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# Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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Chair: Robert Morrissey





# Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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• (1540)

[English]

**The Chair (Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)):** Good afternoon, committee members.

[Translation]

Welcome to meeting number 39 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

[English]

Pursuant to the motion adopted on Monday, May 4, 2026, the committee is meeting on homelessness in Canada. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members and witnesses are appearing in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

Before we begin, I would like to remind all members to please silence your devices. You have the option to participate in today's meeting in the official language of your choice. Please use the earpiece and select the channel for the language of your choice. If you're appearing virtually, please click on the globe icon at the bottom of your Surface. Choose the official language of your choice.

If there is an interruption in translation services, get my attention. We'll suspend while the situation is fixed.

All those appearing have met the required test to be translated in both languages.

As well, please refrain from tapping the boom on the microphone, for the protection of our translators.

Please direct all comments through the chair and wait until I recognize you by name before proceeding to speak.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for the first hour. From La Halte du Coin, we have Pierre Rousseau, chief executive officer; and Frédérique Favreau, clinical director. From Raft, we have Michael Lethby, executive director; and from Tiny Tiny Homes, we have Ryan Donais, founder and executive director.

Each witness, one speaking for a group, will have five minutes for opening statements.

We will begin with La Halte du Coin and Monsieur Rousseau.

[Translation]

Mr. Rousseau, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Pierre Rousseau (Chief Executive Officer, La Halte du coin):** Okay. Ms. Favreau and I will share that.

It is very difficult to present our entire mission and achievements regarding homelessness issues associated with federal programs in five minutes. Here are some elements that may support our presentation and, we hope, prompt some questions.

Allow me to briefly introduce myself: My name is Pierre Rousseau. I have been the general director of La Halte du coin since 2023. We will explain what La Halte du coin is. I am a retired member of the Service de police de la Ville de Montréal, where I worked for 30 years. I was also a training manager at the École nationale de police du Québec. I am a graduate of the École nationale d'administration publique du Québec. In the past, I was the administrator of the Reaching Home program, or RH, for two years. At the time, while I was administering the RH program, I worked at the mental health, homelessness and addiction office before taking a closer interest in homelessness and joining La Halte du coin.

**Frédérique Favreau (Clinical Director, La Halte du coin):** My name is Frédérique Favreau, and I am the clinical director at La Halte du coin. I have a bachelor's degree in criminology. I worked for two years at the ministère de la Sécurité intérieure, in the detention facilities in Montreal. I have also been working on homelessness for nearly 11 years now.

La Halte du coin is a shelter for people experiencing homelessness. It's a shelter with a high accessibility threshold, which means that we respond to emergencies and try to stand out from the crowd by setting ourselves apart.

The things we do differently include a number of programs, such as the ECHO project, a program for peer support workers, who train to help others. Afterward, these people are the ones who welcome people experiencing homelessness to our shelter.

There's also extended emergency, which acts as a small bridge for people who have something confirmed, but for whom we can't make the connection with our partners. Thanks to this program, we can support them until they secure their housing or their therapy, wherever the setting.

We also have the emergency treatment fund, or ETF, which is a very valuable federal program for people with mental health and addiction issues. We take them in for a number of months to help them then integrate into housing.

We also have the local medical clinic. That means we have nurses and doctors who come to La Halte du coin to meet with people experiencing homelessness and address their various needs.

Lastly, we have a day centre to meet the need in our territory, since there's a shortage of day centres, especially on weekends. We open our doors to all people in vulnerable situations so that they can come and get support services, hygiene services and food services.

In terms of statistics, applications have significantly increased since 2020. I'm putting a lot of emphasis on the aspect of new faces. We really do have a lot of new faces at La Halte du coin. From April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025, we welcomed more than 887 separate people, for a total of 16,000 overnight stays and more than 3,000 refusals, an average of nine refusals per day. More recently, from April 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026, we welcomed 964 different people, for a total of more than 20,000 overnight stays and 5,000 refusals. It's important to note that we have increased our welcome capacity by 15 additional spaces, and we have doubled the number of refusals, which shows that the needs have really been growing since 2020.

• (1545)

**Pierre Rousseau:** Having administered the Reaching Home program and dealt with the grants that we gave to organizations, and having been the director at La Halte du coin for three years now, I would be happy to look at the Reaching Home program and the ways it can be improved.

I don't want to take up any more time, because we only have five minutes, but I'd be happy to answer any questions, particularly on the program's flexibility and the necessary predictability.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Rousseau and Ms. Favreau.

[*English*]

Mr. Lethby for Raft, you have five minutes.

**Michael Lethby (Executive Director, RAFT):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for your invitation to appear today.

My name is Michael Lethby. I'm the executive director of Raft, a youth-serving organization in the Niagara region.

It is likely no surprise to the committee that homelessness has been increasing across Canada. It has been reported that instances of homelessness have more than doubled since 2018, with many smaller communities seeing visible homeless in their streets and parks for the first time.

My first-hand experience in the homeless sector occurred in spring 2005, when Out of the Cold, a volunteer-run overnight shelter, closed after winter. Unlike other years, the residents of this shelter banded together and occupied St. Catharines' Montebello Park. This group, which called itself A Ray of Hope, had one demand: that the municipality open a year-round shelter.

