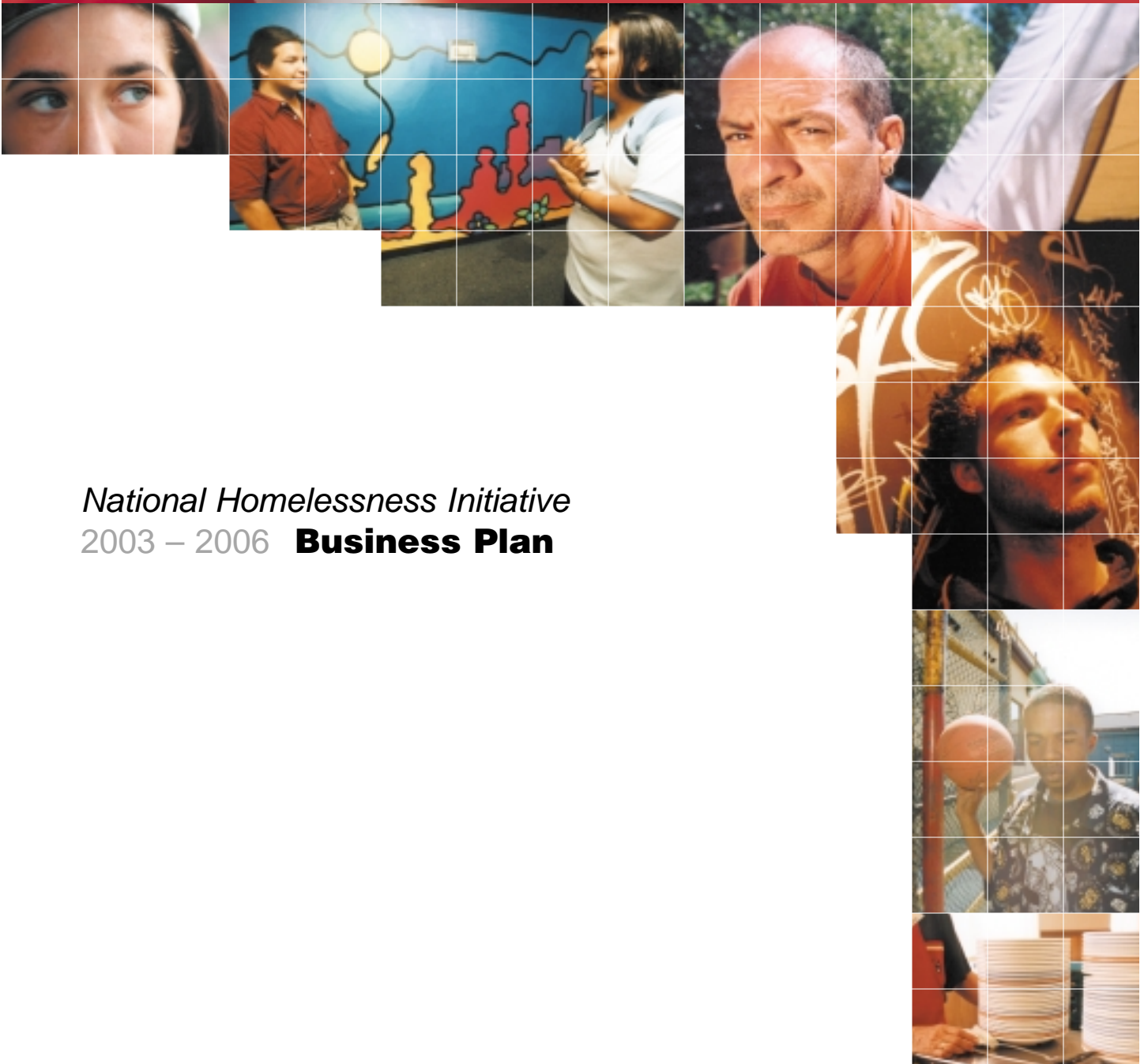National Homelessness Initiative

Initiative nationale pour les sans-abri

National Homelessness Initiative
2003 – 2006 **Business Plan**

Contents

The National Homelessness Initiative (NHI)

In 1999 the Government of Canada announced the National Homelessness Initiative, a three-year initiative designed to help ensure community access to programs, services and support for alleviating homelessness in 61 targeted urban communities located in all provinces and territories. The $753 million initiative engaged governments, community and private sector partners in collaborative work to strengthen existing service capacity, and to develop new community-based responses to homelessness that reflect local circumstances.

