

Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness

Written Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance (FINA)
for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2021 Budget
August 4, 2020

The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) is a registered charity leading a national movement of individuals, organizations, and communities working together to end homelessness in Canada.

Homelessness and COVID-19

The pandemic has exposed a serious weakness in Canada's social safety net, including for those in precarious employment and consequently at risk of losing their housing. And most relevant for this brief, especially among those that have no home – people experiencing homelessness.

People experiencing homelessness are at dramatically elevated risk from COVID-19. It is not possible for people experiencing homelessness to follow public health advice to “go home and stay home.” Physical distancing, accessing proper hygiene or health care is challenging at best and impossible at worst, for those staying in emergency shelters, sleeping unsheltered, or couch surfing. Further, people experiencing homelessness are at elevated risk of contracting COVID-19, and of having more serious outcomes if they do contract it, as a result of pre-existing health conditions.

As Canada learns from this current experience, it will need to redesign our social safety net to be much more resilient. This is particularly true for those who are disproportionately represented in homeless populations, including Indigenous people; women-led households; persons with disabilities; members of racialized groups; people with precarious immigration status, immigrants and refugees; and members of LGBTQ2S+ communities.

As communities re-open, Canadians understandably want to ‘get back to normal’, but ‘normal’ means continued homelessness and life-threatening risk for over 235,000 people. On top of this, over 1.7 million low income Canadians are living in housing need and with the economic impact of the pandemic are at significantly increased risk of becoming homeless.

A Recovery for All

It doesn't need to be this way. Modern mass homelessness in Canada is the product of policy choices made in the late 1980's and 1990's. A growing number of communities have shown that with a focused effort, and the support of government, homelessness can be reduced.

The pandemic has exposed the weaknesses in Canada's social safety net and the recovery gives us the opportunity to fix them.

Working closely with community leaders, partners, housing policy experts, and people with lived experience of homelessness the CAEH has developed a six-point recovery strategy which includes:

- A federal commitment to the prevention and elimination of homelessness
- A national guaranteed income;
- Construction of over 300,000 new permanently affordable and supportive housing units and enhanced rental supports for low-income Canadians;
- Meaningful implementation of the right to housing;
- Measures to curtail the impacts of financialization of rental housing markets; and
- An adequately resourced, distinctions based, Urban and Rural Indigenous Housing and Homelessness Strategy that is developed and implemented by urban, rural and Northern Indigenous peoples and housing and service providers.

In May 2020, the CAEH launched Recovery for All, a grassroots national campaign to encourage Parliament to make pandemic recovery investments that will not only stimulate the economy but help those who need it most. If done right, we believe this recovery effort can end homelessness in Canada, once and for all.

Recovery for All: Proposals to Strengthen the National Housing Strategy and End Homelessness

In June 2020, CAEH released a report to accompany the six-point policy plan, entitled [Recovery for All: Proposals to Strengthen the National Housing Strategy and End Homelessness](#), which details an affordable and achievable plan to end homelessness, create jobs and save taxpayer dollars. Moreover, the report includes measures that can begin immediately to protect vulnerable Canadians from further risk from COVID-19.

The report shows how Canada can **end homelessness by 2030, save taxpayers over \$18 billion and create nearly 500,000 much needed jobs**. This report shows how housing investment can be a key strategy in Canada's pandemic recovery both as economic stimulus and as a means of protecting vulnerable Canadians. The outcomes of this plan are achieved through an ambitious, achievable and affordable enhancement of the National Housing Strategy that focuses on ending homelessness.

The existing NHS aims to reduce chronic homelessness by 50%. The plan proposed by Recovery for All would ensure housing for **all those currently experiencing homelessness** and **prevent homelessness** for over 300,000 households at greatest risk due to high housing costs and precarious situations.

As government determines spending, it's important to note that housing construction is an excellent stimulus investment. The **RFA plan will create up to 500,000 jobs over the next 10 years**, in both construction and social services.

This plan calls for targeted spending of \$52 billion over 10 years (about \$5.2 billion/year). Currently Canadians spend \$7 billion a year on emergency responses that leave people homeless (totaling \$70 billion over 10 years). **This plan generates potential savings to taxpayers of over \$18 billion in the next 10 years.**

Recommendations to the FINA Committee

Further to the [Recovery for All plan](#), we recommend that the federal government implement the following measures for Budget 2021.

Recommendation One: Develop a new program for acquisition and conversion of hotels and apartments as well as the use of modular housing options for rapid creation of affordable and supportive housing—75,000 total units would be acquired over 10 years.

Recommendation Two: More than double National Housing Strategy housing construction to 370,000 units by:

- Expanding the supply of permanent supportive housing with 50,000 units of permanent supportive housing.
- Expanding affordable housing through construction of an additional 170,000 new affordable units (over and above the 150,000 units planned by the current National Housing Strategy).

Recommendation Three: Create a distinct Urban Indigenous Housing Strategy to address the disproportionate number of Indigenous Peoples experiencing homelessness – with 30,000 dedicated units.

Recommendation Four: Expand the Canada Housing Benefit with a new Homeless Housing Benefit to help a minimum of 55,000 people avoid or exit homelessness.

Recommendation Five: Expand direct federal investment in community responses to homelessness through Reaching Home including specific new investments in rural and remote homelessness and women's homelessness.

The [Recovery for All plan](#) is a win-win-win-win opportunity: end homelessness, save lives, reduce cost and create jobs. As Canada build its recovery plan, this is the moment to think big and act decisively to end homelessness in Canada.

For further details, please see [Recovery for All: Proposals to Strengthen the National Housing Strategy and End Homelessness](#).