

TO:

Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada

Honourable Sean Fraser
Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities
Government of Canada

Honourable David Eby
Premier of British Columbia

Honourable Ravi Kahlon
Minister of Housing
Government of British Columbia

CC:

Honourable Laurel Collins
Member of Parliament, Victoria
Government of Canada

Honourable Grace Lore
Member of Legislative Assembly, Victoria-Beacon Hill
Government of British Columbia

November 22, 2023

We are a coalition of people with lived expertise of homelessness, homeless outreach workers, community-based organizations, housing advocates, researchers, and academics.

Today is National Housing Day and we join national leaders [1] in calling on the Government of Canada to act decisively on their legal obligation to demonstrate progress on realizing the human right to housing by:

- Doubling social housing in Canada and dedicating a minimum of 50,000 net new social housing units annually for the next 10 years to be affordable to the lowest income residents of Canada, starting in Budget 2024/25.

And, we call on the Governments of Canada and British Columbia to co-operate on a new social housing strategy that will rapidly make safe, affordable homes accessible to all families and individuals with low and very low incomes and implement real rent control now.

In the 2021 Census, there were nearly 18,000 households with low and very low incomes - annual incomes lower than \$42,500 [2] - in the Capital Region that lack housing they can afford.

This number has certainly risen as the temporary effects of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit have ended and rents have escalated steeply since then.

Housing precarity is affecting all renters in Greater Victoria. Average rents in BC cities have risen between 10 and 23 per cent each year since 2019. [3] And BC leads the country in no-fault evictions. [4] There have been some promising new initiatives announced in the past year designed to alleviate the housing crisis for middle-income households; [5] however, we sound the alarm over the lack of urgency delivering housing responses to homelessness that match the scope and urgency of this humanitarian crisis.

We insist that you now turn your attention to developing housing policy that addresses the extreme affordability gap experienced by those facing or surviving homelessness and housing instability in BC. Meeting those needs requires a variety of subsidized social housing, new income and/or rental supplements.

Many will not be able to permanently exit homelessness if the shelter made available to them is unsafe, unsanitary, splits up families, lacks privacy, or cultural and/or gender safety. We need Indigenous-led housing, seniors housing, veterans housing, housing that is safe for women and their children, safe housing for 2SLGBTQ+, recovery-oriented housing, housing for youth, accessible housing for people with disabilities, and housing for both individuals and families, to name a few. We explore some of these specific populations below, noting that these are only a few examples of housing inequities in our community.

We decry the rising number of seniors experiencing homelessness in Greater Victoria. Seniors now account for almost one in four homeless [6], up from approximately one in five in 2018. [7] Seniors experiencing homelessness age faster and live significantly shorter lives than their housed peers. [8] Seniors face additional age-related stigma and have unique and often unmet support needs while homeless as they age into increasing disability. This is further compacted for seniors belonging to other groups marginalized by social and economic systems.

Indigenous people continue to be over-represented in local, provincial and national homeless counts. Indigenous Homelessness includes experiences of being disconnected from land, family, community, culture, and Indigenous identity. [9] The definition of Indigenous Homelessness recognizes that colonialism, implemented via Canadian public policies, including the residential school system, the ‘Sixties Scoop,’ and the current child welfare system, are the most common and significant contributing factors to Indigenous Homelessness. [10] Affordable housing is critical to ending violence against Indigenous women and girls: affordable housing was mentioned 299 times in the Missing and Murdered Women and Girls report.

The 2023 Greater Victoria Point In Time (PiT) Count found that one third of respondents first experienced homelessness when they were a youth, and one third of youth identified as 2SLGBTQI+. More effective housing programs geared toward supporting youth, especially youth who identify as 2SLGBTQI+ are needed to prevent homelessness.

The 2023 PiT Count found that 46 per cent of people experiencing homelessness rely on provincial disability assistance. It also found that 61 per cent identified as having a mental health issue, suggesting that more unhoused people would qualify for disability assistance. **In**

November 2023, provincial disability rates remain too low to enter the rental housing market.

The impossible math of disability assistance.

Disability income assistance rates for individuals in British Columbia in November 2023 is \$1,483.50 each month. The monthly average *available* rent in Victoria in October 2023 for a studio apartment is \$1,800 and the average *available* rent for a one bedroom apartment is \$2,077 [11]. In other words, the rent is about 20 per cent higher than provincial income assistance. Median available rent is approximately 120 per cent of disability income.

Measly disability assistance rates are causing inflows to homelessness and making exits from homelessness impossible. Setting income assistance rates at levels that make it impossible to secure housing is systemic discrimination from governments towards people with disabilities. [12]

To conclude, housing policies and programs that do not take into account the patterns that cause inequitable access to safe, secure homes are doomed to replicate and reinforce these patterns.

In Greater Victoria, we call on all levels of government to work together to:

- Build 2,000 net new subsidized social homes annually – with rents geared to annual household incomes that are less than \$20,000 – annually for the next 10 years **in Greater Victoria alone.**
- Enact real rent control to turn off the tap into homelessness.
- Raise all income assistance programs to meet Canada's official poverty line and index to cost of living increases through legislation.
- Clarify the legal rights of tenants in transitional and supportive housing, guaranteeing tenant rights, and provide access to administrative justice and unbiased dispute resolution.
- Create a new rent supplement or housing benefit to prevent homelessness and facilitate immediate housing stability for up to 3,000 people currently experiencing or facing homelessness in Greater Victoria.