The city sought temporary accommodation by opening a shelter on unused city property. I was selected to manage the shelter and work with A Ray of Hope leadership to find a resolution. The solution was a request for proposal issued by the municipality to open

and operate a year-round shelter. At the time, this did seem like a solution. It resolved an immediate crisis in a fair and respectful manner. What we didn't understand was that we had started a process of increasing homelessness in St. Catharines and Niagara.

In 2006, I became the executive director of Raft, a 10-bed youth shelter in a dilapidated building in downtown St. Catharines. This building was in such poor shape that none of the doors closed, including the door to the only bathroom, and it was so infested with rodents that we would find their bodies throughout the building. Even in such a state, our shelter was full every night, and I was forced to turn away youth.

The solution, which I'd already experienced, was to open a new, larger shelter, which I did in 2007. The new shelter was and remains beautiful, with 24 beds, large rooms, proper showers and bathrooms, a full kitchen, doors that close and no rodents. Within a couple of months, the solution was overrun. All my beds were full, and I was back to turning kids away.

I'm telling you these stories because I want to establish for the committee that I was part of the problem. The solution to homelessness was opening more shelters. This solution entrenches homelessness, creating a vicious cycle of homelessness, which leads to expanding shelters, which leads to increasing homelessness. I know this is true, because I both witnessed it and have participated in it.

In 2006, Raft sheltered 120 individual youth. In the years 2007-08, the new shelter saw the number increase to almost 500 per year. Not only was the shelter entrenching youth in St. Catharines into homelessness, but we had also started pulling youth from the smaller communities and towns.

However, here's where the story changes. I didn't open a 35-bed shelter or a 50-bed shelter. Overwhelmed by demand and lacking any ability to increase supply, I started considering how to reduce demand. What I found was that the majority of my assumptions about homelessness were wrong. For example, I found that the majority of kids accessing my shelter were in high school immediately prior to becoming homeless, and that, for many, they had dropped out of school in order to access shelter. These weren't "bad kids". However, once in my shelter, few returned to their schools or their communities. Instead, for many, they had found a new community in homelessness in the street.

Our solution was a program called Youth Reconnect, a simple program that works with teachers to identify students who may be struggling with housing. Once identified, a Raft worker meets with the student to understand the struggle, and works to develop the solution. This approach was instantly successful. Students remained housed in their community and remained attached to their schools. Importantly, they remained attached to their natural supports.

In 2013, Youth Reconnect was available to every student in Niagara. That year, the Raft shelter went from sheltering close to 500 youth per year to 160, which represents a 70% reduction in youth homelessness. Since then, Raft has expanded its prevention and diversion programming, adding shelter diversion and dedicated family and natural supports. As a consequence, homeless youth are only 6% to 8% of the homeless population in Niagara. In 2024, the other youth shelter closed due to a lack of demand. Raft is now the only youth shelter. We have an average of three to four kids per night in a region with a population nearing half a million—one shelter, four kids.

Achieving this solution requires the following: recognizing that homelessness is caused by impaired relationships and social exclusion; an unwavering focus on housing, including the recognition that family is Canada's largest provider of affordable housing; offering fully funded, proven prevention and diversion programs; and increasing the productivity of shelters by reducing lengths of stay and increasing successful discharges to housing.

• (1550)

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lethby. You gave a much different perspective on this issue than I've heard in some time. That's not to take away from any of the other witnesses. Thank you for presenting.

Mr. Donais, go ahead for five minutes.

**Ryan Donais (Founder and Executive Director, Tiny Tiny Homes):** Good afternoon, Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Ryan Donais, and I am the founder of Tiny Tiny Homes, a charity organization focused on transitional housing for people experiencing homelessness.

I also come with lived experience. I first experienced homelessness at 16, while still in foster care. Over the next 10 years, I spent that time on the streets, in and out of jail and stuck in a cycle of destroying my future. What I needed most was not just a shelter bed; I needed stability. I needed privacy. I needed a safe place where I could focus on rebuilding my life.

When you're stuck in survival mode every day, it's hard to work on addiction, trauma, employment, education or mental health. Housing creates a foundation for recovery and stability. That experience has led me to create Tiny Tiny Homes. I believe that healing begins with housing.

One of our residents, Brent Blake, was living with stage 4 cancer. He was the nicest guy in the world. He was humble, proud and the type of person who would not accept a dollar from anyone. He also wouldn't go to a shelter. We were able to get Brent in a tiny home and then into permanent housing for the last few months of his life. We offered him something the system couldn't, which was a path back to his own dignity.

One thing I would like the committee to understand is that homelessness is not one-size-fits-all. Different populations require different solutions. While tiny homes are where we started, we believe it's only a small part of the bigger picture of housing. The real goal

is creating pathways out of homelessness through a multi-level approach of stable, affordable and supportive housing.

In Toronto, we currently have tiny homes operating, and we're working on launching another larger location this summer. One of our major projects is a 10-unit youth housing development in Chatham, Ontario, focused on youth exiting foster care and youth experiencing homelessness. These young people are at an extremely high risk of chronic homelessness after aging out of care. Our goal is to provide small private units with washrooms and supportive services so these youth have a stable foundation while they transition into adulthood.

