

The Honourable Charles Sousa  
Minister of Finance  
c/o Budget Secretariat  
Frost Building North, 3rd Floor  
95 Grosvenor Street  
Toronto, ON M7A 1Z1



January 31, 2014

Dear Minister Sousa:

### **RE: 2014 Pre-Budget Consultations**

Please accept this letter as a formal written submission from the Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee (HSJCC) to inform the 2014 Pre-Budget Consultations. We appreciate this opportunity to share our ideas about how investments in the 2014 Budget can benefit individuals with a serious mental illness, developmental disability, acquired brain injury, drug and alcohol addiction, and/or fetal alcohol syndrome who have come into contact with the law (henceforth referred to as individuals with mental health, addictions and/or related issues).

#### **About the HSJCC Network**

The HSJCC Network, which has over 1,200 members, includes health and social service organizations, community mental health and addictions organizations and partners from the justice sector including crown attorneys, judges, police services and correctional service providers. The HSJCC Network consists of a provincial committee, 14 regional committees and 42 local committees. The Provincial HSJCC is mandated by the *Provincial Strategy to Coordinate Human Services and Criminal Justice Systems in Ontario (1997)* and established to coordinate resources and services, and plan more effectively for people who are in conflict with the law. The committees were generated as a cooperative effort between the Ministries of the Attorney General, Community and Social Services, Children and Youth Services, Health and Long-Term Care, and Community Safety and Correctional Services.

The two primary areas of emphasis for the HSJCCs are:

1. to bring together service providers to find solutions to the problem of the criminalization of people with defined unique needs, and;
2. to develop a model of shared responsibility and accountability in dealing with this group of individuals at points of intersection between the human services and justice systems.

The following information, unless otherwise cited, was provided through consultation with key service providers and experts from the HSJCC Network which consists of individuals who work in the human services and justice sectors including the community mental health and addictions sectors.

#### **Key Messages for Ontario's 2014 Budget**

The HSJCC commends the Government of Ontario for its continued commitment to the human services and justice sectors. Through the release of *Building Foundations: Building Futures Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy* in 2010, the Government renewed its commitment to affordable housing options which are invaluable for individuals with mental health, addictions and/or related issues who come into contact with the law. However, no additional funding was provided to ensure the sustainability

of this commitment. In addition, the Government invested \$257 million over three years for child and youth mental health through the *Open Minds, Healthy Minds: Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy*. The early implementation of this strategy saw the creation of 18 Service Collaboratives, 4 of which focus on justice, mental health and addictions. Members from HSJCCs make up 40% of the Justice Collaboratives membership and actively participate and contribute to the implementation of the *Mental Health and Addictions Strategy*. As we enter years five to ten of the *Affordable Housing Strategy* and years four to ten of the *Mental Health and Addiction Strategy*, the HSJCC recommends that the Government provide targeted investments in the following three areas:

- Affordable Housing and Rent Supplements
- Housing with Supports
- Housing First and Safe Beds

## **The Need for Housing across Ontario**

Finding, establishing, maintaining and sustaining housing for individuals with mental health, addictions and/or related issues who encounter the justice continuum is an important issue affecting many Ontarians. Housing has been identified as a critical resource by our HSJCC members across the province. Individuals with mental health, addictions and/or related issues who have come into contact with the law are frequently released from custody into shelters rather than supportive housing programs that provide more appropriate care for this population.<sup>1</sup> Our stakeholders have expressed that there is a limited capacity of beds within housing programs, which places limits on available options for youth and adults who are leaving correctional facilities. Conflicts in shelters can often arise and may result in individuals being banned from certain programs or facilities that could help them, thus leading to homelessness. Individuals can also experience harassment and violence in shelters which also contributes to homelessness. The stress of being homeless may exacerbate previous mental health and addictions issues. However, the difficulties of being homeless may encourage anxiety or depressive disorders as well.<sup>2,3</sup>

### **Affordable Housing and Rent Supplements are required to Support People with Mental Health, Addictions and/or Related Issues who Come into Contact with the Law**