In March 2003, the Government of Canada has renewed the National Homelessness Initiative for an additional three years (2003-2006). Under the next phase of the NHI, the government is putting a stronger emphasis on supporting the coordinated delivery of services to prevent and break the cycle of homelessness and on establishing sustainable, long-term solutions. Under this initiative, communities will be assisted in further implementing measures that assist homeless individuals and families in achieving and maintaining self-sufficiency.

The extended NHI consists of the following program components:

National Homelessness Initiative
Phase II (2003-2006) – $405M

- Homeless Individuals and Families Information System $6M
- Research $7M
- Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative $9M
- Regional Homelessness Fund $13M
- Urban Aboriginal Homelessness component $45M
- SCPI $258M
- Operating Funds $67M
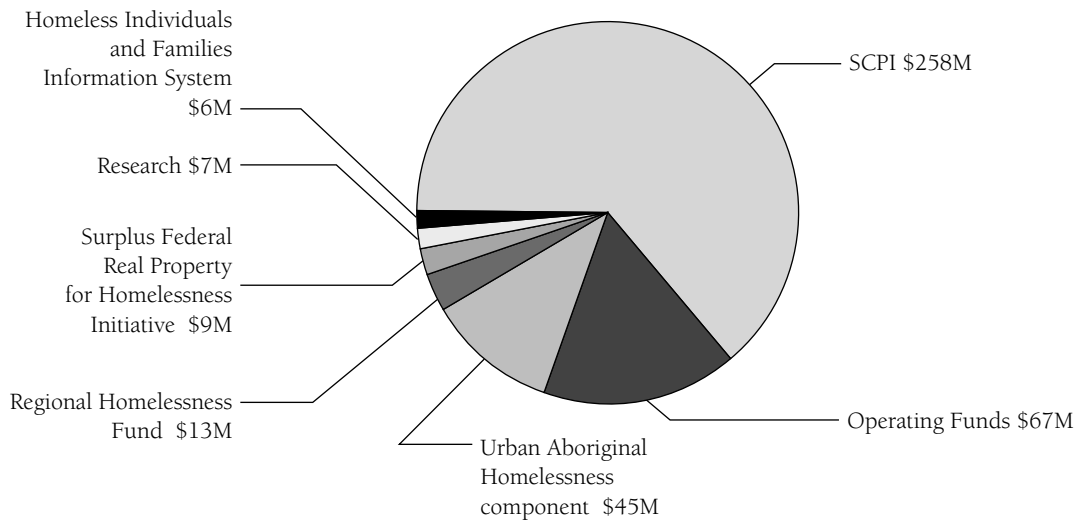
· **Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI)** – will continue to provide communities with program support and funding, which must be matched by community resources, for increasing availability and access to services and facilities for homeless populations.

· **Urban Aboriginal Homelessness (UAH)** – together with the Government of Canada's Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS), will continue to support projects to increase the well-being of urban Aboriginal people in eight targeted cities.

· **National Research Program (NRP)** – will further increase community-relevant research and policy, support research partnerships and facilitate knowledge transfer and sharing of best practices in support of effective responses to homelessness.

· **Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS)** – will build on progress to date in collection and management of electronic data that supports better understanding of homelessness issues.

· **Regional Homelessness Fund (RHF)** – will provide support to small and rural communities dealing with homelessness issues.