All of the projects are funded by grants and donations; no funding has come from government.

From our experience on the ground, I believe there are several areas where the federal government could improve outcomes.

First, funding processes need to move faster. Small organizations often struggle with long approval timelines and complex application systems, even when projects are ready to move forward.

Second, there needs to be more support for smaller, community-led housing models. Large projects are important, but smaller projects can often be built faster, integrated into communities more easily and operated with lower costs.

Third, we need to focus on transitional and supportive housing, especially for vulnerable populations, like youth exiting foster care, people recovering from addiction, seniors and people leaving encampments.

I also believe that we need to recognize that harm reduction starts with housing first. It is next to impossible for someone to recover from addiction, improve their mental health or stabilize their life while living outside in survival mode every single day. Housing gives people the stability needed to begin working on the deeper issues they are facing.

In Toronto, the average cost of a shelter bed is about \$136 per night, and in specialized shelter settings, the costs are significantly higher. On a most basic level, it is often cheaper to house people than to keep them homeless in emergency systems.

Beyond the financial cost, stable housing also reduces pressure on hospitals, policing, emergency services and the justice system. Housing creates stability before a crisis happens. At a time when every public dollar matters, we should be prioritizing housing models that deliver the greatest number of housing outcomes per dollar invested. By embracing lower-cost housing solutions, we can help more Canadians without increasing overall spending.

Finally, I believe we need to remember that housing is not just infrastructure. Housing is health care, housing is prevention, housing is public safety and housing is dignity. Everybody deserves a safe place to stabilize their life and build a future.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today.

I look forward to your questions.

• (1555)

**The Chair:** Thank you so much for your testimony, Mr. Donais.

The question round will be interesting.

Go ahead for six minutes, Mr. Aitchison.

I'd like to change places with you, but I can't.

**Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We'll give you an opportunity. You can exercise your prerogative a little later on.

Thank you to all of the witnesses who are here today. We appreciate your coming.

I'm going to start with Mr. Lethby.

You and I have talked a few times about what I think is quite a miraculous transformation of the homeless youth situation in Niagara. I'm wondering, though, if you can explain to us a little bit about the homeless and the shelter system generally, and how people find themselves in the situation that you found yourself in.

For example, politicians seem to think that the solution is more money for more beds. I wonder if you can elaborate on that a bit for the committee.

Basically, tell us what we've been doing wrong.

**Michael Lethby:** Thank you for the question.

This is a solution that's over 100 years old. I was over in England not too long ago, and I found that there was a shelter that was created for people coming in to work in the cities. This has been our response. What's happened is that while our society has changed over time, our response has stayed largely the same.

In the past, people would come in, mostly men, and it was for very temporary stays. What's happened now is that we have a shelter system that's trying to deal with all of the population, utilizing a model that was really designed for another time.

From a politician's standpoint, especially as a mayor... Mayors tend to be the politicians who hear about homelessness the most. They're the ones taking the calls, because there's someone downtown, and the answer tends to be very understandable: You see someone on the street and you assume they need a place to go, so a

shelter seems to be the logical in-between place, because we all know housing is unaffordable.

I'll say that I've been doing this work for 20 years, and housing has always been unaffordable. I've never been in a time where housing was affordable, but the same answer comes through, and it's being reinforced only now by the courts, which are saying that the answer to homelessness is that you must provide shelter. The direction to municipalities is that they must provide shelter, so from a legal standpoint, we're entrenching shelter even further into our system, which then makes it very difficult to look at other options.

**Scott Aitchison:** I want to continue with this line of questioning.

You focus very much on diversion, on diverting young people from ever becoming homeless in the first place. We heard a stat in the last meeting that a staggering number of people are experiencing homelessness as adults, but that their first experience with homelessness was before they were 24 years old.

The work that you are doing now is not just about young people today. It's about the future. I'm wondering if you can speak a little more about that work and about what the biggest barrier is to diverting people from becoming homeless in the first place.

• (1600)

**Michael Lethby:** In a research study I conducted in 2006, we did an interview with about 160 entrenched homeless people in the Niagara region. About 45% of that population identified that they were first homeless as teens, so we have very local research that shows this problem. Actually, part of the development of our program was that study back in 2006.

As for the biggest barrier, prevention takes time. That's probably one of the biggest barriers. If you're the mayor and you're getting all of those calls, it's hard for someone to stand up and say, "Well, we have a solution, but it's going to take five to 10 years to have effect." That's the tough part about prevention: It's generational. It takes time before it takes effect, in which case you have to have your emergency shelter system running at the same speed as you're running your prevention. Because it's in a crisis moment and people tend to want to deliver crisis services, it's always hard to champion a prevention model that doesn't directly address the crisis.

However, we have found that our shelter diversion program is probably the best of the early-adoptive prevention programs, because we're currently seeing a 70% chance of diversion. Seventy per cent of young people who had never been in shelter before were able to divert to safe and appropriate housing, and if they have had experience with homelessness, we're still seeing a diversion rate of about 40%, for an overall diversion rate of about 53% to 59%.

**Scott Aitchison:** I have 40 seconds left here. I want to make sure we don't demonize very well-meaning people whose *raison d'être* is to grow their organization and house as many people as possible. I think that's very well meaning, but you're telling us that it's not really the solution.

