



The Alliance to End Homelessness

www.endhomelessnessottawa.ca

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2006 Community Forum on Homelessness:

Linking Ottawa Research with Action and Policy

In Honour of NATIONAL HOUSING DAY November 22, 2006

OPENING REMARKS

Good morning. I am Mary-Martha Hale, the Chair of the Alliance to End Homelessness. Some of you will know of me in my role as Executive Director of Centre 454. I would like to welcome everyone to our 3rd Community Forum on Homelessness where we focus on linking research on homelessness with action and policy.

The forum is one way the Alliance shows our coalition's commitment to working together to end homelessness by gaining and promoting a better understanding of homelessness and advocating for strategies to end it. As many of you know today is National Housing Day and I want to bring you up to date on what the Alliance is doing on the federal level.

ALLIANCE FINANCE COMMITTEE BRIEF

On September 5th, the Alliance presented a Brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance Pre-Budget Consultation. We stated our belief that it is possible that communities across in Canada can be inclusive and take responsibility for ensuring every resident has an appropriate home. We firmly believe that long-term public policy commitments at the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government are required to meet the challenges confronting homeless people and those at risk of homelessness. On a daily basis many of us in this room see or experience the continuing need for strengthened federal support for communities such as ours in the prevention and reduction of homelessness.

In our brief, we made 5 proposals:

- 1. An immediate decision to create a long term, sustainable program that commits Canadian Government's support for effective, innovative solutions to homelessness at the local level.**
- 2. We proposed that the federal government directly and significantly increase affordable and supportive housing.** This should include a FEDERAL HOUSING STRATEGY with significant dollars attached. And there needs to include policies to ensure that the Ontario and other provincial/territorial governments be required to immediately spend funding in the existing Affordable Housing Program.
- 3. We asked for an increase rates and access to income support programs such as Employment Insurance (EI), Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Support (GIS) programs** to enable people receiving these benefits to pay their rent AND feed themselves and/or their families.
- 4. We requested a reduction in the lowest tax rate and increase the exemption rate to reduce the risk of homelessness.** The increase of 0.5 percent in the last Budget placed tax burden on those with the lowest incomes. For the low-income Canadians recently required to start paying income tax, the risk of homelessness has increased.
- 5. And finally we proposed the Canada Health Act be amended to uphold the portability clause of the Act to include out-of-province mental health care provided in a psychiatric hospital institution.** For someone who is homeless or at risk of it, a mental health crisis is no less critical than a physical health crisis whether they are in their home province or not.

I'd like to speak a bit more about our current crisis – federal homelessness funding.

FEDERAL HOMELESSNESS FUNDING

So far, the Alliance has taken part in 3 media conferences and rallies where we have urged Mr. Harper and the Conservatives to make an immediate commitment to renew and increase federal homelessness funding and we thank all of you who have come out to support those activities.

Unfortunately, Mr. Harper and Ms Findley have not yet brought to Parliament policies to continue and increase federal homelessness funding past March 2007.

Right now Ottawa agencies that are currently receiving the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative funding are busy advocating to have funding in place for next spring before programs have to start reducing or ending services.

Here in Ottawa, SCPI funding alone amounted to \$17.27 million between 2000 and 2003, another \$17.27 million for 2003 and 2006 and \$5.6 million for 2006 to March 31 2007. The loss of federal homelessness will have ramifications right across our community.

Taking that much money out of Ottawa or indeed from anywhere across Canada, is going to be a huge loss for a community working hard to help homeless people access services and find and keep a home.

It isn't just the agencies receiving the \$5.6 million one year extension from SCPI who are going to face difficult times next spring when federal funding is drastically reduced.

More families and children, youth, women and men will become homeless, leading to increased demands on other services and adding to the challenges of finding and keeping a home and much-needed help. Seamless federal funding for community-driven, effective and innovative local solutions to homelessness here in Ottawa should be in place this fall long before the current funding ends next March.

We know it but we need to convince the Conservatives and today we are asking for your help to do that.

WE ARE ASKING YOU TO DO TWO THINGS

ONE is sign the Petition now on our website and being circulated here today.

It calls upon Parliament *“to approve funding and announce it before December 20, 2006 to maintain federal homelessness funding for the next five years and that it be at least the same level of funding, adjusted for inflation, and for the same types of programs, especially those that strengthen and extend existing local capacity, as was provided to the National Homelessness Initiative from 1999-2003, 2003-2006 and 2006-March 31, 2007.”* You'll be able to get extra copies from our website.

THE SECOND is to contact your local MP *personally* by letter or email.

We all live in different neighbourhoods and ridings in Ottawa. Your own MP needs to hear a request from you as their constituent, for an immediate commitment to renew and enhance federal homelessness funding.

Back on the information table and on our website we have a list of Ottawa MPs and their contact information. We hope you contact your own MP within the next few days – the briefest of letters will help.

I would like to introduce the Chair for the Forum now, Tim Aubry. As many of you know Tim has been the Chair of our Research and Evaluation Working Group for several years and is a valuable member of our Steering Committee. One of the strengths of the Alliance is that we recognize the value of research in supporting the solutions and policies we recommend and that's what we are here to do today.