The HSJCC commends the Ontario Government's contributions to housing where over \$2.5 billion in combined provincial and federal funding has been dedicated to the construction and repair of more than 200,000 affordable and social housing units since 2003.<sup>4</sup> The HSJCC also commends Ontario's \$50 million Short-Term Rent Support Program which will help marginalized populations including victims of domestic violence.<sup>4</sup> However, this investment has not kept up with the needs of vulnerable populations across Ontario. Additionally, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) also provides rent supplements to 6,742 individuals with mental health conditions.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the approximate \$734 million committed to the Affordable Housing Program by all levels of government is key for providing rent supplements to individuals and families who are unable to afford market rent costs.<sup>6</sup>

Still, there were 152,077 low income households on active waiting lists for social housing across the province in 2011.<sup>7</sup> In the Toronto region, there are currently 628 applicants on the Mental Health and Justice Initiative (MHJI) housing waitlist. There are currently 6972 applicants on the Coordinated Access to Supportive Housing (CASH) waitlist including those on the MHJI housing waitlist. It is estimated that without increased supply the waitlist will double within five years which will increase pressure on hospitals and their emergency departments, as many people show up to the emergency room due to homelessness.

In Eastern Ontario, nearly 17% of all family households captured in the census and 37% of lone-parent families are low income and spend over 30% of their income on housing.<sup>8,9</sup> In Frontenac County, 8 rent supplements are allocated to individuals associated with the criminal justice system but housing for at least 20 individuals is a much needed investment. There are currently a dozen individuals on the housing waitlist, a number that is expected to rise in the 2014-15 fiscal year. In Durham, the wait for Regional Subsidized housing is 10 years for a one bedroom for individuals under 60 years of age and 3-5 years for those over 60 years of age.

In the Simcoe-Muskoka region, rental rates are among the highest in Ontario.<sup>10</sup> Simcoe County has approximately 3,000 rent-geared-to income units. The centralized waitlist through the County of Simcoe Social Housing Department has access to 2,772 of those units.<sup>11</sup> As of October 31, 2013, there were also 630 applicants on the Social Housing Waitlist in the District of Muskoka. Typical wait times for rent-geared-to income housing are 3 to 5 years. This region also noted service gaps such as seniors with mental health issues who have criminal records being turned away from long-term care homes, overcrowded rooming houses and housing that does not meet health and safety standards.

In the Central South region, 27 individuals on the housing waitlist in Brantford have been in contact with the law. The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Hamilton Branch has 129 referrals for justice housing units, 82 meet the criteria and have been accepted, but only 58 are housed. Niagara has 94 housing units of which 20 are given for clients involved with the justice system. Presently there are 14 individuals on a waitlist for a unit of which 6 are involved with justice support. There are more still who are not on the waitlist because their need for housing is imminent and will not be satisfied by this process in a timely manner. Although the Haldimand and Norfolk area received funding for 6 Service Enhancement Units for justice-involved individuals from the Ontario Government, these beds are always full and the waitlist is long. In the Guelph Wellington Dufferin area, no justice specific units exist and 89 people are on the housing waitlist, 14 people are on the waitlist for long-term addictions housing and 7 are waiting for transitional housing. Housing for females in transition is especially needed in this area along with mental health and addictions supports.

Lanark County Mental Health receives rent supplement funding support from the MOHLTC for clients with a serious mental illness. These clients remain on subsidy as there is no other housing to transfer them to, as well there are extended waitlists. In dire cases, clients are transferred to Ottawa to access housing with the Salvation Army. There are 10 individuals on the waitlist for rent supplements.

The HSJCC recommends that the Ontario Government provide additional funding for affordable housing and rent supplements for individuals with mental health, addictions and/or related issues who have come into contact with the law. Increased funding for rent supplements can in turn help in financing new supportive housing units and allow for new construction through the leveraging of private capital by housing providers. Increased funding in rent supplements will also support local initiatives such as supported and supportive housing and Housing First.

## **Housing with Supports is Needed for People with Mental Health, Addictions and/or Related Issues who Come into Contact with the Law**

The HSJCC appreciates the provision of housing with supports provided by the Government of Ontario to 107,294 Ontarians in need, with 7,900 dedicated supportive housing units being available for individuals with mental health conditions.<sup>12,13</sup> Nevertheless, according to the MOHLTC healthcare indicator tool, 1,434 people were waiting for service initiation to receive mental health supportive housing at the end of fiscal year 2012/13.<sup>14</sup>

Champlain HSJCC members have stated that housing is the number one capacity and resource barrier when it comes to providing treatment and supportive services for justice-involved youth, especially in rural areas. This is also an issue in the Central South region.