**Michael Lethby:** In my experience, it's not the solution. In my experience, we look at housing, and we look at boxes, and I see families.

**Scott Aitchison:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Aitchison.

[Translation]

Mr. Joseph, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to take this opportunity to not only thank all the witnesses who are here, but also let them know that their contribution to this study is truly invaluable.

Mr. Rousseau, as a professional responsible for administering the Reaching Home program, how do you suggest we improve it?

**Pierre Rousseau:** In my experience, the program is vast. It addresses many housing needs, from the search for housing to emergency shelters. It naturally works on a project-by-project basis.

In short, what puts organizations in a difficult spot is the late announcements. You should know that the Reaching Home program is a very important funder for people in Quebec, in addition to the Quebec government's interdepartmental action plan on homelessness, or PAII. However, the late announcement of this funding's renewal has consequences on how we manage our organization and on our staff retention. We don't know where we stand. If possible, we should get an announcement about the renewal, please, because there are pressing needs.

I would go further. In Quebec, there's the Programme de soutien aux organismes communautaires, or PSOC, which is a recurring program. In my view, given its importance, the Reaching Home program should also be a recurring program with projects every two years.

We administer non-profit organizations, but there are important management rules that apply, as in businesses. For example, managing to carry over money from one year to the next would be an invaluable gift. The executive director and the people who administer the organizations should also be allowed to have sound management. It's no good trying to scrounge up the money.

For example, money is announced in February, but we have to spend that money by March 31. Come March 31, we're going to spend it, or rather, we're going to invest, we're going to buy things, but if that funding were renewed, paid in advance from the start, it would give us more predictability.

I realized that when I was administering the Reaching Home program. Organizations were in a tough spot. For example, if they wanted to do capital work, they had to find contractors and everything, which can overlap two fiscal years. There's a rigidity that we shouldn't have anymore.

It's important to avoid late announcements, then. Funds should be set aside to give to organizations so that they can carry out their activities, rather than carry out last-minute projects by making investments before March 31, as if it were a race. We'll always find investments, but if we receive the money a bit earlier, we'll be able to do something.

The same is true for the community encampment response plan, or CERP, where shelters work closely with people in encampments. An organization like ours, La Halte du coin, offers 45 beds, and we also manage two trailers under the Jacques-Cartier Bridge. Our organization is located next to Montreal. There's a sea of people there. You heard us when we mentioned the number of different faces we have seen. We do a lot of work regarding chronic issues.

I'm going to digress a bit. I want to add the fact that we have the unique characteristic of being a gateway. We work with other organizations on transitions as well, but also on six-month, one-year and three-year periods. In short, those are the improvements I wanted to highlight.

Naturally, I have to say this: Demand has increased. We've increased the number of beds from 30 to 45, and the number of refusals has almost doubled. The demand from people experiencing homelessness is increasing. The number of people in distress is increasing.

I welcome the government's investment, which has increased Reaching Home's funding, which is rising. However, there should be more funding. As a shelter, we're able to get people off the streets through extended emergency programs.

In October, we introduced a program for which we received 105 people.

It's a race against time; that's true, and my colleague is right to say so. People need to be given more time.

• (1605)

**Natilien Joseph:** Since I have about two minutes left, I'm going to ask you another question.

Do you think that more predictability or flexibility in funding would enable organizations to devote more resources to direct services rather than administrative management?

**Pierre Rousseau:** Yes, inevitably.

That would be reassuring for us, since we have to manage everything. It's important to have perfect management, sound management. If we don't have predictability, it hinders us enormously. We manage to make expenditures and investments, but if there had been sound management, we might have spent those funds on something else. Since it happens at the last minute, we're fighting against a public service rule.

**Natilien Joseph:** Thank you, Mr. Rousseau.

Ms. Favreau, if you had three priority recommendations to make to the committee, what would they be?

**Frédérique Favreau:** The first is to invest in prevention. Numerous studies have proven the importance of prevention.

Mr. Rousseau and I often say that if the goal is to shut off the tap at La Halte du coin, the shelter spaces, then it's really important to invest in prevention and the encampments, things that existed less before.

The longer these people are left out by the water, as is the case in Longueuil, the more they get left behind. That means it takes more resources, more time and more energy to reintegrate them.

The other option is really about housing. I'm talking about supportive housing, not just housing. If we just put these people in housing without any follow-up or support, that's when we have a problem.

**Natilien Joseph:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Joseph.

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for sharing their various opinions with us. It was interesting. Mr. Lethby and Mr. Donais, thank you as well.

My first questions are for the La Halte du coin representatives.

Ms. Favreau and Mr. Rousseau, thank you very much for being here. I don't have a question about your comments on the numbers. It's quite incredible to see that the number of refusals has doubled even though there are additional beds.

I represent the riding of Shefford, whose main city is Granby. I can confirm that homelessness has shifted a lot. It has become a real problem for the Granby region; it's no longer just a problem for Montreal. The face of homelessness is definitely changing.

In fact, my first question is about the increase in homelessness. Mr. Rousseau, in your remarks, you talked about the new face of homelessness. Beyond the numbers, who are these new people who are experiencing homelessness?

