons].” A more laboured formulation comes from Courchene (1995, 12), who sees the “new techno-economic paradigm” driving changes in

governance that, over time, secure growing provincial self-determination and enhance the importance of world cities. However, what the ultimate direction of these changes is remains open to question in face of the surprisingly disparate ways different governments are adapting to the new reality.

In Europe, the adaptation takes the form of the principle of subsidiarity, combined with numerous complex regional governance arrangements, the overall objective of which is to put the capacities of the European Union, national governments, and localities to work in jointly-administered programs designed to bolster the economic competitiveness of urban-centred regions (Hooghe and Marks 2002; Magnier 2004; Keating 2003).

In the United States, multi-level governance in support of regional economies is much less in evidence. Clarke and Gaile (1998) pictured cities seeking to adapt their human capital and infrastructure to the demands of a global economy in the face of federal government neglect. They argued that an increased federal role would be essential to the successful completion of this project, but such changes have not been forthcoming.

Canada, at least under the government of Paul Martin, was following a more nearly European course, beginning with the concession that national resources are needed to solve local problems, proceeding with the recognition that the very different economic and social conditions in different cities call for differentiated policies, and ending with a very North American faith in the capacity of communities to make decisions and execute them, once the resources have been made available.

For those who agree with Clarke and Gaile that the “work of cities” cannot proceed as it should without federal government assistance, that sounds good. However, in Canada as elsewhere, the gritty reality of implementation does not necessarily match the highest aspirations of policy. This article is one of seven case studies of Canadian attempts to bring federal government resources to bear upon typical 21<sup>st</sup> Century urban problems, but to mobilize these resources in such a way as to take account of the differences among different urban regions. The urban policy areas dealt with by the studies are housing and homelessness, immigration and settlement, and welfare.

We did case studies of housing and homeless and immigration and settlement in each of three very different communities, Vancouver, Winnipeg and Saint John—two studies in each city. For each case, we used documents, secondary sources and interviews with key public and voluntary-sector participants in policy implementation. A separate study looked at a municipally initiated welfare-to-work program in Winnipeg, using the same case study methods.<sup>2</sup>

Across the seven case studies, our most robust finding supports North American optimism about the capacity of communities to work out solutions to their own problems. In most of the cases we studied, community representatives responsible

for shaping the implementation of policies in their communities not only had an intimate understanding of local needs, and a practical capacity to get things done, but were also well informed regarding the national state of the art in their respective policy areas. However, delegation of federal government authority has proven to be a tricky business, partly because of federal government unwillingness or inability to achieve the flexibility necessary for the accommodation of local difference, and partly because of the constitutionally mandated intermediary role of the provincial government, which, in any given circumstance, can prove to be either a hindrance or a help.

As it happens, the case study we take up in these pages did not, on the whole, cast accommodation of local difference in a favourable light, but we argue that problems are most usefully viewed, not as obstacles but as lessons. We look at the implementation of the Canadian National Homelessness Initiative in Winnipeg and observe what went wrong. We conclude by identifying, in concrete political and administrative terms, the obstacles to success and considering how they might be overcome.

#### CASE STUDY: FEDERAL RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS IN WINNIPEG

Homelessness affects different communities in different ways. In such growth magnets as Toronto and Vancouver, the cost of housing is high and the homeless are painfully visible—sleeping outside, lining up for food, and during cold Canadian winters, dying. In slow-growth cities, housing is likely to be priced so low that, in older neighbourhoods, it does not pay to maintain it. With housing that is decaying but affordable, street people may be less in evidence (Leo and Brown 2000), while relatively larger numbers of people find themselves one paycheque away from the street or living in poor quality shelter.

