



The Centre

Canadian Centre to
End Human Trafficking.



Attainable Housing: Preventing Human Trafficking & Supporting Survivors

Written submission to the Government of Canada

Dear Minister:

The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking is a national charity dedicated to ending all types of human trafficking in Canada. The Centre works with diverse stakeholders, including survivor leaders, governments, businesses, and service providers to advance best practices and eliminate duplicate efforts across Canada. In 2019, The Centre launched the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline, providing a free, confidential, multilingual service, operating 24/7 to connect victims and survivors, Canada-wide, with a variety of services and supports.

Growing evidence demonstrates strong linkages between homelessness, housing precarity, and human trafficking. Lack of access to secure and safe housing creates significant emotional, financial, and physical vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit. Once in a trafficking situation, survivors' inability to access secure housing is the most significant barrier to leaving and far too many are forced to remain with their traffickers. Even after they have left, survivors may return to their trafficker, or enter another exploitative relationship if permanent and safe housing is not available.

A range of safe, secure, and affordable housing options is critical to disrupting human trafficking. It is essential for protecting people from being vulnerable to trafficking, helping victims exit their trafficking situation, and creating stability for survivors as they recover. Housing, therefore, must be a priority in local, provincial, and federal responses to human trafficking in Canada.

Between 2019 and 2022, the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline received 3,059 signals related to human trafficking across the country. Nation-wide, shelter and housing supports for victims and survivors were the most requested referrals on those signals.¹ Unfortunately, Hotline staff regularly find it difficult to connect survivors with immediate, short-, and long-term housing options due to gaps in policy and programming.

The enclosed pre-budget submission identifies where policy gaps exist across the housing continuum² and where Ottawa can make a difference. In keeping with this, **we are calling on the Government of Canada to:**

1. Apply a consistent, income-based, national definition of affordable housing.
2. Increase funding to scale-up existing and proven homelessness initiatives such as Built for Zero Canada.³

3. Create dedicated pathways to stable housing for individuals exiting prisons, hospitals, and foster care.
4. Consistently and more accurately collect data on hidden homelessness in Canada. This may require partnerships between Statistics Canada and the academic and non-profit sectors that engage with those experiencing hidden homelessness.
5. Improve the collection and analysis of homelessness data by the Reaching Home program to ensure it is meeting its targets to reduce chronic and other forms of homelessness.
6. Launch an awareness campaign around hidden homelessness to reduce stigma and increase awareness of available supports.
7. Commit to providing \$145 million of COVID-era funding that is set to expire in September as annual ongoing funding to VAW emergency shelters across the country.⁴
8. Fund the transportation of human trafficking victims and survivors to shelters, including between Canadian regions.
9. Commit long-term funding for transitional and permanent supportive housing specific to survivors of human trafficking through existing funding programs such as Reaching Home, the Rapid Housing Initiative, and the National Housing Co-Investment Fund.
10. Double the country's social housing stock to bring Canada in line with the OECD average. This can be done by increasing allocations through the National Housing Co-Investment Fund and the Rapid Housing Initiative.

We believe that implementing these recommendations is critical to preventing human trafficking and supporting survivors on their path to recovery.

The Centre recognizes that human trafficking and shelter challenges disproportionately impact Indigenous peoples in Canada. As we build out our policy platform, we plan to work with Indigenous partners to develop a separate brief that focuses on addressing the unique challenges of this community.

Thank you for taking the time to review our letter. We would welcome the opportunity to speak with you about our recommendations – and how we can support you in bringing them to life – at your earliest convenience. We will follow up with your office to find a time to meet.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julia Drydyk". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julia Drydyk

