

A National Strategy for Affordability in Canada

Strengthening Canada’s internal economic capacity, trade, and infrastructure

April 2025

Overview

Canada is at a crossroads. Basic needs such as housing and food are becoming less affordable, while the country remains heavily dependent on foreign markets for essential goods, inputs, and supply chains. At the same time, Canada continues to export raw materials and import higher-cost finished products, missing opportunities to create jobs, deepen domestic capacity, and strengthen economic resilience.

This strategy responds to those pressures by focusing on three connected priorities: affordable housing, affordable groceries, and good jobs. Together, these pillars are intended to strengthen Canada’s internal economic capacity, trade position, and infrastructure in ways that make everyday life more affordable while also improving national resilience.

In housing, demand for construction labour continues to outpace supply, driving delays and pushing up costs.ⁱ Shortages remain severe, and Canada is estimated to need roughly 3.5 million additional homes by 2030 to restore affordability.ⁱⁱ Existing policy has relied heavily on subsidies and regulatory incentives which have not sufficiently addressed workforce constraints or supply bottlenecks, leaving the country behind where it most needs to accelerate.

In the grocery sector, a small number of dominant retailers shape much of the national food supply chain, limiting competition and weakening price discipline. Farmers and food processors also face persistent constraints, including inadequate domestic processing capacity, labour shortages, and exposure to global supply disruptions. The result is a system in which food insecurity is rising even as Canada remains rich in agricultural potential.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the labour market, Canada faces shortages in the skilled trades and other industrial occupations, rising underemployment among young people, and a persistent gap between available jobs and the country’s economic and infrastructure needs. Canada’s resource base remains one of its greatest strengths, yet too much value is still captured elsewhere because raw materials are exported before they are processed into higher-value products at home.

Affordable Housing Build more homes faster by addressing material, labour, land, and approval constraints.	Affordable Groceries Lower food costs through stronger competition, fairer supply chains, and more domestic processing.	Good Jobs Create high-wage work by moving Canada up the value chain in resources, energy, and infrastructure.
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How the strategy works

The strategy addresses these problems as a single economic system rather than as separate policy files. By expanding domestic production of building materials, food, minerals, fertilizers, hydrogen, and clean energy, Canada can reduce its exposure to volatile foreign supply chains. By lowering the cost of housing and groceries, it can ease pressure on household budgets and free more spending for local businesses and long-term investment. By building more capacity in manufacturing, processing, infrastructure, and skilled trades, it can create high-quality employment that supports broad-based prosperity.

Taken together, the three pillars are meant to reinforce one another. More affordable housing supports labour mobility and economic participation. A more competitive and resilient food system lowers living costs and reduces vulnerability. A stronger domestic industrial base creates the jobs, materials, energy, and infrastructure needed to sustain both. The result is intended to be a self-reinforcing model of growth that is more secure, productive, and affordable for Canadians.

Pillar 1 | Affordable Housing

The first pillar is to ensure that Canadians have access to affordable, high-quality housing by strengthening the domestic systems that make housing possible. That means expanding the supply of building materials, growing the skilled trades workforce, modernizing construction methods, accelerating approvals, repurposing underused land, and improving protections in the rental and ownership markets.

Expanding Domestic Production of Building Materials

Canada exports raw logs while importing more processed building materials at higher cost, a pattern that makes construction more unpredictable and contributes to longer build times.^{iv} If Canada is to increase housing supply in the foreseeable future, it needs a more reliable and affordable domestic materials base.^v

A national housing strategy will therefore require a minimum share of logs to be processed domestically before export, increased investment in automated sawmills and engineered wood facilities, and expanded production of softwood lumber, mass timber, plywood, and other engineered wood products. It also requires diversifying export markets by selling higher-value finished products to Europe and Asia rather than relying too heavily on raw exports. These interventions would help to lower construction costs, reduce exposure to trade disruption, and create more high-wage manufacturing jobs at home.

