



Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario  
L'Association des infirmières et infirmiers  
autorisés de l'Ontario

Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau  
Prime Minister of Canada  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Hon. Kathleen Wynne  
Premier of Ontario  
Room 281  
Queen's Park  
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

November 17, 2015

**RE: Federal and Provincial Investment in Affordable Housing for Better Health**

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau and Premier Wynne,

Registered nurses, nurse practitioners and nursing students are thrilled at the prospect of meaningful federal-provincial partnerships. Prime Minister Trudeau's open letter to Canadians upon taking office affirmed that "we made a commitment to invest in growing our economy, strengthening our middle class, and helping those working hard to join it."<sup>1</sup> A critical means of achieving all three is through federal and provincial investments in affordable housing - we call on you to take swift action.

The 2015 Liberal Party of Canada backgrounder on affordable housing starts with the premise that "every Canadian needs safe, adequate, and affordable housing."<sup>2</sup> In their practice and in their daily lives, Ontario's registered nurses, nurse practitioners, and nursing students witness the devastating health, social, and economic impacts of our current housing crisis. In our affluent country, it is a scandal that there are over 35,000 Canadians who are homeless on any given night and that over 235,000 different Canadians experience homelessness in a year.<sup>3</sup> Lack of access to safe, adequate housing remains a key social determinant of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis health and driver of health inequities.<sup>4</sup> People who face marginalization from discrimination are often overrepresented among those who are homeless, including those who are Indigenous, racialized, or belong to a sexual minority. LGBTTQ youth, for example, make up 25 to 40 per cent of homeless youth although they represent only 5 to 10 per cent of the population.<sup>5</sup>

Ontario has 168,711 households (families, single adults, couples, and seniors) on waiting lists for rent-geared-to-income housing, which is an increase of 3,642 more households in 2014 compared with 2013.<sup>6</sup> Even those who are fortunate enough to currently live in affordable housing face compromised physical and mental health when they live in poor quality housing.<sup>7</sup> At present, to take Toronto Community Housing's residential portfolio as an example, about 36 per cent of the housing stock is considered to be in poor or critical condition.<sup>8</sup> Without

substantive investments by the federal, provincial, and municipal governments to repair this deteriorating housing stock, 91 per cent of these residential units will be in poor, critical, or closed condition by 2023.<sup>9</sup> Investing in good to fair housing stock would have economic, social, environmental, and health rewards, including preventing 544,000 instances of resident illnesses over 30 years with better housing conditions.<sup>10</sup>

While the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) welcomes efforts to decrease income inequality by strengthening the middle class, we urge the federal government to put the highest priority on assisting those most in need in securing safe and affordable housing. Home ownership is an aspiration for many, however, our most pressing societal need is to address unsafe, unaffordable, and inadequate housing that compromises health. RNAO was delighted<sup>11</sup> with the federal government's announcement of the reinstating of the mandatory long-form census on November 5, 2015<sup>12</sup> as a means "to ensure data-driven decision making, including on housing."<sup>13</sup> RNAO is heartened that the Liberal platform committed to "invest in a National Housing Strategy"<sup>14</sup> as RNAO has long advocated for an integrated, comprehensive national housing and homelessness strategy by the federal government in agreement with provincial and territorial partners and in collaboration with municipal governments, Aboriginal communities, non-profit and private sector housing providers, and civil society organizations, including those representing people in need of housing.<sup>15</sup> Building on the promise of new investment in affordable housing as part of social infrastructure,<sup>16 17</sup> RNAO urges the federal government to increase federal funding by \$2 billion annually for affordable housing and social housing programs with related services.<sup>18</sup> This will serve to address the sharp decline in overall federal housing investments since 1989,<sup>19</sup> and will also stimulate the economy through a multiplier effect.<sup>20</sup>

A critical lesson that was learned from Ontario's first five-year poverty reduction strategy is that progressive social policy can make a real difference. Largely as a result of the Ontario Child Benefit, more than 47,000 children and their families were lifted out of poverty as child poverty decreased from 15.2 per cent in 2008 to 13.6 per cent in 2011 (using the Low Income Measure).<sup>21</sup>

Despite over \$4 billion in provincial funding for affordable housing since 2003, waiting lists in Ontario have increased by over 40,000 during that time period.<sup>22</sup> As RNAO recommended to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing during updating of the province's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, Ontario should invest one per cent of the province's budget to create new affordable housing stock and address the backlog of existing affordable housing units in need of repair.<sup>23</sup> The Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association has calculated that a provincial commitment of \$1.3 billion per year, over ten years (or roughly one per cent of province's annual budget), would be required to assist all households living in Persistent Core Housing Need, address homelessness, and to repair social housing stock.<sup>24</sup>

The province of Ontario has made a commitment to end chronic homelessness in 10 years and to implement recommendations from the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness.<sup>25</sup> Co-chairs Deb Matthews and Ted McMeekin and the members of this panel are to be commended for prioritizing provincial action to reduce homelessness in four key areas: Aboriginal, chronic, youth (particularly LGBTTTQ and racialized youth) and homelessness following transitions from provincially funded institutions, such as jails and hospitals.<sup>26 27</sup> While a promising start, RNAO is

concerned that no new money was announced to realize this plan and \$10 million over two years in targeted funding from the Local Poverty Reduction Fund will not meet the tremendous need that has been identified.

Substantive federal and provincial investment in affordable housing is the right thing to do improve health, stimulate the economy, strengthen communities, and uphold the human right to housing.

With warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Doris Grinspun", with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Doris Grinspun, RN, MSN, PhD, LLD(hon), O.ONT  
Chief Executive Officer, RNAO

- cc. Rona Ambrose, Interim Leader, Conservative Party of Canada
- Tom Mulcair, Leader, New Democratic Party
- Rhéal Fortin, Interim Leader, Bloc Québécois
- Elizabeth May, Leader, Green Party of Canada
- Hon. Amarjeet Sohi, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities
- Patrick Brown, Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario
- Andrea Horwath, Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario
- Hon. Deb Matthews, Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy
- Hon. Eric Hoskins, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
- Hon. Ted McMeekin, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Ernie Hardeman, Progressive Conservative Critic, Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Percy Hatfield, NDP Critic, Municipal Affairs and Housing

## References:

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- <sup>2</sup> Liberal Party of Canada (2015). Backgrounder: Affordable Housing for Canadians.  
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- <sup>3</sup> Gaetz, S., Gulliver, T., & Richter, T. (2014). *The State of Homelessness in Canada 2014*. Toronto: Homeless Hub Press, 5. <http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/SOHC2014.pdf>
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- <sup>10</sup> Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis (2015). *Socio-Economic Analysis*, 13.
- <sup>11</sup> Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (2015). RNAO applauds Trudeau government's quick move to reinstate the long-form census. November 5, 2015.  
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- <sup>17</sup> Liberal Party of Canada (2015). Growth for the Middle Class: The Liberal Fiscal Plan and Costing, 13.  
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- <sup>18</sup> Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (2015). *Alternative Federal Budget 2015: Delivering the Goods*. Ottawa: Author, 92.  
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