



Hon. Ahmed Hussen, P.C, M.P.
Minister of Families, Children, and Social Development
Via Email: Ahmed.Hussen@parl.gc.ca

October 29, 2020

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA), we would like to congratulate you and the federal government for the announcement in September 2020 of a new \$1 billion Rapid Housing Initiative, and for the commitments contained in the Throne Speech as it relates to affordable housing, particularly the government-wide objective to end chronic homelessness in Canada.

Although these are welcome initiatives, we wish to raise several comments and recommendations on both the Throne Speech commitments and the Rapid Housing Initiative.

Rapid Housing Initiative

We were very pleased with the announcement of the Rapid Housing Initiative, and we appreciate that in the original announcement, you stated that the program was in response to calls from CHRA. We also appreciate the application details that were released publicly on October 27. However, we would like to share our thoughts on the evolution of the program:

- ***Expansion of the existing program:*** According to the October 27 announcement outlining details of the program, the \$500 million that has been earmarked for community housing providers and other entities under the Application stream will cover costs related to lands, acquisition of properties, costs associated with converting properties into affordable housing, and construction of modular housing. Furthermore, the RHI is intended to be in place for 6 months, with all funds expected to be allocated by March 31, 2021, which would result in 3,000 new units of housing created. Although the funding is welcome, \$500 million to cover such a large number of possible costs is insufficient, the duration of the program is very short, and the number of units to be built falls far short of need. We are hereby calling for the federal government to extend the duration of the program to at least 2028 so that it aligns with other programs in the National Housing Strategy. We are also calling for an increase of funding by at least \$5 billion so that thousands more units of safe and affordable housing can be provided over the coming years. With additional time and resources, the scope of the program could be expanded to allow for the acquisition of already existing affordable units in the private market.

Lastly, where required, we are calling on the federal government to permit stacking, whereby any funding received under the Rapid Housing Initiative could be combined with funding received from other federal government programs (and/or funding received from other orders of government) so that projects can be maximized and the greatest number of housing units possible can be developed.

- ***Need for wraparound supports:*** A key element that is missing from the Rapid Housing Initiative announcement were any resources for wraparound social supports and services. As you know, if the intent of the RHI is to provide immediate housing for vulnerable populations such as chronically homeless individuals, there will be a need to provide relevant supports so that the needs of these individuals can be met. It would be an extremely high financial burden to ask non profit housing providers to fully absorb the costs associated with these necessary health, mental health, addiction, legal, and other relevant services. As a result, we are calling on the federal government to include additional resources to fund wraparound supports so that proper care can be provided to the people who will newly housed.
- ***A dedicated earmark for urban, rural and northern Indigenous housing:*** As outlined to you in a letter sent from the Chair of the CHRA Indigenous Caucus dated October 14, it is imperative that an expanded Rapid Housing Initiative contain dedicated, earmarked funding for urban, rural and northern Indigenous housing. Such an earmark could form a component of a broader strategy on urban, rural and northern Indigenous housing (see below).

Throne Speech

We were equally pleased to see a number of commitments in the September 2020 Throne Speech related to homelessness and affordable housing, particularly the government's commitment to end chronic homelessness and to partner with non profit and co-operative housing providers to increase affordable housing capacity. Although we anticipate that there will be many conversations around how the federal government can meet these objectives, we want to offer two immediate recommendations:

- ***Introduce an urban, rural and northern Indigenous housing strategy:*** As you know, your 2019 Mandate letter contained a directive to develop an urban Indigenous housing strategy. Such a strategy is desperately needed, as 80% of Indigenous peoples live in urban and rural settings, and face housing conditions much worse than the non-Indigenous populations. We are recommending that you prioritize an urban, rural and northern Indigenous housing strategy as the first outcome of the Throne Speech commitments. Our respective Indigenous members are ready to work with you to build on proposals that have already been established for such a policy. On October 27, the CHRA Indigenous Caucus launched a campaign entitled the "For Indigenous, By Indigenous" campaign that promotes the vision our Caucus has developed for such a Strategy. CHRA's Indigenous members look forward to working with you to finalize that Strategy as a key component of meeting the Throne Speech and your Mandate Letter commitments.
- ***Make permanent the increases to Reaching Home funding:*** If the government is going to meet its commitment to end chronic homelessness, communities will need ongoing support through the Reaching Home program. Although the government's announcements in 2020 of increased support through Reaching Home were welcome, they were one time increases. We are hereby calling on the federal government to increase support to Reaching Home by \$4.7 billion over the coming years so that communities will be better placed to truly end chronic homelessness across Canada.

We want to reiterate our support for the government's recent initiatives in these areas. When added to the measures already taken in the National Housing Strategy, we are pleased that the federal government is taking a much more active role in supporting the community housing sector. The recommendations presented in this letter will help strengthen and deepen that commitment.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Morrison", enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

Jeff Morrison, Executive Director
Canadian Housing and Renewal Association