



Co-operative Housing
Federation of Canada

Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P., Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada
Hon. Andrew Scheer, P.C., M.P., Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada
Jagmeet Singh, M.P., Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada
Yves-François Blanchet, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
Elizabeth May, M.P., Leader of the Green Party of Canada

July 9, 2019

Dear party leaders,

The next federal election will take place in October 2019. This election will be a pivotal point in time for Canadians to choose their vision for the kind of country they would like to see over the coming decade and beyond.

One of the most top of mind issues for Canadians entering into the 2019 election campaign is access to safe and affordable housing. Recent public opinion polls have demonstrated that housing affordability is amongst the top issues of concern for voters, particularly amongst younger and millennial voters. Canadians will be looking to all political parties to share their positions and policies on this issue of central importance.

There are over 1.7 million Canadian households living in core housing need, and there are over 235,000 people in Canada who are homeless at some point in the year who need access to an affordable home. It is essential that federal parties develop policies that commit to eliminating homelessness and strengthen the community housing sector. As organizations representing the community housing and homelessness sector in Canada, we are calling on all of the major political parties to prioritize housing affordability. This can be done by including the following recommended policies in your election platforms, and subsequent government policies:

- **Commit to maintain federal leadership and investment to address access to housing.** Long-term, reliable funding is required to end homelessness and strengthen community housing in Canada. The next government must maintain housing and homelessness programs and policies that have already been introduced, including policies designed to keep housing affordable for vulnerable and low-income peoples. This includes the right to housing legislation, the “National Housing Strategy Act” that was recently passed by the House of Commons, and the accountability measures that protect this right.
- **Develop and adequately fund a distinct urban, rural and northern Indigenous Housing Strategy:** Indigenous peoples living in urban, rural and northern settings face far greater housing inequality when compared to non-Indigenous peoples. Although the federal government is finalizing three distinctions-based housing strategies, there is no distinct strategy for Indigenous peoples living in urban and rural centres, despite the fact that 87% of Indigenous peoples live in these settings. We are calling on parties to provide dedicated funding for

Indigenous housing in need of housing in urban, rural and northern areas in line with the scale of need; involve urban, rural, and northern Indigenous people in planning and governance of their housing issues that reflects the spirit and intent of Truth and Reconciliation; and create and fund a National Indigenous Housing Centre that would provide Indigenous-led governance and oversight to Indigenous housing, as well as build capacity development.

- **Increase the supply of community housing:** The demand for affordable housing in Canada continues to grow. Wait lists for community housing have increased, and housing affordability has put greater pressure on community housing to provide access. In order to increase the overall supply of community housing, we are calling on all parties to increase support for new community housing through an expanded toolkit of programs and policy options designed to increase access to capital, and to increase funding and modify the mandate of the Federal Lands Initiative so that greater amounts of surplus land and buildings can be made available for community housing purposes.
- **Protect the existing supply of community housing and ensure proper supports to protect supportive housing:** Canada needs to ensure that existing community housing is maintained in a state of good repair, and remains affordable for individuals and families with low-incomes. To accomplish this, we are calling on all parties to commit to the long-term renewal of rental assistance for low-income households; implement meaningful poverty reduction measures, such as increasing federal transfer payments through the Canada Social Transfer; increase support and funding for programs for individuals with complex needs, such as those who require supports to remain housed and live independently or those transitioning from homelessness; and continue to provide funding for renewal and rehabilitation of existing housing.
- **Commit to the elimination of homelessness in Canada:** An estimated 235,000 different Canadians will experience homelessness this year in Canada at an estimated economic cost of \$7 billion per year. In the National Housing Strategy Act, the government has committed to the progressive realization of the right to housing. Under international human rights law, this means priority in housing policy must be given to vulnerable groups and those in greatest need of housing, recognizing homelessness as a violation of human rights and committing to addressing it as a human rights violation, eliminating it in the shortest possible time.

Eliminating homelessness is an achievable goal. Communities across Canada are already having success in preventing and reducing homelessness. Edmonton, Alberta has reduced homelessness 43% since 2009; Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton County, Ontario have reduced chronic homelessness over 50% in just 6 months and Guelph Wellington, Ontario has reduced chronic homelessness by 24% in just seven months. We are calling on all parties to commit to the elimination of homelessness in Canada by 2030 through federal leadership including the expansion of Reaching Home and increased and targeted capital investment in affordable and supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness.

Over the coming weeks, a number of organizations will be sending a questionnaire to candidates from all the major political parties in every riding in Canada asking for their views on some of these key policy considerations. We look forward to hearing from your candidates and sharing their views on community housing and homelessness with Canadians.

Thank you for taking the time to review this letter. We look forward to working with you, your candidates, and the members of the next government in our collective goal of strengthening the community housing sector and eliminating homelessness in Canada.

Yours truly,



Robert Byers, Chair
Indigenous Caucus, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association



Jacques Beaudoin
Secrétaire général, Réseau québécois des OSBL d'habitation



Jeff Morrison
Executive Director, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association



Tim Richter
President, Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness



Tim Ross
Executive Director, Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada