



## PRESS RELEASE



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### **Minister Fontana Announces Renewal of Housing Affordability Initiative**

**OTTAWA, Ontario, April 28, 2005** — The Honourable Joe Fontana, Minister of Labour and Housing, today announced the renewal of ACT (Affordability and Choice Today), a CMHC-funded initiative aimed at regulatory reform to improve housing affordability and choice. The new agreement is for \$1.2 million over four years.

“The goal of ACT is to improve planning and building regulations to make them more responsive to the housing needs of all Canadians,” said Minister Fontana, speaking at the annual 2005 Congress of the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA) in Montréal. “It brings municipalities and the private and non-profit housing sectors together to act in partnership toward this goal.”

ACT is a partnership between CMHC, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the Canadian Home Builders’ Association (CHBA), and CHRA. ACT is funded by CMHC, and delivered and administered by FCM.

Operating since 1990, ACT has funded regulatory reform projects across Canada carried out by local teams made up of municipalities, home-builders, non-profit housing groups and other housing stakeholders. This includes streamlining approvals processes and creating alternative development standards. It also includes removing regulatory barriers to intensification, secondary suites, rooming houses and other housing options.

With 137 projects complete, ACT has a rich database of solutions that local partners can benefit from in their future housing projects. Now the focus is on sharing solutions so that local stakeholders can learn from them and adapt them to meet their needs.

“Municipalities of any size can benefit from adopting ACT’s wide range of regulatory solutions leading to improved housing affordability and choice for citizens, better quality of life for the whole community, and streamlined procedures for municipal governments,” said FCM President Ann MacLean. “We look forward to ACT’s continuing contribution to helping Canadian communities pursue innovation in residential development through regulatory reform.”

"ACT enables home builders and municipalities to work together on regulatory reforms that support innovation. The result is tangible actions to improve housing affordability and choice, “said CHBA President David Wassmansdorf. “ACT is a very important vehicle for sharing experience right across the country."

Joyce Potter, President of CHRA, applauds the decision to continue with support of the ACT program. "We are happy to continue our longstanding partnership with CMHC, FCM and the CHBA. Sharing information and ideas on how to achieve affordable housing will no doubt lead to increased public awareness of the need for affordable housing and more bodies at the table to make sure it gets developed."

ACT has generated a wealth of practical solutions that are documented in solution sheets and case studies, which are available on the website [www.actprogram.com](http://www.actprogram.com). ACT’s knowledgeable staff can also help find solutions and assist local stakeholders in addressing regulatory issues. Grants of up to \$5,000 are available to local teams initiating or promoting

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regulatory reform in their communities, for example through forums, open houses, surveys, background reports or promotional materials. Excellence in regulatory reform by a municipality will also be recognized in a new housing category in the FCM-CH2M HILL Sustainable Community Awards in 2006.

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### **Backgrounder**

#### **Affordability and Choice Today (ACT)**

##### **What Is It?**

ACT provides practical solutions for updating housing-related regulations and permit procedures. Municipalities and others may freely access a wealth of solutions through ACT's website at [www.actprogram.com](http://www.actprogram.com). Whether the focus is new construction, renovation or gaining community support, ACT projects provide insight on solutions.

##### **Purpose**

The purpose is two-fold: 1) to encourage housing affordability, choice and quality through regulatory reform; and 2) to foster co-operation among key housing stakeholders, including municipalities, home builders, community members and others. From its inception in 1990, ACT has proven successful in both these areas.

##### **Funding**

The new agreement is for \$1.2 million over four years. ACT's core focus is on promoting existing solutions and lessons learned. ACT will provide grants of up to \$5,000 for local teams, made up of key housing stakeholders — municipalities, home builders, non-profit housing groups and others — to pursue regulatory reform initiatives.

##### **Partners**

ACT is funded by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), delivered and administered by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and is jointly managed by CMHC, FCM, the Canadian Home Builders' Association (CHBA) and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA). All of these organizations contribute to this initiative in kind.

ACT also fosters partnerships and co-operation among local housing stakeholders. The program encourages municipalities, the home building industry, non-profit groups, community members, provinces and territories, and other interested parties to work together to undertake innovative regulatory reform initiatives.

## **Background**

Keeping housing regulations and municipal approval procedures up-to-date to meet the needs of today's communities is a challenge. Out-of-date rules can impede the provision of affordable, innovative housing and limit the range of options available to meet the needs of Canadians. Regulatory reform is of major concern to builders, who welcome opportunities to work with municipalities in overcoming regulatory impediments to housing affordability and innovation. Non-profit organizations also look for new ways to encourage affordable housing. For municipalities, changing regulations and updating procedures contributes to better use of existing infrastructure, better staff efficiencies and improved service delivery, while also enhancing a community's quality of life.

ACT was created in 1990 as a research initiative designed to fund and promote practical solutions at the local level to overcome regulatory barriers. The program provided grants of up to \$20,000 to teams across Canada made up of municipalities, home builders, non-profit groups and other housing stakeholders. Over the 15 years, 137 projects have been completed and documented, resulting in a rich database of information.

Solutions developed in one community can be a blueprint for others to learn from and build on in meeting their needs. A formal assessment of ACT in 2002 indicated that ACT projects have been replicated across Canada and that more information transfer is needed to encourage further uptake of solutions.

ACT solutions and lessons learned are documented in case studies and solution sheets that can be downloaded from ACT's website. These solutions are promoted at workshops, conferences and other events.

ACT will provide grants of up to \$5,000 for local teams of housing stakeholders across Canada to undertake regulatory reform. This includes: obtaining input and direction on regulatory reform initiatives; facilitating local implementation of existing solutions; and advancing efforts to overcome specific barriers. Eligible projects must include a specific activity or a product, such as a stakeholder consultation, survey, background report, workshop, open house or promotional material. Grants will be selected twice a year by ACT's National Management Committee, which represents the four partners.

ACT will also seek out and document regulatory solutions that have been developed without ACT grants. As well, ACT will be recognizing municipal innovation by sponsoring a new housing category in the FCM-CH2M HILL Sustainable Community Awards. The first award will be given in 2006.