

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



**Provincial  
Human  
Services &  
Justice  
Coordinating  
Committee**

January 30, 2015

Dear Minister Sousa:

### **RE: 2015 Pre-Budget Consultations**

Please accept this letter as a formal written submission from the Provincial Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee (HSJCC) to inform the 2015 Pre-Budget Consultations. We appreciate this opportunity to share our ideas about how investments in the 2015 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 has over 1,200 members, which 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 43 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:

- to bring together service providers to find solutions to the problem of the criminalization of people with defined unique needs, and;
- 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 2015 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*

HSJCC members make up 40% of the Justice Collaboratives membership.

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*.

We are pleased that the announcement of phase two of the *Mental Health and Addictions Strategy* included a focus on expanding housing, employment supports and diversion and transition from the justice systems along with more than \$65 million in 2014-15 growing to \$83 million in 2016-17 for community mental health and addictions. As we enter years six to ten of the *Affordable Housing Strategy* and phase two of the *Mental Health and Addiction Strategy*, the HSJCC recommends that the Government provide targeted investments in the following three areas:

1. Affordable Housing and Rent Supplements
2. Housing with Supports
3. 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 encourages anxiety and depression and may exacerbate previous mental health and addictions issues.<sup>2,3</sup>

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### **1. 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 is pleased to see that Ontario is extending the Investment in the Affordable Housing (IAH) program for another five years with the contribution of more than \$801 million in new funding.<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>5</sup> Additionally, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) also provides rent supplements to 6,742 individuals with mental health conditions.<sup>6</sup> However, this investment has not kept up with the needs of vulnerable populations across Ontario.

In 2011, there were 152,077 low income households on active waiting lists for social housing across the province.<sup>6</sup> In Eastern Ontario, for example, 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>7,8</sup> Housing waitlist in communities across Ontario have anywhere from dozens to thousands of individuals waiting for appropriate housing, a number that is expected to rise in the 2015-16 fiscal year.

The HSJCC recommends that the Ontario Government focus the use of IAH funding on rent supplements and housing allowances for individuals with mental health, addictions and/or related issues who have come into contact with the law. This will provide access to housing to significantly more individuals than investments in new construction. 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.

## **2. 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 addition of 1,000 new units of supportive housing for people with mental health and addictions issues by the Government of Ontario. Nevertheless, according to the MOHLTC healthcare indicator tool, 1,762 people were waiting for service initiation to receive mental health supportive housing at the end of fiscal year 2013-14.<sup>9</sup> Even with 1,000 new units, hundreds of Ontarians will remain on a waitlist for supportive housing.

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In the Toronto region, there are currently 962 applicants on the Mental Health and Justice Initiative (MHJI) housing waitlist. There are currently 8569 applicants on the Coordinated Access to Supportive Housing (CASH) waitlist including those on the MHJI housing waitlist. Of these, 615 are waiting for 24 hour support, 1,219 are waiting for daily support and 8,303 are waiting for occasional support. 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. It is estimated that without a further increase in 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.

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>10</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>10</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.

## **3. 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>11</sup> The HSJCC commends the Ontario Government funding the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI), with \$42 million being invested in 2014-15 and total of \$294 million being put towards this initiative. This will allow municipalities to address local housing priorities in a more flexible way using a housing first approach.<sup>4</sup>

However, ensuring that a diverse set of housing options continue to be offered and explored is also an important area of investment, especially when it comes to those with mental health, addictions and/or related issues. In Champlain region, for example, 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. These individuals require diverse housing options that meet their unique needs in order to prevent further encounters with the criminal justice system.

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>12</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.

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 criminal justice system. 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 rent supplements, housing allowances and affordable housing for individuals with mental health, addictions and/or related issues who have come into contact with the law.
2. 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.
3. 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,



**Michael Dunn**

Co-Chair, Provincial HSJCC  
Director of Research, Evaluation & Quality Improvement  
Canadian Mental Health Association - Simcoe  
County Branch  
705- 726-5033 ext. 279  
[mdunn@cmhastarttalking.ca](mailto:mdunn@cmhastarttalking.ca)

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