

August 29, 2017

Honourable - Mr. Adam Vaughan, M.P.

Spadina-Fort York

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development

House of Commons

Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Vaughan M.P.: **Re: The Client Action Committee's Recommendations for the Redesign of the Housing Partnering Strategy (HPS)**

We are the Client Action Committee (CAC), a group of persons with the lived experience of homelessness that act as an advisory group to the Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF). We meet on a weekly basis to work on addressing a variety of issues surrounding homelessness, partake in research opportunities and to inform policy and practice at CHF. Created in 2012, our main goals are to promote social justice, awareness and to reduce the stigma associated with experiencing homelessness. One such project we have completed is the Charter of Homeless Rights, which asserts that all citizens of our community – regardless of housing status – are equal in dignity, rights, and responsibility. A training module based on the Charter is currently being developed to guide staff in the homeless sector on how to better uphold the rights and dignity of the clients they serve.

Eight individuals from our committee participated in 2 meetings, facilitated by CHF, to gather perspectives on how to better prevent and address homelessness in Canada. This letter is a collection of the recommendations we agreed upon in response to the redesign of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS). Although Canada has made great strides in addressing homelessness, there is much work to be done.

In our opinion, the Federal Government can better prevent and reduce homelessness by:

**1. Providing emergency funding/services to prevent homelessness**

In order to prevent homelessness, funding should be readily available to aid those that are imminently at risk. Millions of Canadians are living paycheck to paycheck and are one life event away from becoming homeless. Low-barrier funding that is available to support those in need (i.e. security deposits, utility assistance etc.) prevents us from ending up on the streets and reduces high system costs associated with homelessness.

**2. Funding ear-marked for Peer Supports Workers**

Those that have experienced homelessness offer invaluable knowledge, insight and compassion to those that need help. Peer support workers should work in conjunction with professional staff to ensure their expertise can be used to help us feel more comfortable and supported. Funding should be made available for hiring peer support workers to ensure that agencies are making use of their expertise as it is a vital resource to prevent and end someone's experience of homelessness. This is also a great opportunity to build self-esteem and offer sustainable employment opportunities for those exiting homelessness.

**3. Additional funding and resources for frontline workers in the homeless sector**

Compassion fatigue and burnout can be attributed to less compassionate staff and high turnover rates in the homeless serving sector. From our experience as service users, we know that fulfilled and content staff are better equipped to provide support to people experiencing homelessness. Providing higher wages and making extra resources available to combat burnout for frontline workers would make a tremendous difference in the lives of those they serve.

**4. Creating opportunities for community engagement and social inclusion**

Feeling like you are a valued member of the community is important to anybody's sense of identity and well-being. This is especially important when it comes to individuals with lived experience of homelessness. Once we are housed, a key aspect of remaining housed is to feel safe, accepted and welcome in our neighborhoods. Creating programs with the aim of building a sense of community and opposing NIMBYism (i.e. not in my backyard) through education will go a long way in preventing people from returning to homelessness. We also call for the strategy to include amending the Canadian Human Rights Act to include social condition (i.e. homelessness) and social position as conditions protected from discrimination and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to include housing as a right.

**5. More funding for financial stability and low-income housing**

One of the main factors that prevents us from graduating a housing first program and moving into self-sustainability, is inadequate income and lack of affordable housing. Income-support needs to reflect the fluctuating economy so individuals are always able to meet their basic needs. Additional low-income housing options also need to be more readily available so individuals on income support have the opportunity to make a house a home. Additionally, we believe more funding should be allocated to Graduated Rent Subsidy Programs (GRS) so individuals exiting housing first programs are able to sustain their housing in the community.

**6. Additional programs tailored towards specific populations**

The Client Action Committee consists of a very diverse group of individuals with different backgrounds. The one thing we all have in common is the experience of being homeless, but this experience can be very different from person to person. Programs that are created (i.e. housing first, outreach etc.) need to reflect this diversity in order to adequately meet the varied needs of the homeless population. Nobody's experience is ever the same, but there needs to be more opportunities for people to connect with those they feel comfortable doing so.

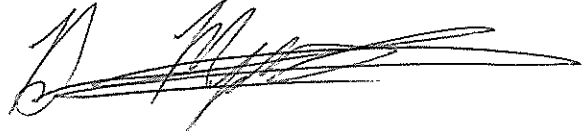
We thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the redesign of the Housing Partnering Strategy. It is utterly important to continually engage and listen to the voice of those directly impacted by your decisions. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input. We hope our recommendations make a difference in the lives of the many Canadians at risk or experiencing homelessness.

Sincerely,

On behalf of the Client Action Committee:



Nigel Kirk



Darren Mycroft



Hayden Young



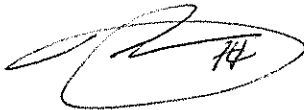
Randy Pages



John Gibson



Ruth Cameron



Hilary Chapple

cc:

The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Families, Children and Social Development  
The Honourable Kent Hehr, P.C., M.P. for Calgary Centre  
Diane Krecsy, President and CEO, Calgary Homeless Foundation