· **The Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative (SFRPHI)** – is an initiative under the NHI that makes surplus federal real property available to support communities' efforts in addressing the needs of people who are homeless as well as those at risk of homelessness.

For more detailed information on these program components and their funding, visit our Web site at: www.homelessness.gc.ca.

The National Secretariat on Homelessness (NSH)

The NSH was established in 1999, within Human Resources Development Canada, to develop and implement the national policy and operational framework for the NHI. The Secretariat provides ongoing program and policy leadership and advice in support of the Initiative.

> *The mission of the National Secretariat on Homelessness is to help reduce homelessness and to advance Canadians' understanding of homelessness by coordinating and implementing the National Homelessness Initiative.*

Coordinating is the operative word in this mission statement. Implicit in the NHI is a new way of building capacity, of forging **partnerships** with communities and stakeholders to get things done. The NHI is a fundamental transformation in the way the federal government delivers programs.

The Secretariat is responsible for coordinating development, management and administration of the five program components of the extended NHI, as described above.

The NSH, in partnership with Public Works and Government Services Canada and Canada Mortage and Housing Corporation, also coordinates the SFRPHI and partners with the Privy Council Office-Aboriginal Affairs' UAS to ensure complementarity between UAH and the UAS in designated cities.

The Challenge

Homelessness Increasing
Discussions with community partners, national organizations and experts, and reports from communities such as Hamilton and Calgary, indicate that homelessness continues to grow in Canada's major urban centres. The *Report Card on Homelessness in Hamilton* highlights that homelessness in the city has escalated dramatically since 1998. The number of people per night staying in emergency shelters in that city has doubled between 1998 and 2001. The *2000 Calgary Count of Homeless Persons* reveals that the number of homeless people in that city's downtown core more than doubled between 1994 and 2000. The authors suggest that homelessness will continue to increase.

According to these reports, the increase in homelessness is due, in part, to an inadequate supply of affordable housing, and reductions in social and income assistance benefits.

At Risk of Homelessness
A combination of declining relative incomes and increased cost of housing has contributed to increasing numbers of Canadians being at risk of homelessness. In Toronto, from 1996 to 2000, the number of units renting for less than $800 per month fell from two-thirds to one-third. National figures indicate that the number of households paying more than 50% of their income for housing costs increased by 59% (from 560,000 to 891,000) between 1992 and 1999.[1]

Compounding this situation is the announcement by several provincial governments of funding reductions and/or public sector downsizing, as they focus their efforts on other priority areas. These factors are likely to reduce services further, resulting in increased hardship, health and social challenges for homeless people.

Face of Homelessness in Canada
Canada's homeless people are a diverse population. The most affected sub-populations include persons with mental health disabilities, individuals affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, substance abusers, lone-parent families headed by women, youth, individuals fleeing family violence, refugees and recent immigrants, ex-offenders, working poor and Aboriginal people.

For example, individuals with mental health disabilities account for 43.2% of the homeless population in Montreal and one-third to one-half of the total homeless population in Vancouver. Homeless individuals with substance abuse issues represent 41.2% and 30% of the total homeless populations in Montreal and Calgary respectively.

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[1] Results have been taken from an unpublished report carried out by Eric Moore and Andrejs Skaburskis in February 2002.

In Toronto, since 1988, families have been the fastest growing group of hostel users (a 105% increase), followed closely by youth at 94%. In 1996, families represented 46% of all hostel users.[2]

It is estimated that 50% of shelter users in Calgary have part-time or full-time employment. In Peel (Ontario), 38% of shelter clients are employed; 23% are employed in full-time positions.

