

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

August 18, 2020

Mr. Prime Minister,

We are writing to express the urgent need for immediate investments to improve the housing system's ability to successfully shelter people experiencing homelessness as part of Canada's COVID-19 response.

The Government of Canada can do this by renewing Reaching Home funding and instituting immediately an Acquisition Fund through the National Housing Strategy. An Acquisition Fund could enable municipalities, non-profits and community organizations to buy properties including existing rental assets, hotels and motels, many of which are already being used through rental agreements. Purchasing these properties outright would create long-term shelter and housing for people experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness. A new Acquisition Fund can work through the National Housing Strategy (NHS) Co-investment Fund to renovate these sites or convert existing emergency shelters from dormitory-style into individualized spaces safer for a pandemic. More broadly, an Acquisition Fund can assist non-profits in purchasing existing moderate rent rental assets and stem the loss of this existing affordable stock, a process of erosion that has undermined the impact of the NHS.

In the first wave of COVID-19, community organizations and municipalities, with the support of the federal government along with the provinces, were able to avoid the kind of crisis in homelessness that we saw in long term care, by establishing temporary accommodation in hotels, motels and other empty buildings to enable physical distancing among people experiencing homelessness. This successfully limited the spread of COVID-19 among the homeless population. Getting out of crowded, dormitory-style shelters has also shown to improve, sometimes dramatically, the wellbeing of people who moved to more dignified settings.

However, these accommodations were temporary. We need to take this critical time when Canada has controlled the virus in advance of flu season and a second wave to solidify gains and improve upon the model.

As a cross-sector group that works together to provide a system perspective on housing policy and the health of Canada's housing eco-system, we strongly urge your government to take these immediate actions. We recognize the immediate renewal of the Reaching Home Initiative and creation of an Acquisition Fund to be critical elements of Canada's COVID response. Enabling distancing for people experiencing homelessness averted catastrophe in the first wave

of the pandemic. This approach much be maintained and strengthened to keep homelessness and housing from being the locus of outbreaks in the second.

By enabling municipalities, non-profits and community organizations to purchase distressed properties, the government would create permanent assets for supportive housing that are immediately available to shelter our most marginalized. This would invest in permanent solutions while saving money in the interim operations, leaving more available for community organizations to provide supports, improving outcomes for the residents of these spaces and improving the relationship with their neighbours.

We need urgent action to buttress the parts of the housing system that serve those most at risk of COVID-19: people experiencing or at immediate risk of homelessness. 250,000 people experience homelessness in any given year; as the economic impacts of the pandemic unfold this is a population that is at risk to increase.

Leadership from the Government of Canada has enabled the development of successful models for minimizing COVID among those experiencing homelessness, and stabilize vulnerable rental properties to keep tenants from becoming homeless. Reaching Home funds have been essential for community response and must be renewed. Federal transfers such as the Safe Restart Agreement will have tremendous impact, but provinces are investing primarily in long term care. That is why immediate federal investment through an NHS Acquisition Fund will help communities avoid crisis for the homeless population.

We applaud the decisive action taken by the federal government to date, and encourage continued strategic investment so all Canadians have access to the first line of defense against COVID-19: adequate housing.

Respectfully,

The Canadian Housing Policy Roundtable



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Federation of
Apartment
Associations

Fédération
canadienne des
associations
de propriétaires
immobiliers

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