Expanding Workforce Capacity in Construction and Skilled Trades

Canada's shortage of carpenters, plumbers, electricians, and other construction workers is now a direct barrier to housing affordability.^{vi} Long certification pathways, low starting wages, and weak early-career incentives make it harder to attract new entrants at the scale required.^{vii}

To close that gap, this strategy proposes tuition-free apprenticeships funded through a Skilled Trades Expansion Program, higher wage subsidies for apprentices, and stronger incentives for journeypersons who remain in construction trades. It also calls for a transferable, competency-based certification pathway^{viii} for general labourers entering residential construction, along with minimum wage and working-condition standards for lower-skilled trades. Together, these measures are intended to bring more young

people into the sector, reduce churn, build long-term labour capacity, and help homes get built faster and more safely.

Fast-Tracking Construction with Prefabricated and Modular Housing

Traditional construction is labour-intensive, weather-sensitive, and often slower than it needs to be, particularly in regions with short building seasons.^{ix} More standardized and repeatable construction processes can reduce risk and improve the speed and predictability of delivery.^x

This strategy therefore calls for investment in prefabricated housing factories, a federal requirement that most federally funded housing projects use modular or prefabricated components, and a dedicated fund to help launch firms that produce modular homes. The goal is to reduce on-site labour needs, compress building timelines from years to months, lower total costs, and expand the supply of affordable housing that can be delivered more reliably across the country.

Streamlining Zoning Laws and Housing Approvals

Even when capital and labour are available, housing projects are often delayed by approval systems that are slow, costly, and restrictive.^{xi} Municipal fees, layered reviews, and zoning rules that limit density continue to block or postpone essential housing.^{xii}

This strategy would leverage federal incentives to encourage reform by tying infrastructure funding to zoning compliance, especially where municipalities adopt as-of-right zoning for higher-density development. It would also introduce pre-approved building designs for affordable housing, provide grants or tax incentives to municipalities that streamline approvals, and establish a national benchmark so that qualifying projects can break ground within six months of application. These actions help to reduce costly delay, increase housing stock, and lower downstream costs that ultimately fall on renters and homebuyers.

Repurposing Federal and Underused Land for Housing

Governments own substantial amounts of urban land and property that remain underused even as housing shortages deepen.^{xiii} Vacant offices, former bases, surplus facilities, and other idle sites represent one of the fastest ways to expand supply without relying entirely on private land markets.^{xiv}

This strategy proposes converting underused public land into housing, rezoning vacant commercial buildings and office properties for residential use, and using public-private partnerships to develop mixed-income projects on government-owned sites. It would also introduce a vacant land tax on commercial and industrial properties left undeveloped for more than three years. These steps are meant to bring more land into active use, reduce pressure on private markets, limit price escalation, and turn underused spaces into livable communities more quickly.

Strengthening Housing Market and Tenant Protections

Affordability is not only a supply issue. Rents continue to rise faster than wages, short-term rental platforms reduce the stock of long-term rentals, and speculative investment is increasing prices.^{xv}

For those reasons, this strategy supports rent stabilization tied to inflation, stronger limits on short-term rentals in high-demand markets, and a speculation tax on homes flipped within short timeframes. It would also offer tax incentives for landlords who provide long-term below-market rentals, prohibit federally regulated Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) and financial institutions from acquiring single-family homes, and remove preferential tax treatment for REITs. The purpose is to make rental housing more stable, increase the availability of long-term rentals, and reduce the treatment of housing as a purely speculative asset.

Pillar 2 | Affordable Groceries

The second pillar is to ensure that all Canadians have access to affordable groceries by improving competition, strengthening accountability, and building a more resilient domestic food system. The aim is not only to reduce prices, but also to make food supply chains more efficient, and less reliant on monopolies.

Increasing Competition in the Grocery Market

Canada's grocery sector is highly concentrated with only a handful of large grocery chains controlling over 80% of the market.^{xvi} This limited competition gives them outsized influence over prices, supplier relationships, and the conditions under which smaller competitors operate.^{xvii}

This strategy proposes amending the Competition Act to include grocery-specific provisions that would prevent large chains from holding more than a quarter of a regional market, require divestment where those thresholds are exceeded, and expand the Competition Bureau's ability to investigate and prosecute exploitative pricing. It would also raise penalties for anti-competitive conduct,^{xviii} extend low-interest loans and tax incentives to small grocers and expand farm-to-store programs that help local producers sell directly to independent retailers. The objective is to widen consumer choice, lower prices through stronger competition, and make it easier for independent grocers to survive and grow.

Regulating Price Gouging and Excessive Margins

The profits of large grocery chains in Canada have increased significantly in recent years, even when supply costs for essential foods remain stable.^{xix} This weakens public confidence and suggests a need for clearer safeguards around essential goods.

To address that risk, this strategy would require work with provinces to strengthen consumer protection rules and establish thresholds for price increases on key staples such as bread, produce, and infant formula. It would also impose sanctions on large chains that fail to cap prices on a defined basket of essential goods.^{xx} These interventions will help to reduce excessive markups, protect consumers from opportunistic pricing, and signal that affordability must remain a core obligation in the retail food sector.

Increasing Accountability in Grocery Supply Chains

When the same companies exert significant control over both wholesale and retail pricing, conflicts of interest become harder to avoid, and smaller suppliers face greater vulnerability.^{xxi} Canadian grocery chains use retail fees, delayed payments, and other practices to transfer risk onto small producers.^{xxii}

This strategy responds by proposing a Grocery Market Regulator^{xxiii} that would investigate price manipulation and supplier coercion, prohibit delayed payments to farmers and food producers, and restrict grocery chains from owning both distribution networks and retail operations in ways that distort competition. A sector-specific regulatory approach of this kind is intended to create fairer dealings across the supply chain and to support new entrants that would otherwise struggle to compete on equal terms.

Expanding Agriculture and Agri-Food Processing

Canada exports large amounts of raw agricultural goods while importing higher-value processed foods.^{xxiv} At the same time, low wages, precarious work, and labour shortages continue to constrain domestic food production and processing capacity.^{xxv}

To address these supply constraints, Canada needs to invest in enabling technologies like automated food processing equipment, expand subsidies for greenhouse and vertical farming, establish a higher minimum wage standard for agricultural and food workers, and offer tuition-free training for key occupations such as equipment technicians, quality assurance specialists, and food scientists. The broader goal is to lower grocery prices by increasing supply, retaining more value inside Canada, and building a stronger long-term workforce in agriculture and food processing.

Reducing Food Waste and Increasing Availability

Food waste is both an affordability problem and an efficiency problem.^{xxvi} Large quantities of edible food are lost each year, while retailers often discard surplus goods instead of redirecting them to households or community organizations.^{xxvii}

This strategy therefore calls for investment in startups that repurpose discarded produce, improved cold-storage infrastructure to preserve perishables, and tax incentives for grocers that partner with food banks and charities to redistribute surplus food. By reducing waste-related losses and increasing the amount of food that reaches consumers, these measures are meant to improve food security, lower system costs, and reduce the environmental damage associated with unnecessary waste.

Pillar 3 | Good Jobs

The third pillar is to create good jobs by moving Canada further up the value chain in the sectors where it holds major natural and strategic advantages. Rather than relying primarily on the export of raw materials, this pillar focuses on processing, manufacturing, energy, and infrastructure that can generate high-wage employment while reducing dependence on external markets and supply chains.

