

RECOMMENDATION 1



A NEW FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL AND TERRITORIAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

Summary:

Canada will have great difficulty ending homelessness without developing a housing strategy; it is the only G7 country without one. After Canada withdrew significantly from investment in affordable housing in the late 1980s and cancelled its national housing policy in 1993 we have seen a huge increase in homelessness. Downloading social housing to the provinces and territories (and sometimes onto municipalities) has meant a dearth of new building, crumbling existing social housing stock and people struggling to make ends meet.

We recommend that the Government of Canada develop a federal, provincial and territorial affordable housing framework, to include:

- Setting an objective to end homelessness and establishing milestones, outcomes and performance expectations.
- Annual Point-in-Time counts using a consistent national methodology.
- A National Homelessness Management Information System for data collection and analysis.
- Targeted strategies and plans for specific groups such as youth, women experiencing violence and Aboriginal Peoples.

Recommendation Details:

In order to achieve meaningful reductions in homelessness and get value for money with a significant new federal investment in housing, the Government of Canada should set clear priorities and expectations for their investment. It is critical that the provinces and territories are invested in these new housing priorities as they have principal jurisdiction over many of the critical systems of care that impact homelessness and, in the end, will be the net financial beneficiaries of reduced homelessness. Finally, any new federal investment in housing has to reflect the reality that homelessness and homeless systems are ultimately local or regional in nature and as a result investment planning and allocation must also be local or regional.

To these ends, we recommend that a federal, provincial and territorial framework agreement on housing be developed. At a minimum, this framework agreement should:

- a. Include an agreed, time-bound and measurable national objective to end homelessness. One approach to measuring this national outcome could be that an end to homelessness in Canada will be achieved when no Canadian individual or family stays in an emergency homeless shelter or sleeps outside longer than one week before moving into a safe, decent, affordable home with the support needed to sustain it.
- b. Specify agreed milestones, outcomes and performance expectations along with an agreement on regular evaluation and reporting.
- c. Ensure all federal investment would be directed by local or regional plans to end homelessness. Those plans should at a minimum:
 - i. Include the participation of the three levels of government, relevant Aboriginal governments, homeless serving agencies, local funders of homeless services and people with lived experience of homelessness.
 - ii. Develop targeted strategies and plans to address youth homelessness, violence against women and Aboriginal homelessness.
 - iii. Articulate a vision and plan to achieve a coordinated homelessness system of care focused on ending homelessness guided by a Housing First philosophy.
 - iv. Include participation in a national Homelessness Management Information System that:
 1. has a means of collecting local system-wide, standardized data for accurate, real-time reporting on the number of people who are homeless, the length and causes of their homelessness, and their demographic characteristics and needs.
 2. tracks the performance of the different programs in the system of care.
 3. tracks the services homeless people receive and the duration of their homeless episode(s).
 4. is locally available to facilitate planning and intervention.
 - v. Plans for an annual Point-in-Time count of homelessness using a consistent national methodology.

- vi. Articulate the housing needs and priorities in the planning area.
 - vii. Articulate the process for allocation of housing and homelessness funding.
- d. Ensure direct federal investment in housing prioritizes chronic and episodically homeless individuals and families; homeless individuals and families who are deemed to be 'high acuity' based on an agreed evidence based assessment; and/or those living in extreme housing need (below area median income, spending more than 50% of income on rental housing. Federal investment should first be used for permanent supportive housing and deep subsidy affordable housing (up to 60% below market).
 - e. Ensure that for deep subsidy and permanent supportive rental housing the federal investment could be used for up to 75% of capital cost. The provinces/territories would be expected to contribute the remaining 25% so 100% of capital cost is covered by public investment.
 - f. Ensure that the provinces/territories cover 100% of support costs relating to supportive housing and match federal investment in Housing First programs.
 - g. Where provincial investments in rent supports or rent supplements are displaced by a new federal housing benefit, the provinces/territories would need to agree to reinvest 100% of that funding into housing support or affordable housing capital until median length of stay in homeless shelters is reduced to less than 2 weeks.