Winnipeg is a prairie metropolitan area of almost 700,000 that grew only 0.6 per cent from 1996 to 2001, compared with Vancouver's 8.5 per cent during the same period (Statistics Canada 2001). Like many slow-growth cities, Winnipeg sprawls over a vast territory while inner city neighbourhoods decay (Leo and Anderson 2006). If homelessness occurs on a continuum from "absolute," meaning no shelter, to "relative," meaning insecure or inadequate shelter, then many Winnipeggers are relatively homeless, living in inadequate, unaffordable, overcrowded, insecure, or unhealthy housing (Daly 1996; Social Planning Council of Winnipeg 2001; Oberlander and Fallick 1987).

Just as there is no cookie-cutter problem of homelessness, there are no cookie-cutter solutions. Homelessness and the provision of affordable housing represents a different problematic in Vancouver, where sky-high housing prices make affordability a problem even for the middle class, than it does in Winnipeg, where homes in some neighbourhoods deteriorate because their market value is so low that owners cannot recoup the costs of renovation (Leo and Brown 2000). In

Canada, the circumstances of homelessness and affordable housing vary sufficiently to make nonsense of the idea of a uniform national housing or homelessness policy. Addressing homelessness in Winnipeg requires a different approach than in Vancouver, Toronto, or Saint John, New Brunswick.

The federal government appears to have recognized this reality with the creation of the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) in 1999, a program that “is at work helping governments and community organizations come together to alleviate homelessness. By encouraging innovative and progressive co-operation, this approach is supporting local solutions for local problems” (Social Development Canada 2004).<sup>3</sup> The NHI design gives substance to those words, while at the same time betraying hesitancy, by putting them into action in only one part of its attack on homelessness, the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI).

SCPI sets the broad objective of reducing and alleviating homelessness in Canadian communities, while allowing individual communities the latitude to determine how those objectives may best be met. A community planning process ensures that SCPI, nominally at least, is guided by community stakeholders, who are recognized as being in the best position to decide what will really work to alleviate homelessness in their particular community (National Secretariat on Homelessness [NSH] 2003).

In Winnipeg, federal SCPI funds are delivered through the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative (WHHI), a single-window office housing representatives from all three levels of government. Out of one office, the WHHI delivers funding for housing and homelessness projects from a dazzling array of federal, provincial, municipal, and shared programs. In this paper, we pay special attention to the federal SCPI program, as it is the component that appears to match the government’s declarations of community-friendliness with action.

### **Context: Homelessness and how to address it**

An understanding of what factors have led to Canada’s increasing homelessness problem, and policy solutions that are recommended in the literature provide context for our case study. The rise of homelessness in the 1980s and 1990s has been well-documented (O’Reilly-Fleming 1993; Daly 1996; Layton 2000), and attributed to trends that are common to post-industrial states (Wolch and Dear 1993). High rates of poverty and growing income inequality (Murphy 2000), a decreasing supply of affordable housing (Layton 2000), and social service cuts due to welfare state restructuring have contributed to the problem.

Timmer, Eitzen and Talley (1994, 17) see the problem as stemming from “the convergence of two contradictory and proximate forces: the rapidly dwindling supply of low-income housing and increased economic marginality among the poor and near poor, caused by a changing economy, changes in family structure,

and shifts in government policy.” Also contributing to the problem was the deinstitutionalization of mental health patients in the 1960s and 1970s, without the promised substitution of community care programs, which left many with no choice but to live on the streets (Murphy 2000).

The complexity of the problem defies easy summary, and the strategies required to solve it are similarly complex. The conventional response to homelessness in Canada and much of the Western world has been to build emergency shelters and food banks (Daly 1996). Such temporary or partial solutions as these, which address the symptoms of the problem but not the cause, are little better than a revolving door back into homelessness (Allen 2000). The widely held view in the literature is that the root of the problem—poverty, a lack of affordable housing, deinstitutionalization, and welfare state restructuring—must be addressed.

Ideally then, strategies to alleviate homelessness would work at alleviating poverty and reinstating Canada’s social safety net (Murray 2004). Since these may not be feasible short-term objectives, homelessness advocates call for the reinstatement of federal funding for social housing, and a redoubling of rehabilitation efforts. The ideal policy would use a variety of policy instruments—income supports, rent supplements, the provision of affordable housing, and services for barriered populations—to address homelessness at all points on the continuum, moving people step by step to secure tenure.

