

# MOVING FORWARD ON HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

*YOUTHLINK's submission to the 2009 Consultations on Federal Housing and Homelessness Investments*

Prepared by:

Marie Muli, Director, Inner City Youth Programs  
Bryan Heal, Research & Evaluation Officer  
Brandy Broderick, Student Researcher

October 2009



*Providing youth with support, guidance and opportunities for positive life choices*

---

**Main Office**

747 Warden Avenue  
Scarborough, ON M1L 4A8  
416- 967-1773 Fax 416- 967-7515

**Youth Skills Zone**

7 Vanauley St.  
Toronto, ON M5T 2V9  
416-595-9902 Fax 416- 595-5219

**Inner City**

7 Vanauley St.  
Toronto, ON M5T 2V9  
416- 703-3361 Fax 416- 703-3359

**North West Scarb Youth Centre**

3850 Finch Ave. E. Unit 410  
Scarborough, ON M1T 3T6  
416-502-9293 Fax 416-502-0047

## **Introduction**

The Canadian government has put forth generous funding and a great deal of effort in helping communities prevent homelessness and in assisting street-involved individuals with accessing and maintaining housing. These initiatives have taken on many forms, but are most commonly reflective of strategic partnerships with implementing agencies in communities or through cost-sharing agreements with other levels of government, including the existing Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS).

YOUTHLINK applauds the Federal government for engaging in this consultation and appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on ways to improve the effectiveness of Federal housing and homelessness investments and how best to allocate these investments between the years 2011-2014.

## **1. HOUSING**

### **DISCUSSION THEME 1: POLICY PRIORITIES/STRATEGIES**

#### **Recommendations**

- A comprehensive range of safe, secure, affordable and appropriate youth focused housing options continues to be required for street involved youth including shelters, supportive and transitional housing, and long term housing.
- Adequate funding is required to support enhanced prevention programming particularly for the increasing number of street involved youth with mental health, addiction issues or concurrent issues.
- Specific funding should be made available to organizations supporting groups who are particularly vulnerable to discrimination including street involved youth, Aboriginal people, the elderly, and individuals with mental and/or physical disabilities, new comers and women.

### **DISCUSSION THEME 2: ROLES**

#### **Recommendations**

- Federal commitment to address the identified need for a national housing strategy to ensure affordable housing for all Canadians living in vulnerable/precarious housing situations with funding aligned to support long term planning, collaborative community based program development and integrated service delivery.
- Federal government should be lead partner along with other levels of government, community organizations and private sector to ensure affordable and appropriate housing options for one of Toronto's most vulnerable populations - street involved youth

## **DISCUSSION THEME 3: PROGRAM DELIVERY/ FUNDING MECHANISMS**

### **Recommendations**

- Increased attention to preventing youth from becoming homeless through enhanced community based street outreach services and wraparound and case management models of service delivery, as well as support for youth engagement models of service delivery including peer driven programs that hire youth with lived experience.

## **2. HOMELESSNESS**

### **DISCUSSION THEME 1: POLICY PRIORITIES/STRATEGIES**

#### **Recommendations**

- Distinct funding stream for youth who are homeless and especially street involved youth should be reinstated with adequate funding to address their unique needs which are quite different from adult needs (42 M cancelled under NHI in 2003)
- Priority support and funding to ensure effective data collection systems including common systems and processes for youth and other priority groups - would help with trend analysis, evaluation and advance best practices and evidence based programming for populations of homeless people
- Supportive services required for youth who identify as LGBTQ
- Urban Aboriginal stream should be maintained and reinstated in Quebec and Atlantic Canada

### **DISCUSSION THEME 2: ROLES**

#### **Recommendations**

- National housing/homelessness strategy is urgently needed - government leadership needed to develop a 5-10 yr. plan to address youth homelessness, adequate funding with distinct policies to address unique needs of youth, ensure establishment of affordable/appropriate housing and relevant supportive services delivered over the long term including the continuum of housing options for street involved youth including youth exiting child protection resources including foster care and group homes.
- Integrated, coordinated supports and services need to be further developed through proactive, inclusive community planning that ensures identification of needs by and within local communities. Federal government can play leadership role in ensuring success by improved communication systems between levels of government.

- Community based program delivery best model and should be continued. HPS should remain a flexible, locally delivered fund - flexibility in investing in both housing and supports including pre employment, training and employment opportunities. Private sector engagement needed.
- Community plans should be developed aligning action plans for at least 5 years vs. the current 2 year or less funding. Program delivery time frames which have been extremely short for effective program planning and implementation need to match action plan duration.

### **DISCUSSION THEME 3: PROGRAM DELIVERY/FUNDING MECHANISMS**

#### **Recommendations**

- HPI program focus should remain ‘housing first ‘ and should include customized supports for services that ensure individuals remain housed over the long term and meet community needs as well as individual needs as identified - so that it is not a model that is viewed as ‘housing only’
- Funding ideally should be doubled given the current identified increasing needs and recession and the lack of increase in funding levels since 2000- many projects have experienced a 30-50% funding reduction in the previous few years.
- Invest strategically in street involved youth by supporting increased opportunities to develop job skills, specifically funding supports for programs that couple stabilization, pre employment and customized plans to support them in skill development and helps to create the pathway out of homelessness towards independence and self sufficiency, (e.g. maintain and replicate programs like Youth Skills Zone-recently replicated in St. John’s, NFLD)
- Continued need to ensure a balanced continuum of prevention, emergency and transitional supports.
- Currently excess of emergency response programming and limited proactive, preventive and transitional supports including access to pre employment, employment and educational opportunities.
- Need for increased outreach services to connect with the most isolated and marginalized of the homeless population.
- Comprehensive supports needed over an extended period of time to help youth transition out of homelessness including housing access and maintenance, employment, identification, leadership opportunities, education, drugs/alcohol assessment and treatment, legal assistance.

### **3.3 Alternative Models for Housing and Homelessness –Maximizing benefits of federal investments**

#### **Recommendations**

- Creation of community based committees to develop common evaluation practices, measurement and tracking methods including success measures/indicators
- Program delivery needs to be coordinated locally with community-based partners (e.g. housing workers and health care providers) to adequately address complexity of issues and needs encountered by street involved youth.
- Optimal service delivery system leading to permanent solutions would comprise service teams with diversity of expertise (mental health, addictions, concurrent disorders) Wraparound and case management models would support multitude of intersecting needs experienced by street involved and homeless youth.

#### **Conclusion**

It is essential that federal and provincial/territorial funding be continued and ideally expanded, with an increased level of proactive, long term community based service planning, delivery and outcome measurement. This should serve to establish the foundation for a universal standard that all service providers would be required to meet so that all Canadians would receive the same level of service no matter where they are experiencing homelessness.

---