In Haliburton, the problem of housing is most critical when individuals are entering and leaving a correctional facility, with the amount of time an individual is incarcerated being a major factor to sustaining housing. Individuals can also be 'underhoused' where they reside in rooming houses because they have difficulty and lack of supports in navigating the system to find better housing. There is a move to improve additional access to transitional housing for up to 3 months in Haliburton in order to address some of these issues, but funds are needed in order to ensure the success and sustainability of these efforts. On average there are about 150 persons who are involved with the justice sector at any given time across the 4 counties of Haliburton, Northumberland, Peterborough and the Kawartha Lakes. These individuals are either homeless, under-housed, temporarily or semi-housed or housed with financial pressures.

In the South East regional HSJCC, Lennox and Addington County is the home of Quinte Detention Centre and there is a full time release from custody worker at the jail. However, finding adequate and suitable accommodations for individuals being released continues to be a challenge. The county would benefit from investments in dedicated housing with supports attached. The support piece is key, as many individuals being released from custody need case management supports and counselling with respect to pro-social behavior and lifestyle choices. Many offenders lack supports of any kind upon release and this often contributes to recidivism. Housing options need to be diverse in order fit the population and could include individual rent supplements or communal style living. Prince Edward Hastings County would also benefit from housing options including a shelter with 24-hour supports.

In Durham region, 23 individuals are on the waitlist for housing as part of Durham Mental Health Services Supportive housing. The target for discharges is one client per month, so the waitlist often sits between 18-24 months. There are 40 individuals on the waitlist for CMHA Durham housing, plus 12 on Community Access Services (CAS) (intake) waitlist identified as housing referrals. Leeds and Grenville County also requires funding for additional housing with supports where successful release and recidivism reduction can be achieved with the creation of a night supervised co-operative apartment offering clinical supports, employment supports, and casework instrumental supports. Finally, the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness advocates that the most effective way to eliminate homelessness is to provide subsidized housing with supports.<sup>15</sup>

The funding investments made to provide supportive housing in 2005 were sufficient to fill the gaps at the time; however, the need for affordable, supportive and supported housing has greatly increased since.<sup>16</sup> For example, people are now being discharged from safe beds in Toronto into homeless shelters rather than the supportive housing that they require. Discrimination, low income and poverty are also related and additional barriers to housing across Ontario.

Designated housing for individuals with mental health issues provides an opportunity for cost savings in the healthcare system where it costs \$486 a day (\$177,390 per year) to keep a person in a psychiatric hospital, compared to \$72 per day (\$26,280 per year) to house a person in the community with supports.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, it costs \$143 – \$457 per day (\$50,908 to \$162,692 per year) to keep a person in jail indicating a cost savings opportunity for the justice sector as well.<sup>18</sup> The HSJCC calls on the Government to invest in a range of housing options including supportive (24-hour supports) and supported (e.g. homecare or counseling) housing for individuals with mental health, addictions and/or related issues who have come into contact with the law.

### **Increased Access to Housing First and Safe Beds is Required for People with Mental Health, Addictions and/or Related Issues who Come into Contact with the Law**

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) has reported that an estimated 150,000 to 300,000 people across Canada are homeless, resulting in an annual cost of \$1.4 billion to the health, justice and social services systems.<sup>19</sup> In Champlain region, the Elizabeth Fry Society of Ottawa reports that of their clients who are homeless and in custody, 80% have mental health issues. Similarly, 73% of rural clients who are homeless and in custody also have mental health issues.

