

NHS Solutions Labs Program

Solutions Labs is a program under the National Housing Strategy. These labs fuel bottom-up collaborative innovation by bringing diverse groups of people together to solve complex housing problems for government's consideration and help inform decision making at all levels. Labs are formed through either our annual open call for applications process or through our directed lab stream. More information about funding opportunities can be found [on our website](#).

The goal of the Solutions Labs Program is to develop world-leading solutions to our most challenging housing problems that contribute to the National Housing Strategy's key priority areas and shared outcomes.

WHAT IS A SOLUTIONS LAB?

Solutions Labs go by many names, such as social innovation lab, change lab or design lab, but all have one common goal: to tackle the complex societal challenges Canadians are facing and that require systems change and that have not been solved using conventional methods. For us, that means applying an innovative problem-solving lens to housing issues in order to achieve the National Housing Strategy objectives and outcomes.

WHY ARE SOLUTIONS LABS UNIQUE?

We have seen that conventional ways do not work and recognize innovative problem solving can help!

The challenges that Solution labs tackle are not black and white—they are layered in complexity, often messy and at times daunting and even controversial. Part of the lab's role is to deepen stakeholder understanding of the specific challenge by exposing them to the perspectives of other stakeholders. No one group has the answer – but by enabling groups to work together, the lab can develop collective, relevant and responsive solutions, as well as identify potential “champions” who are best positioned to scale-up those solutions. What sets this innovative approach apart is that the solutions are developed by stakeholders for consideration by governments, rather than the other way around.

Characteristics of Complex Problems

Complex societal problems have some similar characteristics:

- 1 They are difficult to address and they change with every attempt to address them;
- 2 They involve many diverse stakeholders and opinions;
- 3 They have causes and drivers that are interdependent and filled with uncertainties;
- 4 They are unique and have no precedent to compare; and
- 5 They do not have definitive criteria or indications for the right solution.

A Solutions Lab

allows for and provides tools and experts to guide stakeholders to co-develop solution ideas, prioritizes those ideas so they can be prototyped and tested together, and if they work, be implemented.

A lab creates a safe zone for a diverse and inclusive group of participants to explore, question assumptions, be bold, be agile enough to adapt as learning emerges, and to experiment with solutions.



≡ Tackle Complex Problems

HOW DO SOLUTIONS LABS WORK?

CMHC's annual budget available for Solutions Labs is up to \$3 million.

Funding is given based on the quality and quantity of submissions and available budget each year. Labs can be funded through a number of types of funding streams:

Open-Calls Competitive Process

The primary funding stream is an Open Competitive Call for Proposals. These calls for proposals are held on an annual basis. They target teams of affordable housing providers, housing experts, academics and other stakeholders, to work with recognized solutions labs consultants to develop and submit proposals for solving specific housing challenges and developing prototype solutions related to the NHS.

A proposal evaluation process, adjudicated by external government and non-government representatives with subject matter expertise, will recommend innovation labs for funding. For more information on the eligibility requirements for Open-Call please [download our Fact Sheet](#).

Directed Solutions Labs

CMHC will support directed Solutions Labs and bring together relevant experts, stakeholders and innovation labs consultants to solve housing challenges that are not addressed through the open-call process. These challenges are based on a list of priority problems identified by CMHC and match gaps in funding through the open call for proposals.

Either open-call labs or directed labs provide a structured process for approaching complex problems and a safe and creative environment to experiment and prototype radical innovations.



cmhc.ca/SolutionsLabs



Phase 1: Definition

Establish scope and confirm or re-frame the original issue. Confirm commitment, funding, accountability and project understanding by Lab Participants and Lab Consultants.



Phase 2: Discovery

Generate insight through data analysis and lived experience. Understand the current state of the issue based on a range of research methodologies.



Phase 3: Development

Ideation – explore new ideas and co-develop potential solutions (practices, policies, technologies or processes) to accelerate improvements. Establish strategic direction for prioritizing solutions and opportunities for immediate improvement.



Phase 4: Prototype & Test

Test and refine shared ideas and proposals in iterative and adaptive ways. Rapidly develop solutions based on previously identified leverage/opportunity areas. Take forward the best solutions for further development.



Phase 5: Roadmap

Share back and engage in “sense-making” of prototype experiments, and harvest key learnings and insights. Create Solutions Uptake Roadmaps for the most promising solutions/prototypes with implementation plans and identified opportunities for future funding.