



# **HOUSE OF COMMONS FINANCE COMMITTEE**

## **PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATION PROCESS**

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# RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** Establish permanent housing options with mental health supports in our communities.
- 2** Provide assistance to non-profits that have the capacity to deliver food programs.
- 3** Develop community-based supports and treatment programs for people with opioid dependency.
- 4** Assist non-profits in need of technology system upgrades and e-mental health platforms.
- 5** Reduce barriers to employment for Aspiring Workers, and the employers who support them, by investing in non-profit employment services and programming.

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**COAST**  
MENTAL HEALTH

August 4, 2020

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada  
Office of the Prime Minister  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Honourable Bill Morneau, Minister of Finance  
Department of Finance Canada  
90 Elgin Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A0G5

Honourable Mona Fortier, Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and  
Associate Minister of Finance  
Department of Finance Canada  
90 Elgin Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A0G5

Honourable Wayne Easter, P.C. M.P. for Malpeque and  
the Chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee of Finance  
House of Commons  
Parliament Buildings  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

**Subject: House of Commons Finance Committee pre-budget consultation process**

Dear Right Hon. Justin Trudeau, Hon. Bill Morneau, Hon. Mona Fortier and Hon. Wayne Easter,

I am writing on behalf of Coast Mental Health, a B.C. based registered charity that advocates for and supports people living with mental health challenges. We have 52 sites, providing over 1,300 homes, many with mental health supports for people living in Greater Vancouver. With 48 years of expertise in community-based mental health services, we continue to work in collaboration with local governments and community groups to build healthy and inclusive communities in B.C.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many of our staff (779 employees) were front line workers responsible for the safety and care of over 5,000 clients. Luckily, we only had four mild cases of COVID-19 confirmed, and no outbreaks. This experience places us in a unique position to share our learnings and provide input on how best to invest in services to support Canadians.

Below, we offer input for the House of Commons Finance Committee pre-budget consultation process. Our feedback is based on the breadth of expertise of our Board of Directors, the senior executive team and our employees, who are all committed to lifting up and supporting members of the mental health community through local mental health support services.

# OUR SUBMISSION

**It's not just about housing, but housing with mental health supports:** Housing with mental health supports has been an essential service during the pandemic. Through education and awareness, restricting visitors at sites, rigorous cleaning schedules, and client wellness checks, we're able to keep clients informed and safe in over 1,300 homes across Greater Vancouver.

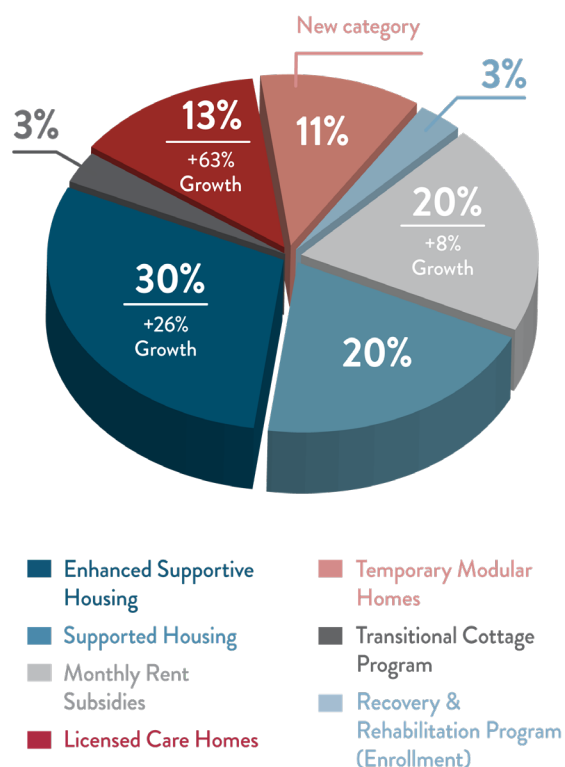
A number of [our sites](#) follow the [Housing First Model](#), which includes 24 hours a day/ 7 days a week mental health teams who work closely with clients to promote personal recovery and community integration. While we commend the BC Government's investment in affordable housing, many are temporary facilities or rental properties, rather than a spectrum of permanent housing models with supports. A further investment by the Government of Canada through its National Housing Policy is needed. From our experience, permanent housing with supports allows people to successfully transition to housing that promotes a sustained recovery and more independent living. Housing with supports is also an economic driver for communities, providing opportunities for primary and enhanced health care services and treatment programs.

The [social value and impact of community-based mental health supports](#) should not be underestimated. Without these essential services during the pandemic, many people struggling with mental illness would have been transferred to B.C. hospitals, ambulance services, police, and the criminal justice system. Communities are in need of housing and programming to support vulnerable populations. In an emergency situation like the COVID-19 crisis, these essential services have been instrumental in keeping our communities safe.

