

Home price anxiety cuts across all Canadian income levels

By Jordan Press

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Feel like a house in your city is unaffordable? Apparently, you're not alone.

A new poll suggests that just over two in five Canadians believe housing in this country is not affordable for them, a finding that cuts almost evenly across income levels.

The poll by EKOS Research appears even more bleak in some of Canada's hottest housing markets, where only a small sliver of respondents said they believe homes are affordable.

The data closely lines up with more formal benchmarks the federal government uses to measure affordability, as well as other data about the cost of housing, whether purchased or rented.

The Trudeau government has promised a national housing strategy to help Canadians find and afford suitable housing, part of a larger strategy to reduce poverty. But the poll suggests the government is also dealing with public fears about affordability.

"It's a deeply troubling finding that in certain portions of Canada, either geographically or societally, that this is a crisis level," said Frank Graves, president of EKOS Research.

The poll found about half of respondents who consider themselves poor or working class believe that the cost of local housing is beyond their means. The rate was 38 per cent and 37 per cent, respectively, with respondents who consider themselves middle or upper class.

Looking at cities, only six per cent of respondents in Toronto and two per cent in Vancouver said they believe housing was affordable. In Calgary, the number was 11 per cent; in Montreal, 22 per cent.

The results of the telephone poll of 5,658 Canadians, conducted between June 1 and 19, are considered accurate to within 1.3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The federal government hopes to halve the number of the hardest-to-help homeless, lifting tens of thousands out of "core housing need" – meaning they spend more than one-third of their before-tax income on housing that may be substandard or doesn't meet their needs.

The Liberal government believes the biggest impact could be on renters who are stretched financially in many of Canada's biggest cities.

Research from the University of Calgary's school of public policy finds that affordability crunch is most acute in Calgary, Vancouver and Toronto, where a low-income family can spend upwards of half their income on the lowest-priced apartments.

Different situations in different cities make crafting a national housing strategy a challenge, because it must account for regional variations in incomes and costs, the school says in its June research note.

Municipal leaders are asking the government to prioritize federal spending on repair existing and construct new affordable housing units to deal with chronic shortages and deepening poverty in Canada. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities is also recommending the government provide direct housing support newcomers to Canada and provide more help for indigenous peoples living in urban centres.

The recommendations are part of a submission to the Liberals' anti-poverty strategy consultations, which the FCM is making public Monday.