Aboriginal people are significantly over-represented in the homeless population across Canada, especially in major urban centres. This is linked to conditions on reserves and in remote communities, as well as socio-economic and cultural barriers that Aboriginal people face when living in large urban environments. In Calgary, it is estimated that Aboriginal people represent 13% of the homeless population. In Toronto, Aboriginal people account for 25% of the total homeless population.[3]

Cost of Homelessness
A major study conducted by the Government of British Columbia demonstrates the cost-effectiveness of providing services to homeless people. According to this study, the costs incurred by the criminal justice system and the costs of providing health care and social services (excluding housing) to homeless individuals were, on average, 33% more than cost for housing individuals. The major cost category for many homeless people was the criminal justice system (average of $11,000 for one year) compared to the major cost category for housed individuals in this study (social services, $9,000).

A study conducted in New York estimates that some individuals in the chronically homeless population use an average of $40,450 US of publicly funded services per year. The same study found that it costs about $16,300 US per person in a supportive housing unit year round.

A chronically homeless population has complex and multiple needs, with many suffering from poor physical and mental health and/or addictions. Homelessness creates and/or exacerbates these issues. These individuals rely heavily on public systems/services (i.e. hospital emergency rooms, correctional facilities, etc.). The cost of this cycle of homelessness is extremely high, both in human and economic terms.

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[2] "Homelessness - Causes & Effects: Background Report. *A Profile and Policy Review of Homelessness in the Provinces of Ontario, Quebec and Alberta*". Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security. Vol. 4, Page 10.
[3] Composition of the Homeless Population." Parliamentary Research Branch. January, 1999. Page 3.

The Track Record – Successes to Date

Private Sector Meets the Challenge

During the first three years of the NHI, communities recognized the need to develop innovative partnerships involving the private sector, as well as community organizations and all levels of government, to succeed in establishing sustainable, long-term solutions to the issue of homelessness.

Across the country, scores of private sector organizations, companies and individuals have arisen to the challenge, contributing in a variety of ways to local projects. Their contributions range from collaborative planning and implementation, to donations of cash and goods and services, to the assignment of staff in voluntary roles.

Just a few representative examples from the initial NHI:

- In Halifax, the Parker Street Food and Furniture Bank has received generous financial contributions from **ADRA Canada**, the **Royal Bank** and the **Lions Club**; free advertisements and promotion were provided by local newspaper, the *Mail Star*, and **Global TV**. **Atlantic Superstore** offered free storage.
- In St. John's, Stella Burry Community Services, which offers shelter and related support services, has worked with the **Canadian Women's Foundation** to develop partnerships with the private sector. **Zellers** has donated clothing and household goods, the **Body Shop** has provided toiletries and the services of staff to do makeovers and give advice on personal grooming. The **Delta Hotel** has provided furniture for the shelter and will donate furniture when women are ready to leave the shelter and set up their own households.
- In the Montérégie region of Quebec, individuals representing local, national and international private sector companies have banded together and launched a campaign to raise funds to renovate and equip a facility for homeless and at-risk persons.

- In Toronto, a community market promoting goods and services produced by homeless entrepreneurs received donations of space from the **St. Lawrence Market**, design expertise from **Robbie Sane Architects**, construction from **Citibank** and creative goods and services from **Cracker World Communications** and **Ontario Paints**.
- In Saskatoon, Tamara House, which provides services to adult survivors of sexual abuse, has donated a house constructed by **PR Developments** and acquired a second house with support from a number of private and community partners.
- In Calgary, the **Calgary Homebuilders Foundation**, on behalf of the local building industry, contributed $800,000 and was responsible for the construction of a 61-unit apartment building in conjunction with local affordable housing organizations.
- In Edmonton, the owners of **Concept Homes**, a construction company hired to build a supported housing facility for Aboriginal families, have pledged to provide support for the ongoing maintenance of the project.

