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**CANADIAN
HOUSING FIRST
NETWORK**
COMMUNITY OF INTEREST

February 11, 2023

To: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

c.c. Carolyn Bennett, Canadian Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Ahmed Hussen, Canadian Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion
Chrystia Freeland, Canadian Minister of Finance
Jagmeet Singh, Member of Parliament and leader of the New Democratic Party
Pierre Poilievre, Member of Parliament and leader of the Progressive Conservative Party

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau:

In our role as Co-Chairs of the [Canadian Housing First Network](https://caeh.ca/caeh-calls-for-federal-investment-in-a-new-housing-benefit-to-stop-the-destructive-wave-of-new-homelessness-sweeping-across-canada/), we are writing you in support of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness' proposal for a [Homelessness Prevention and Housing Benefit](https://caeh.ca/caeh-calls-for-federal-investment-in-a-new-housing-benefit-to-stop-the-destructive-wave-of-new-homelessness-sweeping-across-canada/): <https://caeh.ca/caeh-calls-for-federal-investment-in-a-new-housing-benefit-to-stop-the-destructive-wave-of-new-homelessness-sweeping-across-canada/>. The proposed Housing Benefit is based on scientific research demonstrating that rental assistance can both help people experiencing chronic homelessness to become housed and prevent homelessness for those who are at risk.

Implementation of a national Housing Benefit would, we believe, be a key component in actualizing the goal of reducing chronic homelessness by supporting Housing First programs in Canadian communities.

Regarding the first goal of reducing chronic homelessness, we know that Housing First is an effective, evidence-based approach for Canadians who have complex needs that include mental illness and addictions, including people who are Indigenous.

Both of us were members of the National Research Team of the [At Home / Chez Soi Demonstration Project](#) that tested the effectiveness of Housing First for people with serious mental illness and a history of homelessness in five Canadian cities. This research was funded by the federal government under Health Canada for \$110 million from 2008-2014 and was administered by the Mental Health Commission of Canada. The findings from this study were unequivocal in demonstrating that Housing First can solve homelessness for a majority of this population. Moreover, [the At Home / Chez Soi study](#) found a 49% cost offset for those receiving Housing First with intensive case management and a 69% cost offset for those receiving Housing First with Assertive Community Treatment associated with reduced use of health care, social services, and justice-related services.

Following the end of project, from 2013-2016, the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy funded an initiative to scale up Housing First to 18 Canadian Communities. This initiative was administered by the Mental Health Commission and led to the development of 14 new Housing First programs. At the same time, the federal government made a change in the Homelessness Partnering Strategy program in 2013 to prioritize the development of Housing First programs. For the 10 largest Canadian communities, that receive the majority of funding (80%), 65% of their federal funding was to be allocated to HF, while 40% of the funding in the other 51 communities was to be used to implement HF.

Prior to the At Home / Chez Soi Project, Canada's policy response to homelessness can be characterized as "treatment as usual," including shelters, treatment programs, and street outreach, or what we call "managing homelessness." However, with the stimulus of At Home / Chez Soi, Canadian federal policy shifted to a focus on "ending homelessness" through Housing First.

Unfortunately, this policy progress on homelessness has been short-lived. While the goal stated in Canada's National Housing Strategy in 2017 of reducing chronic homelessness by 50% in 10 years is laudable, in our view Canada is back to where it was prior to 2008, emphasizing the management of homelessness rather than solving it. The [recent Auditor General's report](#) indicated that there is no reliable data available to determine if we are making progress in decreasing the number of people experiencing long-term homelessness.

Sadly, the requirement that communities focus on Housing First was eliminated in the revised federal homelessness initiative known as "Reaching Home", and there is no mention of Housing First in Canada's National Housing Strategy. In recent years, we have witnessed the proliferation of tent encampments, a renewed emphasis on shelters, and the funding of congregate housing that harkens back to the mental health field's emphasis on segregated institutions. Despite conducting the largest study of Housing First in the world and finding Housing First to be effective in ending chronic homelessness, Canada's progress on homelessness has been eclipsed by other countries (e.g., Denmark, France, Finland, Ireland, Norway) who have integrated Housing First into their national homelessness strategies and are making headway on eliminating homelessness.

The implementation of a national Housing Benefit would also be an effective way of preventing homelessness.

Regarding the second goal of preventing homelessness, we agree that a national Housing Benefit would be instrumental in preventing the growing number of new cases of homelessness. Finland has been effective in reducing homelessness because of its emphasis on both Housing First for people experiencing chronic homelessness and on prevention by providing access to housing for people at risk of homelessness. In Finland, the number of people experiencing homelessness has declined from 18,000 in 1987 to less than 5,000 today, more than a 70% drop in homelessness nationally. Moreover, they are projecting an end to homelessness by the end of this decade.

Research clearly shows that rent supplements are an indispensable component of homelessness prevention, <https://kmb.camh.ca/eenet/resources/portable-housing-benefit-indispensable-component-ending-homelessness-in-canada>. In their recent book, *Homelessness Is a Housing Problem*, Greg Colburn and Clayton Page Aldern found that what is driving homelessness is the cost and availability of rental housing combined with a growing group of people living in extreme poverty. Affordable rental units are needed, and a Housing Benefit is a strategic and effective way of making rental units affordable for people.

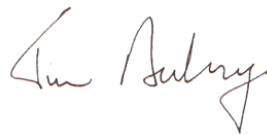
In a large 12-city study in the United States, the [Family Options Study](#), Daniel Gubits and his colleagues found that providing permanent rent supplements to families ended their homelessness rapidly and reduced intimate partner violence and behaviour problems among children. In their book reviewing the extensive research on strategies targeted to end homelessness, *In the Midst of Plenty*, Marybeth Shinn and Jill Khadduri concluded that rent supplements are the most effective approach to preventing homelessness in addition to being a critical ingredient to end chronic homelessness..

We wholeheartedly endorse the Canadian Alliance’s proposal and urge you to implement it so that Canada can follow other nations and move in the direction of eliminating the scourge of homelessness.

Sincerely,



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