• (1610)

**Pierre Rousseau:** It's really varied. Having worked in Montreal and patrolled the poorest neighbourhoods, I can say that gentrification has taken place. There were people who were struggling to make ends meet at the end of the month because of the rising cost of living, poverty, housing renovations and evictions. These are people who were already struggling to get by.

Some of these people were getting organized; they were on welfare, but they couldn't make ends meet. A welfare benefit is \$865 for one person, whereas a one-bedroom unit costs \$1,100. The solution was to share an apartment, but when people fought, they came back to the shelter.

There are also a lot of homeless seniors. When people get to the shelter, they're always a bit distant from their family. If they come to La Halte du coin, it's because something was wrong before they arrived. Whether it's a 93-year-old, a young person who has just left

a youth centre or someone who can no longer afford their housing, we really want to direct them to organizations, such as L'Antre-Temps. We naturally accept young people, but there are a lot more young people and seniors who need support. I'll give the example of a couple where one spouse was visually impaired; a worker would walk around with that spouse, but that would monopolize one person. That image is unbelievable and shocking.

Ms. Favreau, do you want to add anything about the new faces of homelessness?

**Frédérique Favreau:** I think you have covered the issue, but I can confirm that many more seniors need help, particularly because of renovations. That's quite staggering. As I was saying, we sometimes wonder if we haven't become a residential and long-term care home.

**Andréanne Larouche:** I can confirm that, in Granby, the main issue for the Association québécoise de défense des droits locale is the number of renovations and of seniors ending up on the streets.

I was listening to a report last Thursday when I was on the road back to my riding after my work week. The report confirmed that the combined income from the old age security pension and the guaranteed income supplement—you were talking about the amount of social assistance—no longer enabled seniors to afford to pay their rent. Given that, combined with what you already said about young people leaving youth centres, I think we can see that the faces of homelessness have changed dramatically.

Food Banks Canada published its report this morning. I'm going to consult it to see the new faces of the people seeking food aid. We agree that two of the most essential items, which have gone through the most inflation, are housing and the ability to put food on the table. Those are two basic needs.

What are the causes? You talked about the lack of income. Is it the lack of a continuum of services? Is it more a lack of funding for support programs? You talked about Reaching Home. Regarding the encampment program, in January I met with organizations that were lamenting the fact that they didn't have confirmation that their program could go ahead. Many organizations benefited from this program in my riding.

What are the consequences of that?

**Pierre Rousseau:** This naturally leads to insecurity.

The causes of homelessness include breakups, workplace accidents and addictions. This is well known and is very broad. You mentioned food assistance. We run a day centre three days a week when we're open to the public. People, including those at risk of homelessness, also come to us for a meal. That, too, is skyrocketing.

We're already in trouble when social alienation begins. An organization like La Halte du coin has seen its number of beds drop from 45 to 35. We had to reduce our capacity by 10 beds because La Halte du coin will run a deficit this year. Despite the help of a foundation that is covering part of our deficit, we'll still be in the red. So, thank you for the effort, thank you for what has been done, and thank you for the increase in VCS, but honestly, it isn't enough. This means our number of beds will drop from 45 to 35. It breaks our hearts.

• (1615)

**Frédérique Favreau:** Regarding the CERP, that is, the community encampment response plans, I had a meeting this morning on this topic, and the figures have still not been confirmed to date. La Halte du coin helped with a project involving trailers under the metro during the winter. Over the winter, at that location alone, aside from La Halte, we welcomed 12,000 people to a community café.

We're already concerned about what we'll do if the funding doesn't come through or if we don't have the same amounts confirmed for next year. Will we be able to help on the same scale this year, even just for the winter?

All these people have returned to the waterfront to live in tents. If you pass through Longueuil, you'll be able to see them. As Mr. Rousseau said, the more we put them in encampments, the more socially disconnected they become. It then becomes difficult to bring them back with us, into society.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[English]

Ms. DeRidder.

**Kelly DeRidder (Kitchener Centre, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** You have five minutes, ma'am. Welcome.

We have a number of new members this afternoon.

**Kelly DeRidder:** I'm going to start with Mr. Donais.

Thank you for coming and sharing your story. From one person to another who slept on the streets, the more we talk about it, the more we'll make change in this country. I'm grateful for your courage and for your desire for a solution to what we're seeing here in this country.

One thing I think we haven't focused on yet today is how addiction surrounds homelessness and how it's a piece of the puzzle of what we're seeing in this country today.

There is an encampment in Kitchener, where it was just ruled that the encampment is going to stay because housing needs to be provided, which you said is stifling progress. I agree with you, sir. Our office went and talked to 22 of those residents in that encampment, and of those 22, only one wasn't using. I think a piece of that is recovery services for addiction and focusing on your big, beautiful life on the other side of addiction.

Can you just speak to how that transitional piece will help with focusing on stabilization and recovery for people trapped in addiction?

**Ryan Donais:** Addiction definitely played a part in my homelessness, and recovery was a big part of ending that cycle and getting out of that cycle.

I don't think the solution is spending more money; I think it's to spend money differently and divert it towards the places it should go. There are a lot of seniors who just need a small rent supplement.