A Context of Achievement

Since 1999, by working in partnership, the initial phase of the NHI is producing excellent results in communities across Canada, namely:

- 1,800-plus projects, totaling approximately $368.6 million, received SCPI funding.
- $91 million invested in more than 600 projects that target youth and Aboriginal populations that are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- Close to 8,000 new permanent beds and 700 seasonal beds are being created in shelters, transitional and supportive houses.
- The construction, renovation and enhancement of more than 650 sheltering facilities and nearly 400 support facilities such as food banks, soup kitchens and drop-in centres.
- Close to 850 organizations receiving project funding for support services, such as psycho-social counseling, provision of housing, transportation, training and employment information, and legal and financial services for homeless people or those at risk of homelessness.
- Transfer of 50 properties worth $9.2 million has been approved through the NHI's SFRPHI and will result in the creation of 214 transitional and affordable housing units.
- Partnerships with more than 550 NGOs, private sector and other governmental partners have leveraged substantial resources, valued at nearly $560 million, towards the implementation of homelessness projects.

What Still Needs to be Done

Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness

Since 1999, responding to emergency needs (e.g. emergency shelters, food banks, etc.) to reduce the immediate hardship for people living on the streets and those in the shelter system has been the priority of both the NHI and communities it supports. This type of assistance is an essential first step, but it will not reduce or prevent homelessness. Without further assistance, homeless people often face a never-ending cycle of entering emergency shelters and returning to the street.

The cycle can be broken with increased access to a stable living environment with appropriate services and supports designed to help homeless individuals and families stabilize and acquire the capacity to lead independent lives. Access to relevant services can also help prevent at-risk individuals and families from falling into homelessness.

Numerous studies have shown that the integration of different types of housing (e.g. transitional, supportive) and support services can reduce homelessness, improve stability for individuals living with mental illness, addiction and chronic illnesses and provide them with a higher quality of life. Research has also shown that individuals with access to appropriate housing experience marked reductions in shelter use, hospitalizations, and incarcerations.

It is also essential that the up-stream sources of homelessness (e.g. correctional institutions, mental health institutions, foster care system) begin to build long-term housing strategies into their release plans for individuals returning to community living.

Broadening the Partnership Base

The complex nature of homelessness means that partnerships across government and the private and not-for-profit spheres at the local, regional and national levels are essential to responding to homelessness and helping communities sustain their efforts.

Partnerships across the various sectors can:

- increase community access to resources, programs and funding;
- diversify the resource base available to communities; and
- create stronger linkages among existing programs for more sustainable solutions.

Increasing and Sharing Knowledge & Information on Homelessness
In order to develop appropriate and effective responses to homelessness, it is essential to have a solid base of information on the issue and the population.

Enormous gaps exist in the information and analysis about homelessness in Canada. For example, there is a pressing need to undertake more longitudinal and comparative studies on how different cohorts of the homeless population move in and out of shelters/housing/the street over time. Also, no reliable information exists on the size of the homeless population in Canada. Most importantly, from a public policy and expenditure perspective, there is a need to study the cost of homelessness and the potential effectiveness of addressing the root causes of homelessness.

Considerable information about the issue can be gathered by analyzing homelessness investments and activities. This information could also be utilized to build a database of best practices and lessons learned from which all stakeholders and partners can draw to aid in the development of effective solutions.

To be properly utilized, the information and knowledge needs to be made available and in a format that is accessible to all stakeholders and partners.

Results We Are Looking For
Based on the above assessment of what needs to be done, we are aiming to see the following results achieved by 2006:

Communities are better able to overcome local issues and obstacles in addressing the root causes of homelessness, thereby reducing the incidence and the hardship of homelessness across Canada.

An array or "continuum" of services and programs are in place at the local level that suit local needs and requirements for reducing and preventing homelessness – that support homeless persons and those at-risk to break out of or avoid falling into the cycle of homelessness – including longer-term supports and services that stabilize living environments and encourage self-sufficiency (e.g., supportive and transitional housing, life skills, etc.).

The array of integrated, coherent services at the community level is sustained through coordinated and ongoing partnerships that actively involve all levels of government, the private sector, community service providers, and others.

Service providers, policy makers at all levels and Canadians have a better understanding of the magnitude and nature of homelessness and its causes, and of the measures needed to address it.