These views are not only reflected in the literature of advocacy, but as we will see, they are widely held by those who have practical experience working with the homeless. When it comes to policy responses, it is not surprising that “locally devised, community-based programs are most appropriate,” and that “the most successful efforts have been small in scale, tailored to community needs with limited, realistic objectives” (Daly 1996, 239).

SCPI seems to fit this latter description quite well. By design, it is meant to be driven by local priorities, and guided by community stakeholders—who know the most about what needs to be done. Unfortunately, our evaluation will show that the community’s ability to direct SCPI spending was hampered by the program’s excessively narrow mandate, which focused only on absolute homelessness, failing to address in any serious way the needs of the relatively homeless.

### **The National Homelessness Initiative**

SCPI is the cornerstone component of a broader homelessness strategy that began in 1999 as a response to Canada’s burgeoning homelessness problem and its vocal critics. The National Homelessness Initiative was introduced as a three-year, \$753 million program consisting of seven components (Leo and August 2005). The program was renewed for another three years in March 2003, featuring less funding (\$428 million), and fewer programs. The development and implementation of the NHI was undertaken by the National Secretariat on Homelessness, which was

created in 1999 for the task within Human Resources Development Canada.<sup>4</sup>

The NHI comprised a number of components, which are set out in detail elsewhere (Leo and August 2005), but in these pages we focus on SCPI, the centre-piece program of the NHI, which received \$305 million. The majority of this money (80%) was distributed among ten big urban centres, or 'eligible communities', with the remaining 20% allocated to smaller Canadian communities based on demonstrated need. Winnipeg, one of the ten "80% communities," received \$10.8 million over the initial three-year funding period (NSH 2003).

SCPI is unique in that the federal government funds community organizations directly, in order to make the program responsive to local conditions in each community. To select which projects receive funding, SCPI supported extensive community consultations, leading to the creation of 'community plans'—unique to each community—to provide priorities for spending and a strategy for local homelessness alleviation. In order to be funded, each proposed initiative had to be in line with the priorities set out in this community-created plan. It was also required to fit the federal SCPI mandate, and terms set out by the Treasury Board. SCPI covered 50% of the costs of approved projects, with the community responsible for the rest (Human Resources Development Canada 2000).

Since SCPI was explicitly designed to shape a federally funded homeless initiative according to local knowledge and community priorities, we turn now to an evaluation of the program's first three-year term and its implementation to see whether Ottawa delivered on its good intentions, and, more broadly, to try to understand what is involved in tailoring national programs to the unique circumstances of particular communities.

### **Focus of SCPI: Absolute Homelessness**

SCPI's objectives for 2000 to 2003 reveal the program's bias towards funding projects for 'absolute', rather than relative homelessness problems. The objectives included increasing shelter beds to reduce absolute homelessness, using a 'continuum of supports' approach, strengthening community capacity, building partnerships among stakeholders and expanding knowledge through research (Human Resources Development Canada 2000). The types of projects that are eligible for funding reveal further how the concept of homelessness has been narrowly defined under SCPI. Five categories of projects are eligible, including sheltering facilities, support facilities (such as food banks and soup kitchens), support service provision (including life skills training, counselling and health services), capacity building and public awareness (Ibid.).

These categories focus on alleviating 'absolute homelessness', and on approaches that temporarily assist the most visible of homeless people. Projects addressing relative homelessness are not eligible, and no concrete provisions are offered to move the homeless into secure tenure. In practice, the program institutionalizes

homelessness, rather than seeking strategies for moving as many as possible out of those woeful circumstances. These shortcomings did not escape the notice of homelessness advocates in Winnipeg.

Nor did it escape the notice of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), which concluded in 1999 that efforts in Winnipeg must be concentrated on rehabilitating older housing stock to increase the supply of affordable housing for low-income households (National Housing Options Team 1999). Both the FCM findings and those of Winnipeg-based research led to the conclusion that the homelessness problem in Winnipeg is primarily a matter of inadequate housing and insufficient means to pay for shelter, or 'relative' homelessness (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg [SPCW] 2001).

