



ONTARIO NON-PROFIT
HOUSING ASSOCIATION

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

March 23, 2020

Subject: Inclusion of the community housing sector in COVID-19 response and relief plans

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau:

The Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA) represents over 700 non-profit housing providers across 220 communities in Ontario who house over 400,000 people in 170,000 homes.

We support the significant steps your government has taken to “flatten the curve” and contain the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus), and support people and communities through significant commitments for investment in federal aid to support Canadians, including additional support resources for low-income workers and workers who do not qualify for Employment Insurance, doubling investments in Reaching Home initiatives to support people experiencing homelessness, additional investments for First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and additional funding for shelters to support people fleeing gender-based violence.

As we all strive to keep people and communities safe through the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, we recognize the critical role that community housing providers play in supporting those who will be most impacted by the virus, including low/limited-income individuals/families, seniors, Indigenous peoples, newcomers and tenants requiring support services. Now more than ever, the need for adequate, affordable housing that meets the needs of our communities is paramount. Current events have highlighted the inextricable link between health and housing.

As such, echoing many of the calls released by our sector partners, we ask the Government of Canada to consider the following recommendations:



1. Engage ONPHA in ongoing government consultations to represent the needs of the community housing sector and assist the government in communicating crucial information in a timely manner to the sector.
2. Continue to expand Employment Insurance (EI) and other worker compensation eligibility programs and increase wage replacement from 55% to 100% for low-wage workers.
3. Direct CMHC subsidies to provincial community housing stabilization funds to support non-profit housing providers whose tenants are unable to pay rent and/or utility fees due to COVID-19 related reasons (i.e., quarantine, lay off, self-isolation, caring for a family member).
4. Implement a federal directive banning evictions for a period of at least 3 months.
5. Accelerate the finalization of Canada Housing Benefit agreements with each province and implement them as soon as possible, as another income security measure.
6. Repurpose surplus federal buildings for emergency housing purposes, with an intent to eventually turn those structures over to non-profit housing providers to support long-term housing needs.
7. Immediately provide a pool of capital to existing and/or new rent banks across the country.
8. Freeze payments on all high interest loans without penalty.
9. Widely publicize new income supports and the means to access them via traditional and social media, direct mail and other culturally/linguistically appropriate methods.
10. Increase funding to provinces, territories and municipalities for homelessness services and housing, including emergency funds for rent banks, expansion of shelters, housing and supports and medical personnel in shelters, provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) and critical equipment for safe and sanitary site maintenance.
11. Continue to increase Reaching Home funding for homelessness services.
12. Ensure rural and remote communities (including Indigenous communities) are able to access necessary health supplies and support (i.e., healthcare workers, ventilators, masks, sanitizer, etc.), in addition to adequate and affordable food and household supplies.
13. Immediately address boil water advisories on First Nations to ensure access to safe drinking water and safe hygiene practices.

As public health officials continue to recommend self-isolation, we are acutely aware of the impact this has on community housing providers and their tenants, many of whom may not have the option to self-isolate and are likely to face mounting financial burdens. As ONPHA is able to work remotely and continue to serve our members effectively while keeping our team safe, we recognize the vast number of people in our communities who are unable to self-isolate due to employment requirements (including the



inability to afford to take time off work), the need to care for themselves and/or ill relatives, the need to care for children in light of school and daycare closure and overcrowded housing conditions (which impacts nearly 1 in 10 Canadian households, as reported by [Statistics Canada](#)).

Low/limited-income individuals/families who face work shortages due to containment measures (i.e., closure of businesses, cancellation of events) are likely to see dramatic losses to their incomes. This in turn affects their ability to pay rent and utility fees, which directly impacts the financial viability of non-profit housing providers, who operate on limited budgets with little room for fluctuation. Our advocacy to the Province includes a community housing stabilization fund, in addition to flexibility around funding agreements and reporting requirements, which could help to stabilize the narrow operating budgets and capacity of community housing providers and allow them to continue to provide safe, affordable housing options for low/limited-income individuals and families.

Our members serve populations that are more likely to be at high risk to the virus, including seniors, Indigenous peoples, newcomers and tenants requiring support services. In light of recent supply shortages, we recognize the critical importance of equipping these providers with the tools, training and supports they need to provide safe, continued support and services for those most vulnerable to the effects of the virus, while also ensuring the protection of their employees, and have included a recommendation related to this in our advocacy to the Province. In addition, many of the tenants in community housing rely heavily on community-based supports such as food banks and in-home services for daily living so we are compelling the government to ensure the sustainability of these critical support services.

We are also concerned about the impact of the virus on people experiencing homelessness due to crowding in shelters and drop-ins and heightened incidences of pre-existing health conditions among people experiencing homelessness. Partnership with municipalities must include direct investments in shelter systems and homelessness initiatives to maximize practices of social distancing and/or self-isolation, while providing health support to high risk populations.

We take comfort in the fact that people and communities are coming together to support each other during this time and are working with our members to promote community-based responses and the sharing of best practices. We look forward to forthcoming government measures to continue supporting our communities. We recognize the crucial work of community housing providers in providing safe and affordable housing and the strong role that the community housing sector and ONPHA can play in supporting government initiatives.



We look forward to engaging with you or your representatives at your earliest opportunity to discuss these recommendations and how ONPHA and the community housing sector can be a part of the government's response and relief plans to address COVID-19.

Sincerely,

Marlene Coffey

CEO, ONPHA

Cc:

The Honourable Bill Morneau, Minister of Finance

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations

The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, President of the Treasury Board

The Honourable Catherine McKenna, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities

The Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health

The Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development

The Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Indigenous Services