Respectfully,

Nicole Chaland, The Housing Justice Project
Bruce Livingstone, The Housing Justice Project
Marshall Kilduff, Right to Housing Research Cluster
Izzy Adachi, Greater Victoria Acting Together
Lynn Beak, Greater Victoria Acting Together

Organizational Endorsements

The Housing Justice Project
Peer2Peer Indigenous Society
MakeWay Charitable Society – The Existence Project
Greater Victoria Acting Together
BC General Employees' Union
Homes for Living
Alliance to End Homelessness in the Capital Region
Bridges for Women Society
Anglican Diocese of Islands and Inlets
British Columbia Nurses' Union
Roman Catholic Diocese of Victoria
University of Victoria Nursing Student Society
Quadra Village Community Centre
Fairfield Gonzales Community Association
Climate Justice Victoria
Rabbi Harry and Congregation Emanu-El
Saint Patrick's RC Parish
Holy Cross Roman Catholic Parish
First Unitarian Church of Victoria
Anglican Church of St. John the Divine
Self-Management BC
Backpack Project Victoria BC
Vancouver Island PWA Society (VPWAS)
Southern Gulf Islands AIDS Society
Neighbourhood Solidarity with Unhoused Neighbours
University of Victoria Students' Society
ACPD - Action Committee of People with Disabilities Society
Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria
Sisters of St. Ann (Victoria, BC)
Fairfield United Church
Victoria Labour Council
Broad View United Church
Grace Lutheran Church, Victoria
Threshold Housing Society

Individual Endorsements

Bernie Pauly, RN Ph.D, Co/led, UVIC Right to Housing Research Cluster
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Gordon Craig Miller
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Joanne Fadden
Susan Coyle
Andrew Kerr
Brenda Dovick
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Tricia Sanders
Bob Crane
Aki Gormezano
Nathan Lachowsky
Meera Dhebar
Anthony Amato
Anya Slater
Bryan Hemingway
Ashleigh Enright
Gracia Dong
Jamie Morrison
Brian Christie
Andrea Mellor
Heather Kwan
Lauren Davey
Tyrone Curtis
Taylor Snowden
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Simon Carroll
Susan McDaniel
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Bruce Wallace
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Patrick McGowan
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Cian Dabrowski
Allie Miskulin
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Theone Paterson
Marion Selfridge
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Mark Stevens
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Kim Daly
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Lyn Clark
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April Duffield
Cleo Philp, UVSS Director of Campaigns and Community Relations
Andrew Holeton
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Joanne Neubauer
Erica McCollum
Murray Luft
Sonia Theroux
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Stephen Tyler, Ph.D.
Kirk Mercer
Ha Na Park, co-lead minister, Broad View United
Lynne Milnes
Toni Love
Vanessa Melcosky
Rama de la Rosa, Director of Resistance Rising Choir
Jennifer Johnson, Native Artist
Michelle Ferris
Cliff Skin, Dakelh Artist
Shay Dasta
Katsiaryna Savitskaya
Brigitte McKenzie
Kendall Fraser
Zackary Derrick
Eric Gordon
Colleen Skelcher
Diana Cary
Patricia Baxter
Hillary Hodgskiss
Tessa Whitehouse
Isabel Erickson
Hannah Sobh
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References

- [1] The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, REALPAC, The Place Centre Smart Prosperity Institute, Scotiabank, and the Canadian Housing Renewal Association. Extracted from <https://www.nationalhousingaccord.ca/>, <https://www.scotiabank.com/ca/en/about/perspectives.articles.economy.2023-01-social-housing-scotiabank-report.html>, and https://chra-achru.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Blueprint-for-Housing_CHRA-2022.pdf
- [2] Housing Assessment Resource Tool for the Capital Region extracted from <https://hart.ubc.ca/housing-needs-assessment-tool/>
- [3] Evaluating Prospects for Vacancy Control Policy in B.C.'s Housing Affordability Crisis extracted from <https://www.tapsbc.ca/vcnow>
- [4] Estimating No-Fault Evictions in Canada: Understanding BC's Disproportionate Eviction

Rate in the 2021 Canadian Housing Survey. Extracted from https://housingresearch.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/2023-05/estimating_no-fault_evictions_in_canada_0_2.pdf

[5] Initiatives to encourage new construction of housing, such as missing middle initiatives, zoning reform and GST rebates on purpose built rental housing, are an important piece of the puzzle, however these initiatives are not robust enough to result in housing that is affordable or accessible to individuals or families with incomes lower than \$42,500 within a reasonable time-frame or to prevent inflows or exist to/from homelessness. See: A Human Rights-Based Calculation of Canada's Housing Shortages: extracted from <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/human-rights-based-calculation-canada%E2%80%99s-housing-shortages>

[6] 2023 Greater Victoria Point in Time Homeless Count and Housing Needs Survey. Extracted from <https://www.crd.bc.ca/about/data/housing-research>

[7] 2018 Greater Victoria Point in Time Count : A community survey of people experiencing homelessness in Greater Victoria. Extracted from <https://www.crd.bc.ca/about/data/housing-research>

[8] "No Home, No Place": Addressing the Complexity of Homelessness in Old Age Through Community Dialogue. Extracted from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02763893.2015.1055024>

[9] Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada: Extracted from <https://www.homelesshub.ca/IndigenousHomelessness>

[10] Towards Health and Wellbeing Through Cultural Community. Extracted from <https://acehsociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Priority-One-Lessons-Learned-Report-Final-comp.pdf>

[11] Extracted from <https://www.zumper.com/rent-research/victoria-bc>

[12] Housing Discrimination and Spatial Segregation in Canada. Extracted from <https://housingrights.ca/wp-content/uploads/SRAH-Submission-Discrimination-and-Spatial-Segregation-in-Canada-CERA-NRHN-SRAC-May-2021.pdf>