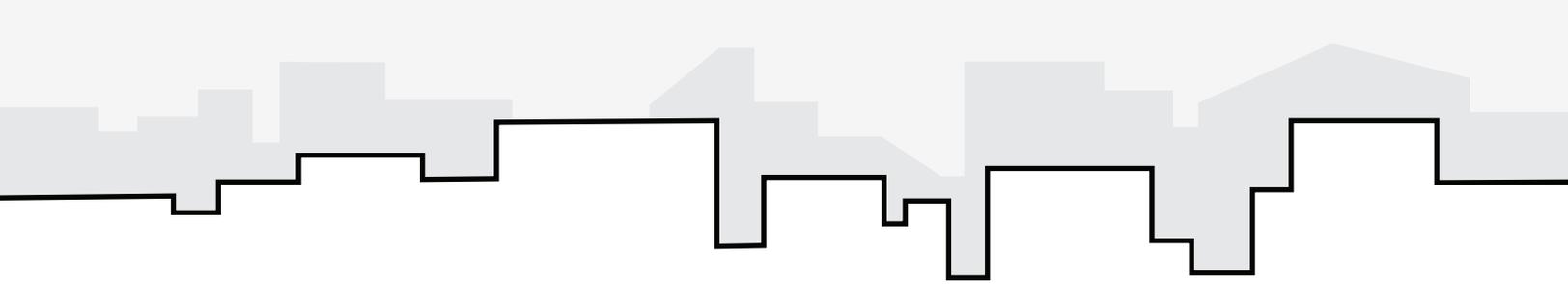




HOUSING: NOT A COMMODITY BUT **A RIGHT!**

The situation of low and modest-income tenants is deteriorating everywhere in Quebec. In the last census, nearly 244,000 of such tenants had coring housing needs and were forced to rent a dwelling that was too expensive, in bad condition and/or too small for them. Since then, due to the housing shortage and the pandemic, the housing conditions of these tenants have nearly certainly deteriorated. One thing is also clear : more and more people are finding themselves on the streets.



Despite their international commitments to promote and protect the right to housing, Canada and Quebec are currently doing very little to help their residents presently living in inadequate housing. With the ongoing implementation of neoliberal policies, they promote housing as first and foremost a private responsibility, or commodity, an opportunity for investment and profitability; the sale of a house or apartment is currently seen as an indispensable contribution to the pension funds of taxpayers. Relegating the fundamental necessity of housing to the private market can be defined as commodification – the transformation of an essential product or service to a source of private profit. The commodification of housing is fuelled by a lack of regulation and the chronic underfunding of social housing.

Even worse, in the recent years, a new danger is threatening vulnerable tenants : the financialization of housing.

FROM THE COMMODIFICATION OF HOUSING TO ITS FINANCIALIZATION...

Frequently, large corporations (especially pension funds) invest in residential projects in exchange for high return rates. In these scenarios, these corporations do not look at housing in terms of community need, but rather, in terms of achievable profit. This is called the financialization of housing.

Real estate developers who engage in these lucrative transactions put continuous pressure on the existing housing stock. They do this in particular by targeting modest buildings occupied by longstanding tenants, where rents are relatively low and the cost of purchase is consequently cheap. Once the building is purchased, developers then push out the tenants, using various –sometimes illegal –schemes, saying they will be demolishing units to rebuild them, or will be converting them into more profitable housing, sometimes without even carrying out the work announced. After the damage is done, the developers move on to the next building. This has dire consequences, not only for the first tenants that who are kicked out, but for the entire supply of affordable housing in the area.

The housing conditions of tenants become even more dire when there is a shortage of rental units available, as has been the case in Quebec for years. Landlords take advantage of this situation by discriminating against and refusing to rent to the most vulnerable, by neglecting their buildings and endangering the health of the occupants, and by demanding unjustified rent increases because their tenants have nowhere else to go. Thus, from 2018 to 2020, the average cost of rent increased by 11.2%, while in the same time inflation increased by only 5.2%.



... TO THE SOCIAL HOUSING SHORTAGE

The exorbitant increase in the price of buildings and land also hinders the development of social housing. Social housing development groups are no match for large-scale developers when sites are very quickly sold off at exorbitant prices.

Governments themselves are undermining the development of social housing. Quebec has been underfunding its own social housing development program, AccèsLogis, for 12 years. And, for its part, Ottawa has stopped directly funding the development of new social housing since 1994, consequently depriving Quebec of more than 80,000 new units.

THE RIGHT TO HOUSING AND THE SOCIALIZATION OF THE MARKET

To guarantee the protection of the right to housing for all, the legislative framework for repossessions, evictions for major repairs or renovations, housing unit conversions and abusive rent increases must be tightened.

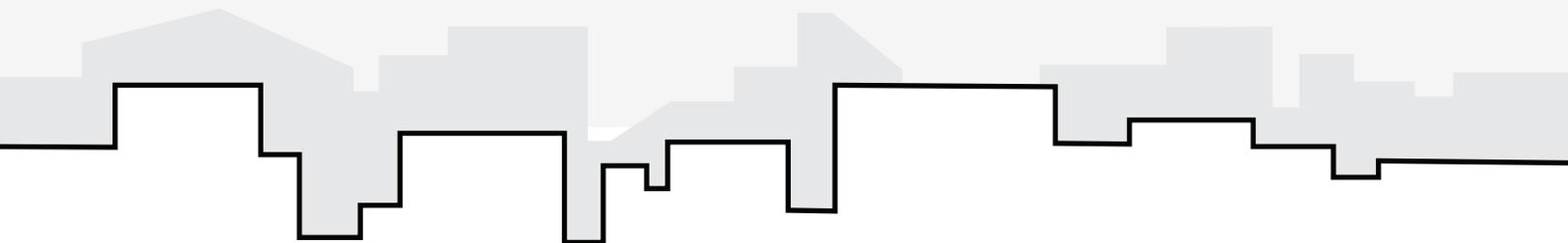
We also need more social housing that meets a variety of needs (families, seniors, people with disabilities, in the process of social reintegration, etc.). Social housing is an essential component supporting the development of communities that are more resilient in the face of crises. Moreover, it has significant economic benefits: for every dollar invested by the Quebec government in social housing it is projected that at least \$2.31 is reinvested into the economy, according to a study carried out by the Société d'habitation du Québec in 2013.

The development of social housing can also help by removing still-affordable housing off the private market. Purchasing a building, renovating it and transforming it into a co-op, a non-profit housing corporation or public housing, protects tenants from developers and other profiteers. This is called **the socialization of the rental housing stock**.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE HIGHER LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT



The governments of Quebec and Canada must formally recognize the right to housing, as they do the right to healthcare and education. Further, to make this right a reality for households with core housing needs, they must **fund the building of 50,000 new social housing units over the next 5 years**. The Quebec government in particular must also strengthen the measures protecting tenants against evictions and fraudulent repossessions, as well as against bad housing conditions and introduce universal rent control.



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