This is not to say that absolute homelessness is absent in Winnipeg. Between 2001 and 2002, 1,563 clients were served at one downtown shelter alone (Main Street Project Inc. 2003). However, both national and local studies for Winnipeg concluded that the bulk of resources for fighting homelessness should be directed towards "transitional and permanent housing options" for those who are most in need (SPCW 2001, ii-iii). Given the consistency of these priorities, we would expect them to come out in the SCPI community plan to guide action. We will now turn to an analysis of SCPI in Winnipeg, beginning with the community planning process.

### SCPI in Winnipeg: A tale of two plans

In support of its stated objective of tailoring programs to the different requirements of different communities, SCPI conditions require that funding be conditional upon the development of a community plan, created through consultations with service providers, all three levels of government, the voluntary sector and members of the community (Human Resources Development Canada 2000). Based on their recommendations, the community plan must articulate the priorities for reducing and alleviating homelessness. The plan must recommend actions, identify service assets and gaps, and act as a framework to direct federal funding and community action.

Once drafted, every community plan must be approved by the Federal Co-ordinator on Homelessness before SCPI money is disbursed, and every project seeking funding is tested against the priorities in the plan before it can be approved. In this way, the priorities set out by the community guide which projects are funded. In Winnipeg, a voluntary group of stakeholders reviewed project proposals, tested them against the community plan and SCPI mandate, and recommended the best projects to the HRSDC (Leo and August 2005).

However, there was not just one plan. The first of two plans, written in May 2000 and updated in January 2001, was called *A community plan for the homeless in Winnipeg* (HRDC 2000). Although it claimed to have been developed through,

“the collaboration of many stakeholders,” it was in fact rejected by a formidable coalition of those stakeholders (SPCW 2001, 3). These stakeholders, representing 36 groups involved in service delivery to homeless people in Winnipeg, argued that there was “a lack of grassroots community involvement in [the first plan’s] development,” and that it was not ‘community owned’ (SPCW 2001, i). To remedy this they created their own plan, *A community plan on homelessness and housing in Winnipeg*, which was published in September 2001. In order to avoid confusion, we will refer to the plans by their years of publication: the 2000 plan and the 2001 plan. The group that drafted the new plan was called the CPHH (Community Partnership on Homelessness and Housing), and was led by a ‘reference group,’ whose members are listed in Table 1.

**Table I: CPHH Voluntary Reference Group Leadership & their Affiliations**

Member	Group Affiliation(s)
David Northcott (Chair)	Winnipeg Harvest, Executive Director
Joan Dawkins	Main Street Project, then Executive Director
Paul Johnston	Macdonald Youth Services
George Munroe	Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg, Vice-President
Larry Wucherer	Neeginan Development Corporation Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development
Rhonda Longboat	Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Housing Advisor Sweet Grass Circle Inc.
Stirling Ranville	Manitoba Metis Federation

Source: SCPW, 2001. *A community plan on Housing and Homelessness*. Winnipeg: SCPW, i.

The CPHH was dissatisfied, not only with the content of the 2000 plan but also with the community planning process leading to its creation. One participant called the process frustrating—it involved multiple meetings, beginning in September 1999, and different groups showed up each time. Progress was slow, and eventually the HRDC called in a consulting firm to write the plan so it could be sent off for the necessary approval to get funds flowing from Ottawa.

Ottawa rejected the 2000 plan, as eight of the nine required community plan elements were absent or not well articulated. Needing community involvement to draft these missing elements, the HRDC called the community back to a meeting in January 2001, which was held at the Masonic Temple in Winnipeg. The room was full of long-time front-line service providers, who had been working to help the poor and the homeless in Winnipeg for years.

David Northcott, head of the Winnipeg Harvest food bank, who became chair of the CPHH’s reference group, reported that community members and service

providers were not listened to, or asked for advice at this meeting, but “lectured to” on the “academic definitions of homelessness.” Irritated, a few representatives decided to take matters into their own hands. At their table, they began sharing ideas—discussing what could be done to *really* help homeless people in Winnipeg. In so doing, they pursued one of the goals of the SCPI, which had been previously thwarted by the program’s own bureaucracy. Eventually, the HRDC Regional Director stopped the presenters from speaking, and allowed the members of the community to continue their discussion. It was at this meeting that the CPHH was formed (David Northcott, Personal Communication, June 18 2003).

The CPHH collaborated with the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, which had received \$35,000 from SCPI to research Winnipeg homelessness, and together they developed a truly “community owned” plan to guide action in Winnipeg. An “aboriginal reference group” of the CPHH was created to ensure that the plan would be responsive to problems faced by the Aboriginal population.

The process of community consultation for the second plan was characterized by the consistency and thoroughness that the first plan lacked. The CPHH met “on several occasions” between February and June of 2001, and a community forum was held on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2001, where “community residents, organizational representatives and government representatives were invited to participate in group discussions regarding the priorities to address homelessness and housing issues in Winnipeg” (SPCW 2001, 3-4).

The SPCW conducted interviews with representatives from 34 Winnipeg community organizations involved with housing or outreach services, and also compiled statistics on housing, poverty, and other relevant areas. The final 2001 plan is a result of contributions at the community forum, priorities set by the CPHH and the aboriginal reference group, information from interviews, and findings from SPCW research. The consultation process was inclusive, and the recommendations reflect a community consensus on what is required to meaningfully address the problem of homelessness in Winnipeg (Northcott 2003, personal communication, June 18 2003).

### Comparing the plans

A comparison of the two plans, and of the groups that created them, supports this evaluation. The 2001 plan represented the views of a genuinely broad cross-section of stakeholders. The same cannot be said of the 2000 plan, because there is no author listed, and no record of who was involved.

According to the text of the 2000 plan, its content was the result of recommendations from five ‘Working Groups’. The plan states that “a list of names of those who participated in this process is attached as is a list of the membership of the five Working Groups” (HRDC 2000, 6). This list is not attached, and WHHI officials could not recall having ever seen it. These five Working Groups

were to look closely into issues that had been identified as priorities at an initial Plenary Workshop in September 1999. The focus of each Working Group is detailed in Table II.

**Table II: Working Groups for 2000 Community Plan on Homelessness in Winnipeg**

Working Group	Focus
Second Stage Housing	Addressing the continuum of service for people to become stabilized and graduate to a normalized living environment
Outreach	Examine service gaps, how service providers network and share information, and how additional outreach services can augment resources in high-needs areas.
Community Development	Ensure community-based involvement in programs and services being provided, hold community forums in inner-city neighbourhoods
Coordination & Integration	Examine existing services to identify program gaps, duplication and coordination
Administrative Simplicity	Ensuring easy access, with a Single Window approach to program delivery

Source: A community plan for the Homeless in Winnipeg. May 2000, 2.

The claim that the community picked out these five categories as priorities is suspect, since permanent affordable housing is absent. The 2001 “community-owned” plan recommended that “the majority of our energy and resources ... be used to ensure ...adequate transitional and permanent housing options are available and accessible for those most in need” (SPCW 2001, iii). It is unlikely that the community’s concern about affordable permanent housing suddenly arose in the one year between the two plans. More likely, HRDC officials who wanted the plan to stay in line with the SCPI’s narrow mandate kept them out.

Although the 2000 plan purports to be ‘made in Winnipeg,’ it does not seem to be based at all on the Winnipeg situation and features no accompanying research to show the extent of the homelessness problem and no mention of Winnipeg’s particular problems. The recommendations in the plan focus mostly on networking and administrative simplicity among stakeholders. Three of the five Working Groups (Outreach, Coordination & Integration, Administrative Simplicity) focused on issues facing officials and community leaders, rather than

on ways to help those actually suffering from homelessness, and the majority of the plan's recommendations were for changes that would benefit service providers. It is important, of course, for those people who are working to help the homeless to be able to do so effectively, but one would expect a plan on alleviating and reducing homelessness to focus primarily on those who are suffering, and what can be done to help them.