Sustaining the Effort: an Action Plan

The Secretariat has identified **five strategic directions** to guide the organization in working with partners and stakeholders to deliver results over the next three years:

1. Build and enhance community partnerships.
2. Support communities to develop a comprehensive range of services at the local level.
3. Strengthen knowledge and understanding of the issues for use in developing effective solutions.
4. Showcase the results and impacts of the NHI.
5. Contribute to the policy and legislative agenda required to address structural issues and root causes to help reduce homelessness.

Under each of the strategic directions, **Key Deliverables**, which will be updated yearly, have been identified and include:

1. Build and enhance community partnerships
  · Meet with representatives of key departments and agencies – at the local, regional and national levels – to increase awareness of the issue, show linkages between their mandate and homelessness, secure involvement in developing collaborative solutions. Get buy-in from key federal departments/agencies (e.g. Justice, Health), and central agencies.
  · Provide a strategy, tools and resources for communities to engage ongoing involvement by the private sector, unions and key national organizations and existing campaigns (e.g. Vibrant Communities, UAS, etc.).

2. Support communities to develop a comprehensive range of services at the local level
  · Facilitate partnerships to ensure the sustainability of community approaches and transitional/supportive interventions.
  · Share best practices and lessons learned on transitional/supportive interventions and prevention measures.

3. Strengthen knowledge and understanding of the issues
 for use in developing effective solutions
- Increase the capacity of communities/service providers to undertake research at the local level. Ensure the long-term sustainability of HIFIS.
- Increase the collection, analysis and dissemination of policy information, best practices, lessons learned and research findings from all sources. Work with existing research networks to reduce duplication, pool resources and expertise.

4. Showcase the results and impacts of the NHI
- Provide compelling accounts of the results and impact of the National Homelessness Initiative to stakeholders, partners and the general public, making clear how these successes reflect the Initiative's strategic objectives.
- Ensure that feedback from the public and elected officials is shared with homelessness officials and considered, where applicable, in policy and operational decisions/activities.

5. Contribute to the policy and legislative agenda required to address
 structural issues and root causes to help reduce homelessness
- Monitor and assess key developments in the socio-economic and policy environment of all levels of government as it pertains to homelessness.
- Generate key policy questions to be pursued through a range of means (e.g. consultations with other government departments and domestic/international experts).

Management Commitments and Support

To support the accomplishment of strategic directions and key deliverables, and particularly the development of our capacity to work in partnership with communities and stakeholders, the Secretariat makes a number of management commitments:

1. NSH will ensure effective and efficient delivery of grants and contributions programs and manage financial resources with prudence, probity and value-for-money. It will carry out evaluation and ensure adherence within an accountability framework.

2. The Secretariat will undertake planning, collecting and analyzing data, reporting on results and lessons learned, communications for the Initiative, as well as policy and program support to regional and city homelessness officials.

3. The Department of Human Resources and Skills Development's Regional Service Delivery Network will coordinate delivery of NHI components within communities, with functional guidance from NSH.

Looking Forward

The NHI has been effective in its first three years in mobilizing communities, building partnerships and strengthening the collaboration between local service providers; in increasing knowledge and awareness of the issue and leveraging additional resources to address it. The Government of Canada will continue to respect the planning and priority setting work communities have undertaken in the initial NHI. In the extended NHI, the Government of Canada will work with communities to build on these accomplishments.

Respecting the community planning process ensures that the Government of Canada, other governments and the private sector can be confident the investments they make are responding effectively to community priorities.

Implicit in the NHI is a new way of building capacity; a fundamental transformation in the way the federal government delivers programs. The extended NHI proceeds on the assumption that communities know best what they need.

By working collaboratively at the community level, governments, the voluntary and private sectors can better coordinate resources and services so that the needs of homeless people and those at-risk are met.

A country as wealthy and progressive as Canada should be able to make this commitment. Together we will put in place a sustainable continuum of supports that will help break the cycle of homelessness. And together we will contribute to the policy and legislative agenda required to address structural issues and root causes to help reduce homelessness.