In Simcoe County, there were 2,274 individuals (1,286 applicants and 988 dependents and/or family members) who used emergency shelters in 2012, 185 (14.9%) of the applicants indicated that they had recently been released from a facility (106 from a Correctional Facility, 60 from hospital and 19 from an Addiction Treatment Centre).<sup>20</sup>

Investing in a Housing First approach in Ontario to support vulnerable populations provides an opportunity for cost savings where a shelter bed costs \$1,615/month and permanent housing costs \$717/month. Housing First combines supportive services in addition to housing as the first step towards recovery for individuals with mental health, addictions and/or related issues who have come into contact with the law.<sup>21</sup> This approach has been tested through the MHCC At Home/Chez Soi, Housing First pilot project showing that for every \$1 spent, \$1.54 is saved because of the reduced costs for shelter, health and justice services.<sup>22</sup>

Safe beds are short term crisis beds for individuals with mental health, addictions and/or related issues. The Ontario Government has invested in safe beds by supporting community mental health services which provide the appropriate care for these individuals.<sup>23</sup> However, some regions still have little to no safe beds available to ensure that individuals with mental health, addictions and/or related issues are kept out of the criminal justice and corrections systems.

In Peel region, there are 54 safe beds which are currently full with 66 individuals on the waitlist with some having waited since 2011. In Lennox and Addington County, there is one crisis safe bed for a 7-10 day short term stay. This bed has a focus of trying to keep people out of the criminal justice system. Aside from this there is no dedicated housing of any kind for individuals involved or at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system. Investment in adding 5 additional safe beds would greatly benefit this county. Prince Edward Hasting County has 2 Short Term Residential Crisis Services beds for use as an alternative to incarceration. There is a Court Diversion Enhancement (CDE) worker and 8 CDE rent subsidies used to top up from Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) shelter costs to market rent dedicated to this demographic.

In Durham Region there are 4 safe beds which are operated out of the 2 crisis locations by Durham Mental Health Services. The beds receive the majority of applications from the Court Diversion Program, hospitals, and the Mobile Crisis Intervention Team. The beds, which are meant to be short term transition stay beds, become longer term stays due to lack of permanent housing options. The beds were filled 92% of the time within fiscal 2012/13. There is no dedicated funding for community case management support to these beds. The Guelph Wellington Dufferin area also identified a lack of safe beds as being a serious system gap in the community.

Lanark County Mental Health currently has one crisis safe bed to cover all of Lanark County and the bed is situated in Smiths Falls. The use of this bed includes clients that may present in crisis and have no accommodations or have presented through the emergency departments and require a place to stay due to mental health concerns. This county has no other emergency short term housing and often time clients require admission to a facility to support their care. Each town in Lanark County requires at least 3 crisis safe beds to meet the demand for this service. Finally, in Muskoka, there is no men's shelter, transitional housing, crisis beds or safe beds. Instead, hotel vouchers for one or two nights are used while permanent accommodation is sought, but this is not always successful.

The HSJCC recommends a further commitment to investing in safe beds across all parts of Ontario in order to allow small and rural communities as well as large urban centres to successfully divert individuals away from the criminal justice system.

## **Recommendations**

Currently, there are not enough housing services available for clients with mental health, addictions and/or related issues who are being released from custody. Clients are successfully being diverted away from jails and being directed into the mental health system; however, there are not enough safe, affordable and appropriate housing accommodations available for them. Without affordable, supportive and/or supported housing, clients are at risk of reoffending and re-entering the mental health and justice systems. New resources are necessary to provide adequate housing for clients with mental health, addictions and/or related issues.

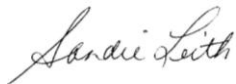
The HSJCC recommends that the Government of Ontario invest in housing by:

1. Supporting investments to and implementation of Ontario's *Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy*, with a special focus on providing housing for individuals with mental health, addictions and/or related issues who have come into contact with the law.
2. Providing funding for additional rent supplements each year from 2014-18 as a commitment to implement a Housing First strategy in the next phase of the *Mental Health and Addictions Strategy*.

3. Allocating any existing and new investments in housing to a variety of housing options, including supportive housing, supported housing, and rent supplements for individuals with mental health, addictions and/or related issues who have come into contact with the law.
4. Establish a Housing First model, where housing is the first step to recovery, across Ontario to support individuals with mental health, addictions and/or related issues who have come into contact with the law.
5. Invest in short stay crisis safe beds across Ontario in order to ensure individuals with mental health, addictions and/or related issues are kept out of the criminal justice and corrections systems.

The HSJCC welcomes the opportunity to work with the Government to ensure that individuals with a serious mental illness, developmental disability, acquired brain injury, drug and alcohol addiction, and/or fetal alcohol syndrome who have come into contact with the law are kept out of the criminal justice system and provided with the appropriate care, housing and supports.

Sincerely,



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