



Giving Hope Today

Submission to **Let's Talk Housing** – The Government of Canada's consultation on a **National Housing Strategy**

October 21, 2016

We would like to thank the Government of Canada for the opportunity to contribute to the Let's Talk Housing discussion, and for framing the conversation in terms of inclusivity and stability for all Canadians. We share the Government's commitment to innovative, outcomes-focused, environmentally sustainable solutions, and look forward to collaborating with our partners and all orders of government in the implementation of a national housing strategy.

The Salvation Army in Canada

The Salvation Army is a Christian church and registered charity present in more than 400 communities across Canada. The Salvation Army began opening rescue homes and shelters in Canada in 1886. Since then, we have grown to be the largest non-governmental provider of direct social services in the country. In Canada, The Salvation Army operates more than 50 emergency shelters and provides 5,650 shelter, transitional, and supportive housing beds for adults, youth, and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The Salvation Army also operates more than 160 community and family services offices and last year helped more than 1,285,000 people to access food, clothing, and other goods necessary to making a house a home.

Addressing Homelessness Across the Country

In 2015, The Salvation Army established seven Operating Principles for Emergency Shelters (see below), to be implemented in all of its shelters across the country. The goal of those operating principles was not only to bring our shelters in alignment with Housing First and best practice, but also to ensure consistency and fidelity to the emergency shelter model, a specialized and essential piece of the crisis response system for people experiencing homelessness. Seventy percent of our shelters report an average occupancy rate of 90% or higher, and 15% regularly operate over capacity with added mats and makeshift beds on the floor. We interpret this statistic in two ways:

- 1) emergency shelters are a vital service, ideally a gateway to housing and other supports for people experiencing homelessness, and
- 2) at present, it is difficult to be a gateway, moving people through our shelters to stable, permanent housing in the community.

We agree with recognized experts that homelessness in Canada is a complex and protracted crisis, made up of structural factors, systemic failures, and personal issues. We also agree with the Housing First premise that all Canadians have a right to housing. In 38 of our shelters, however, residents must share a room with at least five other people (and sometimes as many as 50) and so we aspire to housing that is better than we currently provide. In order to be an emergency service that rapidly and meaningfully (re)connects people to housing, we need:

- **a consistent and comprehensive understanding of Housing First** in all jurisdictions across the country and a framework for ensuring that shelter services in each are aligned with its philosophy and evidence-informed approach;
- recognition that **emergency shelters are an essential piece of the puzzle**, and to see this evidenced by **adequate and sustainable funding**, not just for basic services (i.e. food and shelter) but also for outreach, case management, housing-locator services, and landlord-tenant liaising;
- increased availability and improved access to **appropriate and affordable housing options** for our clients, including attention to the **quality** of those housing options (how they suit the clients' needs, how well-maintained, safe, and accessible they are, etc.);
- **formal partnerships with other specialized agencies** who are equipped to offer the services we often cannot, such as counselling and other mental health interventions, health care, community-based and long-term wrap-around supports, accompaniment and follow-up services.

In a perfect world, Canada wouldn't need emergency shelters, but until such time as we can do without them, we ask for the Government's help in being an efficient and effective response for people experiencing homelessness. In Salvation Army facilities, we do not merely shelter people from the elements, but choose also to care for them as whole people and help them to find stable, permanent housing and appropriate supports. We want to do this from a place of capacity and creativity rather than deficit and stress.

Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable Canadians

When polled, 100% of our shelter managers indicated their desire to “do more” for clients, whether during their stay with us, after their departure from shelter, or even by way of diverting them from shelter in the first place. Their vision for more and better services for those experiencing or at risk of homeless can be grouped into two key types: programs for **improving housing stability** and programs offering **housing with supports**.

Improving Housing Stability

We appreciate the stated values of the Let’s Talk Housing consultation process, but caution that emphasis on “self-reliance” would belie the degree to which all people need help, especially when things get tough. We’ve learned that “self-reliance” and adjacent terms such as “independent living” or “self-sufficiency” can be unrealistic and cumbersome goals for many of the people we serve. We submit **“housing stability” as a more realistic and meaningful goal**. As we see it, part of our role is to help people establish supportive networks they can rely on in uncertain times, both formal and informal. Our work to achieve housing stability with clients means ensuring they know how to navigate challenges as they arise – often with the help of others – instead of returning to shelter or to otherwise precarious living situations.

We have found that in order to meet the varied and specific needs of people experiencing extended periods of homelessness, **a range of supportive activities are necessary**, often on a time-limited basis. The likelihood of long-term stability can be improved with attention to the following:

- the formation of healthy **habits and routines**;
- practising good **decision-making**;
- making, mending, and sustaining **connections with others**;
- learning to manage **household resources** (including time, money, and food);
- learning to be **good tenants and neighbours**.

We’ve witnessed a profound need for services like these and are privileged to provide them, specifically in the context of our transitional housing programs. To be clear, we

are not advocating a return to a housing-readiness model that requires life-skills training prior to housing placement, but rather designated, **second-stage housing** options (in a range of client choices) which seek to improve housing stability where feasible. We believe that these services can be offered both in congregate and scattered-site arrangements, and also as **preventative measures** even before persons or families experience homelessness for the first time. We respectfully ask the Government to invest in the creation and quality assurance of housing stability programs as separate and distinct from emergency shelters.

