



CASW ACTS
Canadian Association of
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des travailleuses et travailleurs sociaux

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July 8, 2013

The Hon. Diane Finley,
Minister of Human Resources and Social Development;
House of Commons,
Ottawa, ON., K1A 0A6

RE: *Housing First and Affordable Housing*

Dear Minister Finley:

The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) is a national organization that works towards strengthening and promoting the profession as well as advancing pro-active approaches to addressing issues relevant to social work practice in Canada. In this regard CASW has recently focussed much of its attention in developing awareness of the overall savings realized when investments in the social determinants of health are coordinated and made accountable.

In this regard, CASW followed closely the 2008 Government of Canada investment of \$110 million through a funding agreement between Health Canada and the Mental Health Commission of Canada to support a five-year demonstration project to evaluate what services and systems best help people experiencing serious mental illness and homelessness. The documented experience of the *Housing First* approach of *At Home/Chez Soi* clearly demonstrated that collaboration in addressing the social determinants of health across government sectors and among different service providers at the program and the individual level results in positive steps forward for participants and a strong return on investment for government.

In Budget 2013 the Government of Canada chose to maintain support for the *Housing First* approach with an investment of \$119 million per year over five years to the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. CASW is extremely appreciative of this commitment as well the renewed commitment of \$253 million per year over five years to work with provinces and territories to help Canadians in need find and keep affordable housing.

It is the expectation of CASW that the renewed commitments to affordable housing in Budget 2013 will be complemented with deeper investments to a comprehensive national affordable

housing strategy. According to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) latest corporate plan, the Government of Canada expended approximately \$3 billion on Housing Program Expenses in 2010. This spending was down by \$1 billion to \$2 billion in 2013 and will be down to \$1.7 billion by 2016.

This is a drastically reduced overall commitment to social housing that will severely decrease the number of subsidized homes available to Canadians precisely when all indicators point to the need for a drastic increase of affordable housing in order to support the growth of our evolving economy. According to CMHC, in 2008, there were 623,700 households assisted through federal affordable housing expenses. CMHC projects that, with the ongoing reductions, the number of federally assisted households will be at 525,000 by 2016 - a reduction of 98,700 subsidized homes, or a drop of 16%.

Again, given the overall projected underfunding of affordable housing in Canada, CASW strongly encourages that the Government of Canada work with the provinces and territories to develop a national housing strategy that complements both adopted poverty reduction plans and mental health strategies

Again, CASW is fully supportive of the steps taken in Budget 2013 to support the *Housing First* approach as well as commitments to the renewal of affordable housing agreements with the provinces and territories

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Morel Caissie".

Morel Caissie, MSW, RSW
President, CASW