If we spend money differently, we can divert money towards more things like addiction services. Right now, in any major city in Canada, if you call city services and say that you want to go to rehab, those services are months away. We need more wraparound supports, and we need more pathways towards ending the behaviour that causes homelessness.

**Kelly DeRidder:** I agree completely.

Mr. Lethby, you spoke about youth today. Can you speak to how poor mental health, addictions, family breakdown and social isolation become a part of youth entering homelessness? If we just concentrated more on upstream funding, could we break those cycles before these youth fall into addiction?

**Michael Lethby:** A famous study in World War II looked at planes that survived and saw where the planes had taken damage. Then they assumed that they needed to strengthen these parts of the plane, but in fact it was the opposite: It was the planes that didn't survive that needed work, not the planes that survived. Similarly, in homelessness, we see lots of addiction, lots of mental health problems and lots of poverty, but we're not actually seeing all the people who didn't become homeless.

If you look at serious addiction in Canada, you see that it is probably at 16%, while 1% of the population is homeless at any given time. If addiction were a major driver of homelessness, we would expect to see a lot more homeless people, but we're not. Why? That's the question.

The answer is what I call the "unifying theory of homelessness". People are homeless because of an inability to leverage a social relationship for housing. Why are people with serious addictions not flooding our streets? It's because they have family and friends who go out of their way to make sure these people are housed.

The people we see on the streets are there because, for some reason, they have not been able to access those supports. Our work is to recognize that and see how we can support people in bettering their relationships and then allow the system—the natural system, not the for-profit, paid system—to support people through housing.

• (1620)

**Kelly DeRidder:** Thank you.

It's not in 100% of the cases that they have supports. I had family who loved me very much, but they showed me tough love. While I was in active addiction, I wasn't allowed home, but when I was ready to recover, I was. That's also a piece of it, I think, moving forward.

There are some people who fall in because it was fun in high school. Then it turns into something they didn't ever expect would happen. We need to support anybody who, at any given moment, wants and needs to recover.

Mr. Donais, if you were to make the decision today, can you say how fleeting that decision is and how quickly we need to respond when someone says they're ready?

**Ryan Donais:** We need to set people up for success. Recovering from addiction is not just going to treatment. It's going to detox, waiting to get into treatment, going to treatment and then the housing aftercare that follows.

If you've been in active addiction for however long, it's many times longer to unlearn the behaviour. We need to put more supports in place, not just for addiction but for mental health. We need to support people in ending the cycle of homelessness.

**Kelly DeRidder:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. DeRidder.

Madam Romanado, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here with us today.

I'll start with you, Mr. Rousseau and Ms. Favreau. Thank you. As the member for Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, the other riding in Longueuil, with the Jacques-Cartier Bridge—I'm very familiar with the work you do.

You touched briefly on prevention and the importance of having not only housing, but also all the necessary support services. After I was elected in 2015, at one of the first meetings I had with the Table itinérance Rive-Sud, I asked why there was homelessness on the south shore. I said that couldn't be true, that everyone was doing fine. They told me about the programs and explained the problem of the lack of an ecosystem. So, if someone has an addiction or mental health issue and things aren't going well with their family, we can give them a place to live, but they won't have any guidance or support.

Can you give us your advice on how to support people experiencing homelessness? It's not just a matter of finding affordable housing. There needs to be a whole system around that. Can you share your advice with us?

**Pierre Rousseau:** Absolutely.

I like using images. Many of you may have played the game snakes and ladders as children. Recovery and homelessness move at the pace of the people experiencing them. For some, this is the first step. Some people will benefit from the ladder, so we adjust

accordingly. The challenge for shelters is to take in all these people who aren't in the same place.

I understand that supported housing is incredibly important. However, we are dealing with a huge number of people in chronic situations, and it's heartbreaking.

In the Longueuil region, organizations are separate, but we work very well as a team. If La Halte du coin is the sink in a plumbing system—I like images—and the continuum is made up of transitional housing and supervised apartments, then that continuum is blocked. This pushes shelters to try things like the ECHO project or extended emergency housing. It's contradictory for an emergency shelter to provide extended emergency housing, but that's because we're racing against the clock. We've been doing this since October, and out of 105 people, 75 have gone into therapy. It's true that they go to therapy and then come back, too. We're working with a very tough group.

So, there's no magic solution. We have to adapt. It's frustrating in a way, because we want this just as much as those people do, and fatigue is also setting in. However, we have to respect this continuum and acknowledge where people are in their journey. We can't just wave a magic wand and put everyone into housing, thinking we'll end homelessness. It doesn't work that way. There has to be support, and unfortunately, along this arduous journey, some people will stumble, get back up and stumble again.

What matters is building relationships of trust. Shelters like ours, for example, will refuse to take in more than 50 people, because we know the individuals, and we build relationships with them. This is the beginning of re-engagement and self-esteem, through projects like ECHO, where, with the Quebec ministry of employment and social solidarity, we provided a small stipend. People received training from the Association québécoise pour la réadaptation psychosociale. They have become individuals who share their lived experience. They are integrated into training programs for future case workers. All of this is about restoring dignity.

It's difficult, Mrs. Romanado. To answer your question, it's very complex. I'm taking a lot of time. My apologies.