Building Domestic Mineral and Metal Processing Capacity

Canada holds significant reserves of critical minerals and rare earth elements that are increasingly central to electric vehicles, renewable energy technologies, and digital infrastructure, however, because the country exports raw critical minerals and relies on other countries for refined battery materials, it is unable to lead in this sector.^{xxviii}

The strategy proposes building domestic supply chains for lithium, cobalt, nickel, copper, and rare earth elements through a mix of exploration incentives and mining partnerships to establish processing facilities in Canada. It would also fund technologies that make mining more efficient and environmentally sustainable, including electrified equipment and water-efficient processes. The intended result is a stronger trade position, a larger domestic revenue base from processing and refining, and more high-paying work in metallurgy, industrial manufacturing, and advanced resource development.

Investing in Potash and Fertilizer Processing

Canada has the world's largest potash reserves, but much of that advantage is lost at the raw-material stage instead of refining it into fertilizer domestically.^{xxix} As a result, Canada is vulnerable to volatile global fertilizer markets which can quickly raise domestic production costs and food prices.^{xxx}

To respond, this strategy proposes new fertilizer plants that process more Canadian potash into finished products before export, long-term supply agreements with major agricultural economies, and domestic

supply quotas to help ensure Canadian farmers can obtain affordable fertilizer before export demand is met. It also recognizes the need for precision agriculture technologies that use fertilizer more efficiently. Together, these measures are intended to stabilize farm input costs, create more jobs in engineering and operations, and reduce Canada's reliance on external fertilizer markets.

Hydrogen Leadership and Export Expansion

Canada has vast hydrogen production potential that could fulfill increasing global demand for clean hydrogen but it risks losing market share to competitors due to limited infrastructure.^{xxxix}

This strategy requires investment in both green and blue hydrogen facilities, building liquefaction and export terminals on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, and providing incentives for fleet operators to adopt hydrogen-powered trucks, buses, and trains. It would also establish a national refuelling network, integrate hydrogen into trade and energy partnerships, and expand support for university and start-up research in fuel cells and electrolysis. The aim is to build a major new export sector, create high-paying jobs across research and infrastructure, and strengthen Canada's long-term energy position.

Expanding Renewable Energy and Integrating It with Industry

Canada has vast hydro, wind, and solar resources, but these assets are not yet fully organized in ways that support integrated industrial development at scale.^{xxxix} Transmission limits, storage constraints, and uneven regional infrastructure continue to reduce the country's ability to use clean electricity strategically.^{xxxix}

This strategy proposes expanding pumped hydro, battery storage, and smart-grid technologies, increasing solar and wind generation in industrial and high-demand regions, and growing offshore wind along the Atlantic coast and in the Great Lakes. It would also establish tax credits and incentives for private sector investment in clean energy projects. This will help to improve domestic energy security, reduce long-term energy costs, support other industries such as hydrogen, and position Canada more strongly in the global clean-energy economy.

Modernizing and Expanding Infrastructure

Aging roads, bridges, utilities, and public systems continue to constrain housing development, industrial expansion, and trade.^{xxxix} Weak transportation and service infrastructure also raises costs for businesses and households, particularly in rural, remote, and northern regions.^{xxxix}

The strategy proposes greater use of public-private partnerships to finance roads and rail into resource-rich areas, improvements to key ports and trade corridors, and expanded broadband in underserved rural and northern communities. Better infrastructure of this kind would improve supply chains, expand access to economic opportunity, support Arctic and rural sovereignty, and make it easier to advance both housing and industrial development at the pace Canada needs.

Reducing Reliance on U.S. Financial Markets and Investment

Many major Canadian industries remain heavily exposed to U.S. capital markets and private investment, making Canada highly vulnerable to shocks that originate outside the country.^{xxxix}

To reduce that exposure, the strategy proposes establishing a sovereign wealth fund^{xxxvii} capitalized through resource revenues and designed to support domestic investment over the long term. A fund of this kind would help stabilize public finances when commodity prices fall, preserve wealth for future generations, and create a larger pool of Canadian capital for infrastructure, education, health care, and other strategic priorities without relying as heavily on foreign financing.

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