Housing with Supports

More affordable housing is a vital and urgent need but will not unilaterally solve homelessness. Some people need **ongoing, intentional, flexible care** in order to live stable and healthy lives. We therefore also call on the Government to **strengthen the links between housing and health** by providing for the creation of more housing options, which include supports – not least for seniors, people with developmental disabilities, those diagnosed with a mental illness, or facing a significant challenge that impacts their ability to live stably and/or independently. Such housing would be:

- **client-centred, holistic, and culturally safe;**
- **multi-faceted**, involving both clinical physical and mental health care, as well as assistance with the activities of daily life;
- **focused on problem solving**, using eviction only as an extreme measure or last resort after all other options had been exhausted and all collaborative avenues explored;
- **oriented toward community engagement**, both among residents as well as with the wider neighbourhood;
- designed with **accessibility, walkability, and sensory** considerations in mind.

We encourage the Government to work closely with service agencies and their clients to design housing that meets a variety of supportive needs.

Conclusion

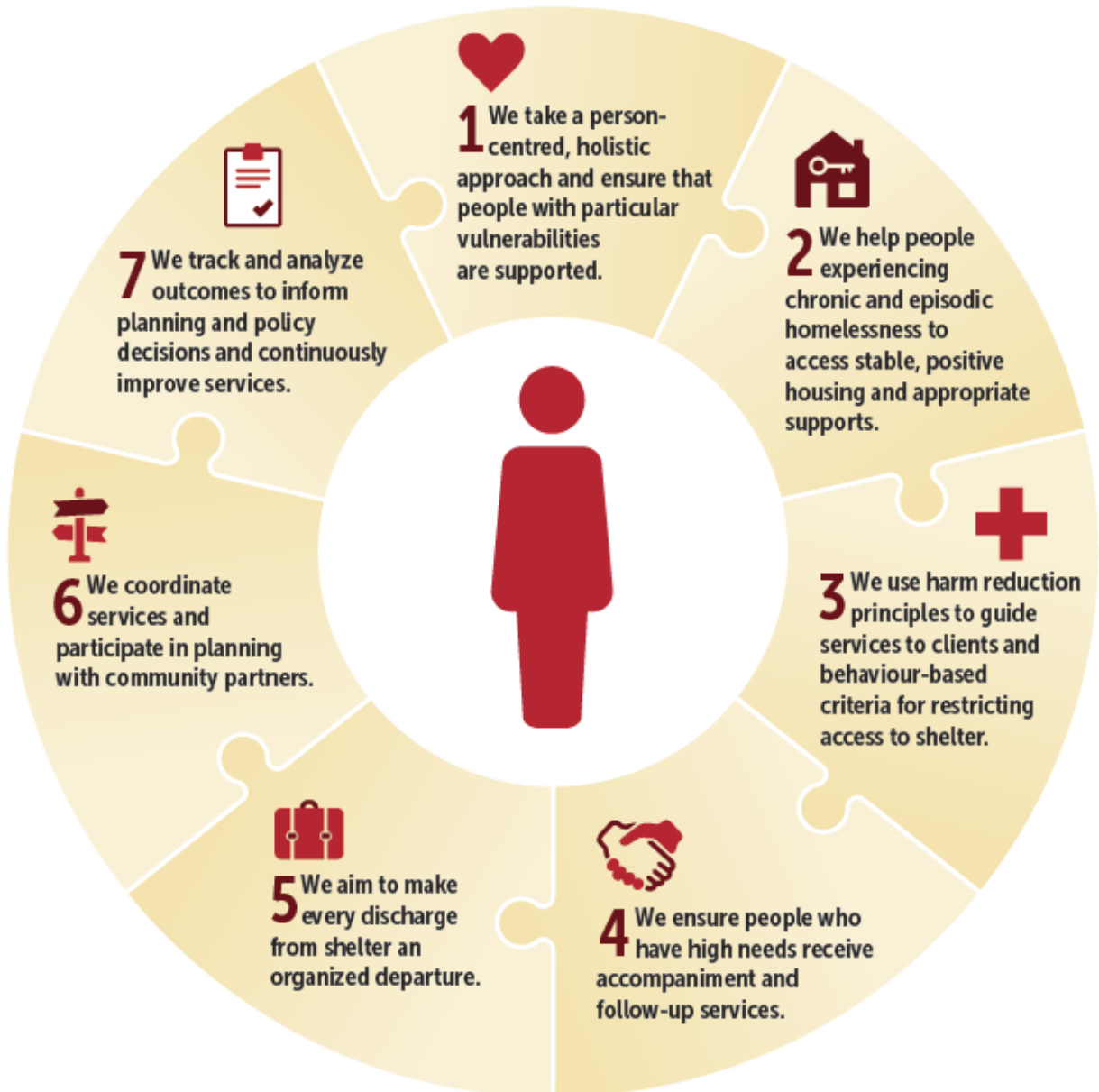
Again, we thank the Government of Canada for the opportunity to submit our views on a national housing strategy. We affirm the Government's commitment to making those experiencing homelessness, precarious living situations, and core housing need a priority in their deliberations. We are excited by the prospect of this strategic vision, of stable housing for all Canadians as foundational to our collective well-being. The Government of Canada can depend on The Salvation Army to be a faithful partner in that process.

As a national provider of services for those experiencing homelessness, present in communities from coast to coast to coast, we respectfully ask the Government to consider the suggestions we have made for:

- improved services at the emergency shelter end of the housing spectrum;
- endeavours that promote and enhance long-term housing stability;
- more supportive housing options that preserve the dignity of vulnerable Canadians.

Should you have any questions or require further information about The Salvation Army's position or its experience, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Emergency Shelter Operating Principles



www.SalvationArmy.ca/shelters