Executive Director

Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking

Detailed Recommendations

- ✓ **Apply a consistent, income-based, national definition of affordable housing.** Clear communication is essential for addressing complex challenges. In Canada, jurisdictions use different definitions of affordable housing (e.g., 80% of Average Market Rent versus 30% of a household's income before taxes). This creates confusion among the public and developers, creates inconsistent program and policy criteria, and facilitates misalignment across governments and ministries. This was highlighted by the Auditor General of Canada in its report to parliament on chronic homelessness.⁵ The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking supports the CSA Group's call for the federal and provincial governments to follow a coherent definition, one that could be created by the Federal Housing Advocate.⁶
- ✓ **Increase funding to scale up existing and proven homelessness initiatives such as Built for Zero Canada.**⁷ The goal should be to end homelessness through a structured, supportive, and data-driven approach (e.g., using proven practices such as By-Name-Lists, Coordinated Access Systems, and Homeless Management Information Systems, etc.).
- ✓ **Create dedicated pathways to stable housing for individuals exiting prisons, hospitals, and foster care.** Research has shown that individuals exiting government institutions are vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking, particularly when they lack access to secure housing.⁸ Establishing a program to support those exiting prisons, hospitals and foster care programs would establish a level of stability that can help prevent human trafficking.

Hidden Homelessness

Hidden homelessness⁹ is defined as individuals staying temporarily with friends, family, or strangers without any security of tenure or immediate prospects for accessing permanent housing.

Challenges

Historically marginalized population groups are more likely to find themselves in situations of hidden homelessness. Along with human trafficking victims/survivors, this includes women, people who experienced physical and sexual abuse as children, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, victims of crime, and people with weaker social networks.¹⁰ However, the invisible nature of this type of homelessness, sometimes

referred to as 'couch surfing,' means that these groups are underrepresented in homelessness data.

Recommendations

- ✓ Consistently and more accurately collect data on hidden homelessness in Canada. This may require partnerships between Statistics Canada and the academic and non-profit sectors that engage with those experiencing hidden homelessness.
- ✓ Improve the collection and analysis of homelessness data by the Reaching Home program to ensure it is meeting its targets to reduce chronic and other forms of homelessness.¹¹
- ✓ Launch an awareness campaign on hidden homelessness to reduce stigma and increase awareness of available supports.

The Emergency Shelter system

Emergency shelters provide temporary, short-term accommodation for vulnerable population groups, particularly people experiencing homelessness and survivors of gender-based violence. For human trafficking victims, immediate access to shelters can be vital to their safety and security and may mean the difference between staying in their trafficking situation and leaving.

Challenges

Services, processes, and eligibility requirements are inconsistent across shelters, between the violence against women (VAW) and homelessness sectors, and between shelters and transitional, social, and affordable housing. This makes it difficult for victims and survivors – who use both types of shelters - to navigate these options. In some instances, for example:

- Shelters restrict out-of-region clients from services even though there may be provincial guidelines stating that people cannot be denied access based on where they are located.
- People are often required to have a police report to verify their experience in order to access gender-based violence and human trafficking beds. Victims may not want to involve the police.
- Shelters impose behavioural requirements as a condition of stay (e.g., restricting the active use of substances) that may limit options for survivors and victims.

Finally, many shelters are not equipped to support the unique needs of victims of human trafficking.

Recommendations

- ✓ Commit to providing \$145 million of COVID-era funding that is set to expire in September as annual ongoing funding to VAW emergency shelters across the country.
- ✓ Fund the transportation of human trafficking victims and survivors to shelters, including between Canadian regions.

Transitional (Supportive) Housing

Transitional housing is a supportive, yet temporary, type of accommodation that is an interim step between homelessness and permanent housing. It typically allows people to stay for medium-term durations (e.g. one to three years).

Challenges

Transitional housing programs face challenges similar to short-term emergency shelters. Waitlists for these programs remain long. Eligibility and intake requirements can also be barriers to access by:

- Restricting out-of-region clients;
- Requiring proof of cohabitation with abusers or traffickers; and
- Requiring compliance with programming in order to stay.

Additionally, minimal options are available to accommodate families, older adults, those who have 'aged out' of youth-focused programs, and human trafficking victims/survivors. The lack of continuous support once someone has exited the program is also a challenge for trafficking survivors who benefit from ongoing and consistent support throughout their recovery. Finally, transitional housing providers must also contend with understaffing, low wages, high turnover, and burnout.

