

# Strategy 4

LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS HAVE IMPROVED ACCESS  
TO AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING



Many low-income family and senior households do not have special housing needs. These households simply do not have enough income to pay rent in the private market – there is a gap between their rent and what they can afford to pay.

Portable housing allowances that can be used in the private rental market are the most economical way for the government to assist these low-income households that do not qualify for a subsidized housing unit. An existing housing allowance program, the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) Program, has successfully assisted many low-income seniors for over 25 years.

Now the Province is creating a new housing allowance program for families, the Rental Assistance Program.

The recently expanded Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters Program and the Rental Assistance Program mean greater housing choice and assistance to bridge the affordability gap in private market rental housing.

The Province will also continue to work closely with other levels of government to promote the development of affordable market rental housing. This will include pursuing opportunities for changes to federal tax policy and working with local governments to advance innovative planning and development practices.

### SHELTER AID FOR ELDERLY RENTERS PROGRAM (SAFER) ENHANCEMENTS

Seniors are living longer and healthier lives in B.C. One of the ways the government is responding to the needs of an aging population is by expanding the SAFER program for low-income seniors in need of rental assistance.

In 2005, the Province nearly doubled the budget, increasing the program's rent ceilings, and expanding the program to include those who pay pad rental fees for their manufactured homes.

Further SAFER enhancements in the summer of 2006 reduced the Canadian residency requirement for immigrants from 10 years to one, and increased allowance for heating costs when paid separately from rent.

Program changes to SAFER will help ensure that seniors remain independent in their own homes for a longer period of time, thereby reducing reliance on more costly institutional options.



## Rental Assistance Program for Families

The government's new Rental Assistance Program will provide direct financial assistance to low-income, working families. The program will be administered through BC Housing.

Portable housing allowances paid directly to tenants have a number of benefits because they:

- eliminate the stigma of receiving government assistance – no one need know they are receiving assistance.
- allow people to live where they want and take the allowance with them if they move.
- allow or even encourage people to move to a location where employment may be more readily available.
- are flexible – they can be provided on short notice and can respond quickly to changing regional needs and economic circumstances.
- are cost effective; when no longer needed, they are no longer provided.
- do not require an operations and maintenance infrastructure to sustain them.