

Incorporated Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa submission to the Government of Canada on a **National Housing Strategy**

Executive Summary

Faith-based organizations, committed to developing inclusive, caring communities, offer unique perspectives, extensive hands-on experience, and innovative housing programs and service delivery models that aim to enhance the quality of life for all and to ensure access to adequate and affordable housing as a basic human right. We are essential and reliable partners in “getting the job done”. As such, we need to sit at the policy and program development tables.

While endorsing the Government of Canada’s stated vision for a National Housing Strategy and welcoming its commitments for additional funding, we recommend placing a high priority on inclusivity, social housing renewal, and creating better quality of life for those in greatest need, including Northern and Indigenous communities, families, seniors, and disabled adults.

With a longstanding and proven track record, the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa recommends that a National Housing Strategy be built upon three pillars: adequate, predictable, and sustainable funding; effective collaboration and partnerships; and a spectrum of housing programs and service delivery models that respect national goals while reflecting local needs and circumstances.

Enhanced collaboration among different levels of government, streamlining and harmonization of their respective programs and regulations, reducing administrative barriers and providing incentives for the creation of new units, and greater engagement with faith-based and not-for-profit organizations can contribute to more efficient and effective results.

Results, however, will also depend upon the government making long-term investments in the Homelessness Partnering Strategy and the Affordable Housing Initiative and providing greater flexibility in their implementation to address local needs and circumstances; additional investments in social housing renewal; and implementation of the Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative.

Faith-based organizations are key players and vital partners...

Faith-based organizations from Coast to Coast to Coast offer unique perspectives, extensive hands-on experience, and innovative housing programs and service delivery models. Committed to developing inclusive, caring communities that aim to enhance the quality of life for all, they are part of the complex fabric of the means to provide affordable housing and to end homelessness. They are key players and vital partners who need to be invited into and engaged in the housing policy and program development processes.

The Anglican Diocese of Ottawa, with its broad footprint in eastern Ontario and western Quebec and its extensive experience in addressing homelessness and affordable housing in both urban and rural settings, welcomes this opportunity to participate in consultations on the development of a National Housing Strategy.

We share and endorse the government's stated vision - the need to improve the lives of people in greatest need and to embrace the full spectrum of housing – from homelessness to market housing. Indeed, we believe that God is calling us to participate in meeting the challenges that detract from the dignity of all people. Poverty, abuse, and homelessness violate the dignity of the person and their basic human rights.

We are one of 30 dioceses of the Anglican Church of Canada, with 1,700 parishes serving every part of the country, including Northern and Indigenous communities. Many dioceses support ministries, similar to ours, which provide housing and services for the homeless and the housing disadvantaged and promote the right to affordable housing.

The Joint Assembly of the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada in 2013 approved a resolution committing the churches to an approach of learning, action, advocacy and prayer concerning homelessness and affordable housing. Inspired by this initiative, the Diocese of Ottawa passed its own motion to move forward in a coordinated manner with a program of prayer, learning, action and advocacy.

The Anglican Diocese of Ottawa Community Ministries include highly effective affordable and supportive housing, shelters for women, and drop-in centres that are funded and overseen by the diocese with funding support from the federal and other orders of government, the private sector, the broader faith community, and many individual citizens.

Our Community Ministries have dynamic and caring staff and directors and fully accountable Boards. They depend on contributions of time, funds, and supplies from many sources to operate services that could never be offered through government support alone. They are appreciated and trusted by their partners and clients. The emphasis is on “community”.

Cornerstone Housing for Women offers a wide range of housing-based services to assist homeless women seeking housing, healing, and new opportunities. Cornerstone has four thriving residential communities, with 40 new units currently in development.

The Well is a spiritual and justice-based gathering place for women, and women with children. It provides a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment where women come together to empower each other and nourish the whole person.

Centre 454 is a day program providing drop-in counselling, practical supports, and recreational activities for individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Centre 454 welcomes more than 250 men, women, and children each day.

St. Luke's Table provides services and support for homeless or those at risk of homelessness. Open five days a week, this day program provides community services including meal programs, social and counselling services, and recreational activities.

In addition, every parish in the diocese regularly provides for people facing economic and social challenges in their neighbourhood and community, whether rural, suburban, central, or inner-city.

A National Housing Strategy requires adequate, predictable, and sustainable funding...

Homelessness is a growing problem in our diocese, as it is nationally. More than 6,000 people are living in shelters in the City of Ottawa alone and the waiting list for affordable housing units is growing. Nationally, the Canadian Housing Renewal Association estimates nearly 235,000 Canadians will experience homelessness this year. The “hidden” homeless, including a growing number of seniors, couch-surfing youths, and disabled adults, are adding to the challenge of adequate and affordable housing for all. And this does not factor in the inadequate housing conditions of many Northern and Indigenous communities.