1,371 

clients received housing support  
from Coast Mental Health  
in 2019–2020

Share and growth of housing stock  
from 2018–2020



**Food insecurity is a public health concern:** We ask the House of Commons Finance Committee to consider investments in food programs that can be administered by non-profit organizations. While some of our facilities have structured food programs, we still lack adequate resources to meet rising food prices that limit our ability to offer meal programs at every site. Nutritious meals are important for a healthy body and mind. The scarcity of food has a serious impact on people with mental illness and substance use disorders, placing them at a higher risk of a relapse, or a sudden decline in health.



The pandemic has exacerbated the food insecurity issue, placing clients at an even greater risk. Food insecurity is also a burden on our health care and criminal justice systems that are forced to act as first responders to a food supply issue. In the 2017 study, [\*The household food insecurity gradient and potential reductions in adverse population mental health outcomes in Canadian adults\*](#), published in [Sciencedirect.com](#), the research data supports our staff observations in the field, suggesting household food insecurity actually has a higher risk of adverse mental health outcomes. And, as these researchers suggest, we wholeheartedly advocate that food insecurity should be a public health concern.

**Treating the opioid crisis:** We need to acknowledge and treat the opioid crisis as a national health crisis, not a criminal justice issue. During the pandemic, we observed increasing numbers of overdoses at our sites. People with opioid dependency need access to safe supply and community-based consumption sites, as well as designated abstinence-based treatment facilities. As stated in the 2018 policy brief by [\*Canada Centre on Substance Use and Addictions: Decriminalization, Options and Evidence\*](#), we need to adopt a range of principles, policies and practices for harm reduction.



**474,500**  
meals served across  
**Coast Mental Health facilities**  
in 2019–2020



R&R client reviews recovery goals with a mental health worker at CMH. Clients are referred by Burnaby Centre for Mental Health and Addictions and the Heartwood Treatment Centre for Women.



[Coast Mental Health's Recovery & Rehabilitation program](#)

is a 40-bed provincially funded mental health and alcohol treatment program. Since November 2014, over 200 clients have received treatments and mental health supports. To support people with opioid dependency we need a combined investment from the federal and provincial governments to treat the opioid crisis through community-based harm reduction services and abstinence-based treatment programs.

**Building equality and inclusion through investments in technology:** We also support many of [Vantage Point's recommendations](#), as outlined in its recent submission to the House of Commons Finance Committee pre-budget consultation process. In particular, we would strongly support investments in technology upgrades and systems for non-profit organizations. We urgently need resources to increase Internet bandwidth; to ensure security measures are in place to prevent the unauthorized access to computer systems; as well as an investment in performance level enhancements to host e-mental health platforms.

The pandemic has increased the seriousness of the technology gap between the e-commerce economy and non-profit organizations that lack the resources to keep up. From our experience, there's an urgent need for technology system upgrades and e-mental health services to support non-profits. During the pandemic, e-learning tools would have helped our front line workers administer care to the mental health community. Academic institutions around the world have adopted on-line learning platforms. Similar investments in technology infrastructure and e-mental health services for non-profit organizations would provide many more people, often living in rural areas, with lifesaving tools and resources.



125  
clients per month access  
Coast Mental Health's Dialectical  
Behaviour Therapy/ Cognitive  
Rehabilitation program to date

## Invest in non-profits to facilitate rehabilitation, training and employment

**programs:** Employment lifts people out of poverty, promotes purpose, dignity and wellness. Whereas unemployment may cause stress, depression, substance use disorders, and other unhealthy behaviors. For people in sustained recovery from mental illness or substance use, employment offers a fresh start: Offering people the motivation and social connections to stay well. Yet, members of this community face many challenges in finding suitable employment.

In the [Mental Health Commission of Canada's Summary Report 2018, A Clear Business Case for Hiring Aspiring Workers: Findings from a research project that looked at the cost and benefits of recruiting and retaining people living with mental illness](#), the report accurately describes the complexity of an Aspiring Worker; people who, due to mental illness, have been unable to enter the workforce, who are in and out of the workforce due to episodic illness and want to remain in the workforce, or who wish to return to work after a lengthy period of illness. As the study suggests, there's a need for a significant investment in Aspiring Workers and the employers who support them.

In 2019/2020 Coast Mental Health, through its related social enterprise, assisted 180 Aspiring Workers through programs like [Social Crust Café & Catering](#), [Street Clean Teams](#), [Landscaping With Heart](#), the [Peer Support Workers program](#), and more. From our experience, provincial programs like WorkBC lack the flexibility to respond to the needs of Aspiring Workers, transferring this essential service to non-profits. We encourage the House of Commons Finance Committee to consider investing in non-profit programs that support rehabilitation, training and employment for people who live with mental health challenges.



Clubhouse members who are part of the Street Clean Team Employment Program at Coast Mental Health



Students enrolled in Coast Mental Health's Culinary Skills Training Program gain job-ready skills at our Social Crust Café & Catering social enterprise.