The 2001 plan does this and offers concrete recommendations to make it happen. It focuses primarily on housing, recognizing that in Winnipeg, the key to reducing homelessness is making housing more available and affordable for those who need it most, and improving the quality of substandard accommodations. This focus is made clear in the Plan's objectives; (1) Identify the people who are in need of housing resources *the most*, (2) Identify the *gaps* in housing resources, (3) Increase the availability of safe, affordable, appropriate housing, and (4) Improve the coordination of housing resources between governments and the community (SPCW 2001, 7).

The rest of the 83-page report, though obviously based on a great deal of research, experience and careful thought, suffers from unfocused editing. It also lacks targets specific enough to allow for a subsequent evaluation of whether the program's objectives have been met.

Some of the main recommendations gleaned from a careful reading of the entire report include calls to increase the stock of permanent affordable housing, offer more transitional housing, increase the supply of emergency shelters for youth, establish a central housing registry, prevent demolition of inner-city homes, and increase funding for renovations. Additionally, the report asks that 5,900 affordable housing units be built over the next five years, that sustained funding be offered to organizations helping the homeless, and participation and representation be ensured for the affected community (SPCW 2001).

These recommendations make it clear that relative, not absolute, homelessness projects are the most pressing priority in Winnipeg. Community leaders took the view that affordable housing options must be increased, more transitional housing must be offered for people to move to a more stable situation, and supported housing must be made available to people who cannot make it without help.

### Following the money

Did these priorities become the program implementation guidelines for the SCPI in Winnipeg? In other words, did the program follow the community leadership provided in the 2001 plan, or did the federal government set its own course? WHHI officials were reluctant to answer that question clearly. Asked whether they were guided by the 2001 plan, they responded that both it and the 2000 plan were used. That answer alone demonstrates ambivalence on the part of federal officials regarding their commitment to community involvement.

We can go beyond their vague assertion, and determine what actually happened by following the money, looking at what projects were approved for funding. Projects that aimed toward secure housing for the absolutely and relatively homeless would indicate that the 2001 plan guided the process. An emphasis on remedial solutions targeting absolute homelessness would reveal that the federal government had ignored the community’s recommendations in Winnipeg.

Table III lists projects that received funding from federal NHI programs. Since these breakdowns were unavailable from government sources, we have obtained them by undertaking our own careful analysis of each individual funding decision that we were able to document, drawing on news releases, information on the NHI web site and other government documentation. Of the \$13,995,260 we were able to capture in that analysis, by far the largest portion (47.9%) of the funds went to emergency shelter and support facility projects. Transitional and supportive housing projects received 35.7% of the recorded NHI funding, and capacity building and support services received 16.3%.

If we look at total funds delivered through the WHHI, which administers SCPI in Winnipeg (Table 3), we see that a little over \$7 million was allocated towards increasing the affordable housing stock. None of this money—that which was actually spent in line with community goals for alleviating homelessness—was provided by the federal SCPI program. This funding came from the city, the province, or from CMHC programs.

**Table III: WHHI Funding Commitments: Program Areas**

<b>National Homelessness Initiative Funding by Project Type</b>		
Emergency Shelter & Support Facilities	\$6,719,840	47.9% of NHI funding
Transitional & Supportive Housing Facilities	\$4,995,069	35.7% of NHI funding
Support Services & Capacity Building	\$2,283,351	16.3% of NHI funding
<b>Non-Federal WHHI affordable housing projects</b>		
Affordable Housing	\$7,331,360	95% of non-federal WHHI funding

Source: Calculations by authors

Although community groups have agreed emergency shelters and food banks are important, their representatives have emphasized that these measures do not reduce and alleviate homelessness. The 2001 Winnipeg community plan made it clear that housing is a priority in Winnipeg, and that the quality and affordability of housing must be addressed if Winnipeg’s homelessness problem is to be alleviated. Our figures show that the federal government has not funded the types of

projects recommended in the ‘community-owned’ community plan, and thus has not lived up to its claim of being responsive to local conditions.