Federal funding is the essential foundation on which provincial, territorial, and municipal governments build and deliver their programs. The nature of the challenge requires that funding be adequate (including through leveraging), predictable (longer-term horizons for planning purposes), and sustainable (needs to address structural issues and thereby transcend the inevitable downturns).

We applaud the Canadian government for adding \$111.8 million over two years to the existing \$119 million per year in the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS). Will this be adequate? Probably not. But it is a step in the right direction. And its effectiveness will depend, to a great extent, on its design and its implementation.

The previous government revamped the Homelessness Partnering Strategy using a Housing First approach. Housing First, championed by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, focuses on moving people who are chronically homeless from the street or emergency shelters into permanent housing with supports that vary according to client need.

We support Housing First as an important innovation in addressing homelessness, but it is not a panacea for all situations and its implementation requires sufficient flexibility to allow local authorities to adapt the funding criteria to the needs and circumstances at the local level.

Our own experience bears this out. In the last few years, the application of the new criteria resulted in a \$350,000 shortfall in vital funding for Cornerstone and The Well, both of which serve the needs of women. We have managed to maintain these facilities, working closely with the City of Ottawa, but there has been a cost, the cost of losing some of our capacity to serve people in need. Our experience was not an isolated case. It has been experienced by others within the Anglican Church and others that provide housing and services for the homeless and for those at risk of homelessness. Fortunately, some of that loss has been balanced by a recent influx of new funding reflective of Ottawa's learning in the first year of Housing First implementation.

Therefore, we are encouraged to note that the Canadian government recognizes, as a key principle of a National Housing Strategy, that the one-size-fits-all model is not a solution to addressing housing needs. It calls for some finesse and flexibility in the implementation of programs such as Housing First and it calls us to remember that there is a need for a spectrum of programs and services to address the challenges of homelessness and affordable housing, including the persistent need for emergency and transitional shelters and supportive housing.

We also endorse the Canadian government's key principles of tying performance to results and basing decisions on what works. This goes a long way in ensuring that funding is not only effective, but sustainable in the longer-term. The City of Ottawa's experience is instructive. Over the last year or so, 292 chronically homeless individuals were moved out of shelters into housing, surpassing the initial target of 250. Again, the active participation of faith-based organizations, including our own, made this possible.

Affordable Housing – Time, Talent, and Treasure?

Responsible stewardship of our time, talent, and treasure is a central tenet of our faith. We will be held accountable for how we manage what we have been given and how we respond to the needs of others. What applies to us as individuals and as a church also applies to our country that has been richly blessed. Much have we received

and much we have to give. In secular terms, we need to make strategic investments of human and financial resources that will raise people out of poverty and give them hope of a better future.

The Anglican Diocese of Ottawa, believing that we must “walk the talk”, has established our own affordable housing initiative with twin goals of engaging every parish in some aspect of addressing homelessness and affordable housing and of helping to create a total of 125 new units. We are developing innovative models that we believe will not only serve those in need, but that can be examples for others to emulate. We would be pleased to offer parliamentarians, ministers and staff and officials a site visit of one of our facilities.

We welcome the government’s commitment of an additional \$504 million over two years, doubling funding for the Affordable Housing Initiative. We believe the increase is justified by the size of the housing deficit. The Canadian Housing Renewal Association reports that over the past 25 years, Canada’s population has increased by 30 per cent while annual federal investment in affordable housing decreased by 46 per cent. As well, Operating Agreements for more than 600,000 social and affordable housing units have been expiring and that without action federal investment in affordable housing will be zero by 2040.

In order to reap the benefits of such investments and to increase their yields, however, requires longer-term investments, enhanced collaboration among different levels of government, streamlining and harmonization of their respective programs and regulations, reducing administrative barriers and providing incentives for the creation of new units, and greater engagement with faith-based and not-for-profit organizations. Of particular concern is the timely disbursements of start-up capital for the creation of new affordable units. The current system essentially inhibits initiative by not-for-profit groups.

Responsible stewardship calls for wise use of land as well as money. The Anglican Diocese of Ottawa and the Anglican Church nationally have made land and buildings available for affordable housing. Recently, the Diocese of Ottawa decided to review each vacant property to determine whether it would be suitable for affordable housing.

Hence we welcome the Prime Minister's Mandate Letter to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development to conduct an inventory of federal land and buildings that could be made available for affordable housing. This would go a long way in addressing the complex issue of affordable housing, especially in overheated real estate markets such as Vancouver and Toronto.

Therefore, we recommend that the government implement the mandate letter commitment through expansion of the Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative (SFRPHI), as proposed by the Canadian Housing Renewal Association that recommends the government expand the program with additional funding to permit a greater number of surplus federal properties to be used for transitional, social, and affordable housing purposes.