Recommendations

- ✓ Commit long-term funding for transitional and permanent supportive housing specific to survivors of human trafficking through existing funding programs such as Reaching Home,¹² the Rapid Housing Initiative, and the National Housing Co-Investment Fund.¹³

Social and Community Housing

Most social housing stock was constructed between the 1960s and mid-1990s, at which point the federal government began transferring this responsibility to the provinces. Relatively few buildings have been constructed since then, and the cost of maintaining these older buildings through repairs and renovations is high. The cost of constructing new buildings is also very high. Intentionally incorporating a broad range of income groups to create mixed-income buildings is one way such high costs may be alleviated.¹⁴

Challenges

Canada is falling behind its OECD peers on providing social housing. In 2020, approximately 655,000 or 3.5% of Canadian homes were non-market (social) housing.¹⁵ In the United Kingdom and France, by contrast, social housing represented 17% and 14%, respectively, of all dwellings in those countries. The OECD average is 7%.¹⁶

Increased demand for social housing, coupled with the lack of supply, means that many people leaving emergency shelters and transitional housing do not have suitable long-term accommodations in place. This form of housing insecurity makes people vulnerable to human trafficking.

Recommendations

- ✓ Double the country's social housing stock to bring Canada in line with the OECD average. This can be done by increasing allocations through the National Housing Co-Investment Fund and the Rapid Housing Initiative. As Scotiabank noted in their 2023 report, this would not completely meet demand for social housing but would represent an important investment in Canadians' future.¹⁷

Endnotes

¹ Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline Data. Date range is from May 29, 2019 (when the hotline was launched) to December 31, 2022. Signals include phone, webchat, email, and webform. Data collection is an important, but secondary, purpose of the hotline. Staff take a trauma-informed approach when engaging with signalers. This means that signalers are not asked probing questions and are not required to provide specific demographic or geographic information in order to receive service. For this reason, hotline data is subject to minor variances and likely underrepresents instances of trafficking in Canada.

² Adapted from the [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation](#). Retrieved November 17, 2022.

³ [Built for Zero Canada](#) is a national change effort helping communities end chronic homelessness and veteran homelessness – a first step on the path to eliminating all homelessness in Canada.

⁴ Government of Canada. (2020). [Government of Canada provides emergency COVID-19 funds to nearly 1,000 organizations delivering essential frontline supports to those fleeing violence and abuse](#). Press release retrieved August 8, 2023.

⁵ Office of the Auditor General of Canada. (2022). [Report 5 – Chronic Homelessness](#).

⁶ Dragicevic, N. (2023). [Building Together: Improving Collaboration to Deliver More Affordable Housing](#). CSA Group.

⁷ [Built for Zero Canada](#) is a national change effort helping communities end chronic homelessness and veteran homelessness – a first step on the path to eliminating all homelessness in Canada.

⁸ Native Women's Association of Canada. (2023). [Systemic Inequities and Interjurisdictional Issues in Human Trafficking and MMIQG2S+](#), pp. 15-16; O'Grady, W., Lafleur, R. (2016). [Reintegration in Ontario: Practices, Priorities, and Effective Models](#). John Howard Society of Ontario, pp. 32-33; Buccieri, K., Oudshoorn, A., Frederick, T., Schiff, R., Abramovich, A., Gaetz, S., and Forchuk, C. (2018). [Hospital discharge planning for Canadians experiencing homelessness](#). *Housing, Care and Support*. 22. 10.1108/HCS-07-2018-0015.

⁹ According to the [Canadian Definition of Homelessness](#), hidden homelessness is a type of provisional accommodation. The remaining three typologies within the definition are unsheltered, emergency sheltered, and at risk of homelessness.

¹⁰ Rodrigue, S. (2016). [Insights on Canadian Society: Hidden Homelessness in Canada](#). Statistics Canada.

¹¹ Office of the Auditor General of Canada. (2022). [Report 5 – Chronic Homelessness](#).

¹² Government of Canada. [Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy Directives](#). Retrieved July 21, 2023.

¹³ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. [Funding Programs](#). Retrieved July 21, 2023.

¹⁴ de Vos, E., and Moore, I. (2018). [Mixed-Income Housing: The Model in a Canadian Context](#). Royal Roads University.

¹⁵ OECD. [Public policies towards affordable housing](#). Retrieved July 21, 2023.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Young, R. (January 18, 2023). [Canadian Housing Affordability Hurts](#). Scotiabank.