• (1625)

**Sherry Romanado:** I'll just ask Mr. Lethby a question.

[*English*]

Mr. Lethby, you talked a little about a success story in terms of youth and prevention and keeping kids out of homelessness. I'm assuming that you've had to work very closely with municipalities, with schools, with teachers, with social workers and so on to successfully implement that program. What would you recommend to those who are trying to do similar work in terms of hoping that one day we won't need shelters? What is your hope that all levels of government, all intervenors, can work together for that common goal of making sure that if somebody is at risk right now, they don't get to the point of being homeless?

Could you give us any insight?

**Michael Lethby:** Yes, that's 100% right. We've had to work with the whole community in order to support youth. It's not something that my agency can do alone, but I do think it's important that all the services focus on the thing that they do well, instead of trying to do all the other things. That's where I find there's some conflict.

We focus on youth and on making sure they get into housing.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Romanado.

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for two minutes and 30 seconds.

**Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Once again, witnesses, you are unsung heroes. You are changing people's lives through your work, what you do every day. What's more, some of you are doing this after having gone through difficult times yourselves. That is a great credit to you.

I'd like to digress for a moment. Mr. Rousseau, you mentioned earlier that divorce can be a cause of homelessness, and you spoke about the game snakes and ladders. My first encounter with people experiencing homelessness was as a teenager, when I spent an evening at the Maison du Père in Montreal serving meals. Afterward, I was invited to chat with the people there. I played cards with a man who had been a lawyer but had lost everything following a divorce. He ended up on the street. So, it's true that there are many causes.

Ms. Favreau and Mr. Rousseau, I'll ask you a question first, and if there's time, other witnesses can answer it.

Several organizations in Quebec advocate for a continuum-of-care approach. At this time, does a single-approach model like Housing First truly meet the needs of all profiles of people experiencing homelessness? I think your testimony has already confirmed this.

There are organizations in my region. I'm thinking of the people at Auberge sous mon toit and Le Passant shelter, who, during a meeting, used the image of steps on a staircase. It's one step at a time. If you skip a step, you might fall. It's a bit like the snakes and ladders game you mentioned.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on this. Maybe housing alone doesn't solve everything.

**Pierre Rousseau:** There is a wide range of people experiencing homelessness. We've kept some individuals in the shelter longer because they were about to move into housing with the help of the Quebec's rent supplement program. That's a breath of fresh air, a great idea, and it can truly help. However, it doesn't work for everyone.

As a shelter, we don't want to exist. We don't want to see the line keep getting longer. That's not what we want to do, but given the current situation, we can't hope that...

It comes down to housing, but with support, once people are ready and have reached that point. That's difficult and it takes a long time—and for some, it's a long and discouraging process. There are people we've known for three years. I've known people

for three years, and some of them have gotten off the streets. However, it takes a very long time. For others, it really doesn't take long at all, because they have social skills or even a small support network. They're able to get back on their feet quickly, and we support them. They feel valued. We know their names and we build a relationship. For them, things go well.

It's true, Ms. Larouche, that housing isn't everything, but it's important too. People experiencing homelessness are a community. I'll stop there.

• (1630)

**Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[*English*]

We'll go to Mr. Davies for five minutes.

**Fred Davies (Niagara South, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lethby, I want to start by saying how much I appreciated meeting you about a week and a half ago, I guess it was, and going to Raft.

For those in the committee, I'll say as a resident of Niagara that Niagara is composed of 12 municipalities. Raft is in the city of St. Catharines.

You have a youth homeless shelter. What is the typical profile of someone who would come to your facility?

**Michael Lethby:** Typically it would be a young person between the ages of 16 and 24 who is looking for shelter. A large percentage of these young people would have a history of care at some point. Probably about 40% of the young people coming into my shelter have been in the system somehow.

The other side is that addictions and mental health would definitely be factors. Moving out on their own, not knowing how to deal with a landlord or even being able to start the process, and not understanding how to engage the system properly would all be characteristics.

**Fred Davies:** In a region like Niagara, with so many municipalities, we tend to exist in silos, and we had this discussion. How is it that people from Port Colborne, for example, or Fort Erie or Wainfleet, could actually find their way to your shelter? It's quite a distance.

**Michael Lethby:** That was one of the things I found back in 2007, when we had those 500 youth coming. We assumed that the majority were from St. Catharines, but when I looked at who was actually coming, I saw that 60% or more were actually from all the communities around St. Catharines.

What we found most troubling at the time was that this group of youth was particularly vulnerable. They were vulnerable not only from their experiences of homelessness but also because we were forcing them to travel to St. Catharines in order to have access to shelter.

At the time, I called it the bus station challenge. Anyone could go to the bus station and watch the out-of-town bus and tell when someone coming off that bus was not from the city. What was happening was that not only did I have no outreach, but drug dealers and pimps did. They would wait at the bus station for those kids to come off a bus. Then they'd bring them in and say, "Do you need a place to stay? Do you want to smoke?" We even had examples of gangs enrolling students in high school in order to bring drugs into that school or to recruit for human trafficking.

That's what happened, and when we started Youth Reconnect, that's why the program was so successful. It's because we were able to keep kids in their community so that they never had to travel to receive service. We didn't force them to become vulnerable in order to access service.

