

Lived Experience Groups Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities About COVID-19 and Strengthening Housing for All

August 20, 2020

Prepared by “Homes for All” Coalition

The coalition of lived experience groups in the Waterloo Region appreciates the opportunity to share our views and submit the following comments and recommendations. With the changes brought on by COVID-19, we are the most vulnerable, lack financial support, are at high risk to miss rent payments and in constant fear of eviction. Since the eviction moratorium ended in July 2020, Bill 184 is making situations even more difficult for tenants. Prior to COVID-19, the housing crisis in our Region posed a major concern, including displacement due to gentrification, and the pandemic has further exacerbated these conditions. These constant stressors contribute to poor mental health and other health conditions that add costs to the economy.

Our lives are greatly affected by COVID-19 and our coalition includes:

- Awareness of Low-Income Voices (ALIVE)
- Alliance Against Poverty (AAP)
- People’s Action Group (PAG)
- Disabilities and Human Rights (DHR)
- Renters Educating and Networking Together (RENT)

The results of the National Right to Housing Network survey echo our immediate issues including: access to basic needs, affordable housing, access to health care, and space to physically isolate. As we move into the recovery phase, our group believes that a priority should be placed on: federal purchasing of vacant properties to increase the housing creation targets and the expansion of housing benefit. All levels of government need to ensure adequate financial support to allow for the creation of affordable housing for all and in much shorter time than 10 years, as we continue to lose affordable units due to gentrification and are already observing increases in the number of homeless without fully seeing the impact of COVID on securing of tenancies.

The National Housing Strategy outlines the following targets¹:

- Cutting chronic homelessness by 50%
- Removing 530,000 families from housing need
- Renovating and modernizing 300,000 homes
- Building 125,000 new homes

1. National Housing Strategy, 2017, <https://www.placetocallhome.ca>
2. CAEH Survey Results, 2020, <https://caeh.ca/caeh-nanos-poll/>
3. City of Kitchener Housing Needs Assessment, 2020, https://www.kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/DSD_PLAN_Kitchener-Housing_Needs_Assessment.pdf?utm_source=kitchenertoday.com&utm_campaign=kitchenertoday.com&utm_medium=referral
4. Region of Waterloo Housing Action Plan, 2014, <https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/living-here/resources/Documents/Housing/Waterloo-Regions-Housing-Action-Plan-for-Households-with-Low-to-Moderate-Incomes-access.pdf>
5. Recovery for All Six Point Plan, 2020, <https://www.recoveryforall.ca/6pointplan>

Individuals deserve the right to a safe and affordable home and should be supported to allow for more resilient communities. Our groups have valuable experience and knowledge, and some are contributing to municipal affordable housing strategy development, providing input on alternative housing projects, and providing immediate support to the unsheltered who are not in the service systems in the region.

Key Findings from the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness National Survey¹:

- Canadians rate the urgency of ending homelessness in Canada as 7.5/10
- 36% of Canadians have been homeless or know someone who has been homeless
- 8/10 Canadians say that they somewhat support/support the development of affordable housing
- 1/7 Canadians are worried about not being able to make their housing costs

Region of Waterloo General Situation^{2 4}:

- Close to 5000 households are on the waiting list for community housing and the waiting list for individuals is 7 years long
- There are 400 people in the shelter system and an equal number of unsheltered sleeping rough in encampments, natural areas, and generally unsafe and unsanitary conditions (no access to washrooms, handwashing, water, and basic necessities)
- 10% of residents live in units that need major repairs and equally many are housed precariously in unsafe and unsanitary conditions, while experiencing prolonged income insecurity
- 25% increase in the number of households from 2011 to 2016
 - 73% were renters
- Current community housing units breakdown:
 - Nonprofit and co-ops: 6177
 - WRH (legacy stock): 2722

Key Findings from the City of Kitchener Housing Assessment³:

- Average rent has increased by 41% and housing prices have increased by 104% within a 10-year period
- 250-750 units are needed for supportive housing
- 3000 new community housing units are needed only in the City of Kitchener
- 95% of households are market housing, 62.1% are owned units, and 33.5% are rented units
- The wait time for seniors housing has increased by 127% since 2011
- Threshold for affordable home ownership in 2018 was \$350 000

We support the six-point plan to end homelessness and the Recovery for All Plan outlined by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH). The addition of 125 000 units in 10 years is not enough

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and we need more robust investments.⁵ We need the same support at the national level and need the goals to be grounded more towards lived experience groups.

Our coalition further recommends National Housing Strategy investment and supports for:

- Use of existing or vacant properties as permanent housing alternatives
- Transformation of shelters as longer-term supportive housing with integrated health and addictions supports
- Review of the strict eligibility of the financial assistance programs and introduction of a guaranteed income to allow for income security, dignity and choices for all residents
- Allocate federal owned lands to affordable housing across communities
- Continue to invest into mental health services, services to marginalized populations and individuals with disabilities in all programs supporting homeless people
- In general, create an engagement process to benefit from direct lived experience of people to be impacted by the programs and solutions in local communities (sufficient deadlines, plain language, in-community locally led consultations, etc.)

To achieve this, and have a thorough review of the strategy with the lens of lived experience expertise requires a timely and appropriate engagement process supported by the National Housing Council and the Federal Housing Advocate.

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COVID related submission from the Live Experience Groups coalition made to the Government of Ontario.

[Equity in Bill 185](#), July 21, 2020

[Most Supports for the Most Impacted](#), May 5, 2020

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