

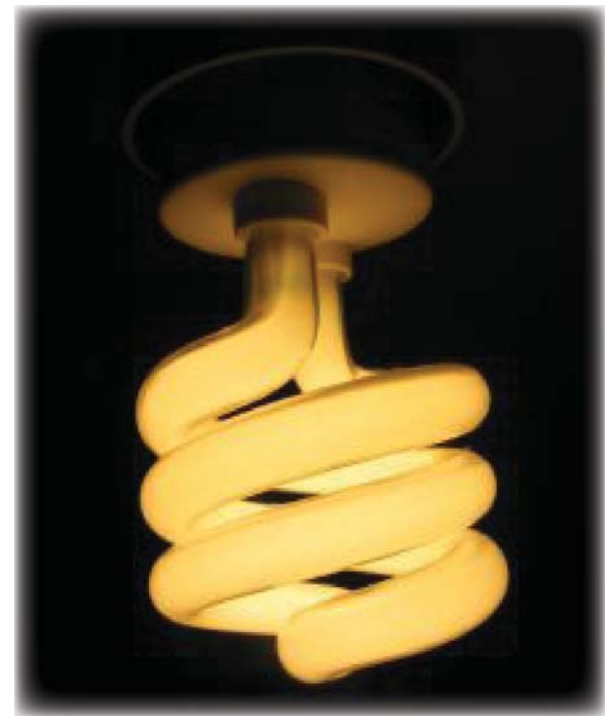
Green and Affordable Housing in Canada

What is this research about?

This research provides the first systematic evaluation of energy efficiency programs in Canada's social housing sector. It examines government policies and programs aimed at making social housing more energy efficient. It also identifies the preferred investment strategies of different social housing providers – public, private non-profit and cooperative.

What you need to know

Canada is committed to energy efficiency as part of its national *Green Plan*, which addresses the environmental issues of climate change, and reducing energy consumption. However, lacking a national housing strategy, and with social housing provision responsibility downloaded to provinces and municipalities, home energy efficiency policies have not been well regulated nor have they been widely implemented. As such, many buildings are operating at 50% below their efficiency potential. Social housing in Canada makes up less than 6% of the housing stock, and the majority of it is between 20 and 50 years old, and is very energy inefficient. Unfortunately, most social housing providers do not enjoy the financial freedom to make costly energy efficient retrofits, which could add between a 5-10% increase to overall renovation costs.



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KEYWORDS
energy efficiency retrofits, Canada, social housing sector, investment strategies

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Green and Affordable Housing in Canada: Investment Strategies of Social Housing Organisations was presented in the Enhr Conference 2011 on 5-8 July, Toulouse by Sasha Tsenkova & Karim Youssef.



What did the researchers find?

An energy efficient social housing stock contributes to the overall objective of reducing climate change. It also reduces the utility costs (heat, electricity and hot water) of the units and thus shields the tenants from energy poverty. The tenants will be able to enjoy the extra money saved from lowered utility costs. “Green jobs” that focus on implementing energy efficient practices will be created and training will need to be provided to those interested in properly implementing the energy efficient activities. Energy retrofits and better housing conditions have a positive impact on the wellbeing of tenants and thus reduce their dependence on other social services and support. In its first year, the \$75 million allocated for the *Renovation and Retrofit of Existing Social Housing* benefited 700 existing social housing projects. However, rents are expected to rise to cover the costs of implementing such energy efficient measures. This will likely place more of a financial burden on the provinces, forcing them to increase housing allowances to assist those that cannot afford potential rental increases.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers examined energy efficiency policy implementation in social housing by analyzing two case studies of social housing projects in Toronto and Vancouver. The researchers also reviewed literature on energy efficiency practices and interviewed social housing providers. This research focused on the types of retrofits (improvements) used

in housing renovations and the savings achieved by combining energy efficient upgrades such as insulation, draft-proofing and water-efficient toilets with sustainable energy conservation measures such as replacing appliances with those carrying Energy Star ratings, replacing new hot water tanks and putting in weather-stripping.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This research can be used to attract further government investment for energy efficient renovations in social housing. It signals an emerging transformation in housing and energy policy, where green and affordable housing can be seen as a proven, cost-effective approach to creating healthy, vibrant communities. It also highlights the importance of both a federal and provincial commitment to housing and energy policy. Although the emphasis is on the social housing sector, the results can be stretched to include the residential sector as a whole.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

SASHA TSENKOVA

Dr. Sasha Tsenkova, is a professor in the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Calgary. Her research interests include cities, climate change, comparative housing policy, international development, planning sustainable communities, sustainable cities, and urban and regional planning.