Luckily, in Winnipeg, the three levels of government have come together under one roof through the WHHI. This has allowed housing and homelessness efforts to be co-ordinated, and as Table IV shows, had resulted, by April 2003, in over seven million dollars being put into affordable housing projects. However, these programs are not enough.

Only at the federal level are there sufficient financial resources to make a meaningful difference. Table IV shows the amount of funding offered by each level of government over the same three years for housing or homelessness initiatives. It is clear where the greatest resources lie. There is no level of government that is adequately filling the social housing void, and no government but the federal government well-placed to fill it.

**Table IV: WHHI Funding Commitments: Levels of Government**

Level of Government	WHHI funding over three years (2000-2003)
City of Winnipeg Programs	\$4.2 million*
Province of Manitoba – NHA	\$6 million**
Federal NHI Programs – SCPI, UAS, YES	\$23.5 million

\* \$7 million over 5 years    \*\* \$8 million over four years

Source: City of Winnipeg, October 13, 2000

## CONCLUSIONS

We began by arguing that different circumstances in different cities make nonsense of the idea of a uniform national housing policy. We lauded the federal government for its apparent recognition of this reality when it decided that, in dealing with the problem of homelessness, it would take the lead from community stakeholders in each city. We also noted the government’s hesitancy about the concept, as manifested in its application only to the SCPI, one part—albeit the biggest—of the National Homelessness Initiative. We can now summarize our findings, consider the lessons learned, and look at how federal government programs can better provide needed community supports while ensuring that local programs fully take into account the unique circumstances of each community.

In establishing SCPI, the federal government set itself the objective of drawing significantly on community resources to shape the program and its implementation in each city. That objective only makes sense if it is based on the belief that the community has the necessary expertise and leadership to play such a role. In retrospect, it is clear that that belief was lacking.

This is obvious both from the fact that program conditions prejudged the question of how resources should be distributed as between absolute and relative homelessness, and from the apparent belief of federal officials that a community participation process could be successful only if it were carefully orchestrated by them. Obviously they believed that it was up to them to organize meetings, bring in “experts” to instruct the community on the whys and wherefores of homelessness, and predetermine the categories of investigation leading to community recommendations.

The 2001 community plan demonstrates that Winnipeg has a wealth of expertise in the problems associated with homelessness, and that local homelessness advocates, under the SPCW’s leadership, are perfectly capable of organizing an investigation, carrying out a consultation, and producing recommendations. Clearly, the community involvement component of the SCPI was not well managed. Instead of trying to determine in advance whether Winnipeg’s assault on homelessness should emphasize absolute or relative homelessness, and trying to orchestrate the process of community involvement, the federal government would have been better advised to let the community organize its own process and determine the program emphasis for itself.

Since, as we found, unfocused editing and the lack of specific targets were the main shortcomings of the 2001 report, the federal government’s objective of letting the community lead would have been better served by hiring an editor to work with the community in clarifying the report, and assigning an official to discuss specific targets with community leaders, than by trying to “guide” community groups in the production of a report tailored to federal government preconceptions about what is best for Winnipeg.

If the federal government screws up its courage to the point of accepting that the best expertise in local matters is likely to be local, it should also consider further applications of the concept. If local advocates for the homeless are best qualified to work out how to address each community’s homelessness problem, why not consult local aboriginal leaders on Urban Aboriginal Strategy, youth workers and representatives of young people on Youth Employment Strategy, housing advocates on Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program?

This is not a rhetorical question. It is easy to agree that local knowledge is key to making good decisions about local matters. In the European Union, the principle of subsidiarity holds that a decision must be made or activity performed at the lowest level of government possible (Norton 1994, 28-31). But this is more easily said than done, for a number of reasons.

### **Prescription vs. performance**

In a sense, subsidiarity is the flavour of the month. The governments of major Canadian cities have called for greater local self-determination as they face grow-

ing difficulties in meeting demands for services and infrastructure (Leo with Muligan 2006). A number of provincial governments have tacitly acknowledged the justice of the case for the enhancement of community self-governance by passing legislation designed to increase the powers of municipalities to act without seeking provincial approval (Garcea and LeSage 2005).

On the other hand, dismay over the effects of government cutbacks and down-loading on low-income communities and on the integrity of the social safety net is leading to calls for the federal government to become more involved in the setting of standards and the financing of programs. These calls, in addition to being very much in evidence in the policy arena, are well founded on both current research and historical experience. But, some might argue, we can't have it both ways. The most significant challenge to the principle of subsidiarity takes the form of a dilemma: Can the federal government maintain national standards while drawing strongly on local knowledge in the resolution of local problems?

There is no simple answer to all individual instances of such questions, but the answer we are posing in our approach to this problem proposes a principle that ought to be applicable in many such individual instances. Our principle is best expressed in the planning literature, where the contrast is drawn between a *prescriptive* and a *performance* approach to land use control (Kendig *et al.* 1980; Leung 1999; Ontario Ministry of Housing *et al.* 1995; Peck, Tomalty and CMHC, 2002).

The performance approach involves replacing a lot of detailed regulations with a clear statement of objectives. In the case of SCPI, the federal government could have substituted a single performance measure for a plethora of regulations, by simply articulating the program's objective as that of addressing homelessness through the application of a plan formulated by local stakeholders, in co-operation with federal officials. Thus a broad objective would be set at the national level and more detailed objectives would be formulated locally.

Such an approach would be responsive to the findings of a literature on performance measurement that has found its way into many other areas of public administration besides land use planning (Goodsell 1993; Gross Stein 2001; Hatry 2002; Kamensky 1996; Liner *et al.* 2001; Martin and Smith 2005; Rosener 1978). One of the key findings of that literature is that the effectiveness of performance measurement is diminished if the objectives being measured are set at a distance, and increased if they are formulated locally.

Responsiveness to local conditions is precisely what is at issue here. It may well be that Vancouver and Toronto find themselves so overwhelmed with the numbers of people spending the night on the streets that their main focus would be on shelters, social assistance and harm reduction. Local stakeholders are well qualified to determine that. In Winnipeg, where there is less absolute homelessness, but perhaps a higher percentage of substandard housing and low incomes, relative

homelessness is seen as the top priority by those who understand the problems best. If they can pull together to produce a credible program with clear criteria of evaluation—perhaps with some help from federal officials—they should be allowed to do so.

Like all bureaucracies, federal government departments are reluctant to relinquish control, influence and responsibility. As well, federal politicians, like politicians everywhere, are reluctant to delegate to other levels of government for fear that, in the process, their contribution will become less visible, reducing their ability to claim credit at election time. But if the federal government wishes to continue to set national standards, while ensuring that the implementation of these standards produces workable results, and plays constructive roles, everywhere in the country, the bureaucrats and the politicians will have to put some water in their wine.

Our evaluation covers Phase One of the National Homelessness Initiative. At this writing, Phase Two is nearing completion, and, with any luck, there will be future federal government programs to address homelessness and the need for affordable housing. The lessons of Phase One can be put to work in the development of better administrative procedures. Substantial local involvement in the formulation and implementation of local programs will not be easy to achieve, but our findings suggest that it is worth the effort.

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Overviews of the findings of these case studies are in Leo with Mulligan 2006 and Leo, 2006. One of the case studies, published as a working paper, is Leo and Andres, 2004. Other available case studies are Anderson and Leo 2006; August and Leo 2006a; August and Leo 2006b; Enns and Leo 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Murray (2004), who sees the NHI as part of a larger pattern of shifting responsibility for social problems to local communities.

<sup>4</sup> Now Human Resources Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). Program details and history are available on the NHI website, [www.homelessness.gc.ca](http://www.homelessness.gc.ca).

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