**Fred Davies:** One of the biggest issues that I have encountered over the years has to do with the right of people to maintain their privacy. Kids who are facing difficulty or who are in a shelter have the right to say that they don't want their parents to be involved. They have the right to deny access.

In communication in your diversion program, you rely heavily on family, on friends, on school. In our situation in Niagara, if somebody is a fair distance away and they say, "I don't want my parents to know where I am," you don't have the right to make that call. Am I correct?

• (1635)

**Michael Lethby:** That's correct.

**Fred Davies:** How often have you encountered that, and what are the specific issues and challenges in dealing with that?

**Michael Lethby:** It definitely is an issue.

One of the first things we ask through shelter diversion is, "Who is your family? Who are your people?" For about 65% of youth, we found that family conflict is largely what's driving youth homelessness. If you ask the youth why they're coming to the shelter, it somehow breaks down ultimately to a conflict with family.

What we also found is that there still is a drive to be attached to family and friends. That's still their community. Sometimes it's a matter of just giving people a bit of time and saying, "You're safe. Regardless of what happens, you're safe." If it takes a week, maybe then we can re-engage and see if...

Family is much larger than just a couple of people. When we talk about family and friends, we're talking about your entire community. It could be a grandparent, a cousin, an older sibling. When we're asking for permission to speak to family, we're really looking beyond someone you might have an immediate conflict with to a much larger group, especially in rural communities, where families tend to be larger and physically placed.

**Fred Davies:** I know I have only about 10 seconds left, but I have one question related to access to parents and sharing of information.

Can you recommend a solution to us? What do we need to do to fix that, so that we can get more help and get more of our youth into better facilities?

**Michael Lethby:** I don't think I have anything to offer on that. I believe in privacy. I think people have a right to privacy. I think it's how we approach the question that is important from the service side.

**Fred Davies:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Davies.

We'll conclude with Mr. Saini.

Mr. Saini, you have five minutes.

**Gurbux Saini (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses.

It's very heartbreaking to hear the stories, especially living in the country that we live in. It's sad that it happens.

My question is for you, Mr. Lethby.

You said a lot of the people are coming as youth. Is it family breakdown? Is it a cultural issue? What are the issues? What is forcing these kids to be in these situations?

**Michael Lethby:** It really is legion, the number of issues that kids are facing. As I mentioned, largely, we know that 40% have had experiences in care. If you're going to look at the single largest risk factor someone may have, it would be their history of care—it is definitely one of them.

Then, if you think about it—again, through my social lens—when you're taken into care, especially with protection being so mandated, the system tends to block you from family. Family is seen as the danger that you need to be protected against, although this is changing, definitely, for the kids who are coming through. Prevention is generational. A change made now will take 25 years before we start to see the effect. That would be the number one reason.

At the core of all of it is family.... It could be as simple as someone not following the rules. Maybe they've started not going to school and maybe they've started smoking pot in their room, or it could be all the way up to the most horrific abuses you could possibly imagine. When we talk about family conflict, then, we really do have to look at it from a nuanced perspective to see if it's something most horrific, or maybe there could be a little conversation between the two of them—the parent and the child—to say maybe there are some rules they could follow and sort of work it out.

**Gurbux Saini:** Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Donais.

Looking at the data, it shows that a high proportion of homeless youths are from LGB communities. In keeping with your experience, what are some of the unique challenges facing this population?

**Ryan Donais:** I don't have a lot of experience in that field, so I wouldn't be able to talk much about that. I'm sorry.

**Gurbux Saini:** Do any of the other panellists have any experience in this?

[*Translation*]

**Frédérique Favreau:** At La Halte du coin, we welcome people from all walks of life. We don't have any expertise in this area, but it's clear that these people face more stigma than our regular clientele. There's a mix of people. We try to provide a space for these individuals, if they wish to use it, but we don't have any expertise in this area. We also don't have many people from that community in our organization.

• (1640)

[*English*]

**Gurbux Saini:** Thank you.

If the committee were going to make some recommendations, what would be the three things you would want this committee to take to the Government of Canada and say, “We need to help these people, and this is how we can go forward”?

Go ahead, Mr. Lethby.

**Michael Lethby:** Thank you.

Three things.... First, the critical piece for families in Canada is affordable housing. A housing strategy that doesn't include the largest provider of affordable housing is destined to fail.

Second, we need to start prevention programs. We have researched programs. We have a large body of knowledge now. We need to start actually implementing the programs, with time for research. It needs to continue, but we need to actually start doing it.

Finally, we need to start increasing the productivity in shelters. We need to look at how shelters operate. We need to start seeing reduced lengths of stay and more success with housing. We can no longer allow for an unproductive system.

**Gurbux Saini:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Saini.

That concludes the first hour of this meeting. We'll suspend momentarily while we transition to the next hour.

Thank you so much to the witnesses who appeared. Your testimony was extremely informative for this study.

We'll suspend for three minutes.

• (1640)

(Pause)

• (1645)

**The Chair:** Committee members, we are back in session. All our witnesses are virtual for this last hour.

I would just briefly remind those participating online that you have the option to participate in today's meeting in the official language of your choice. Click on the globe icon at the bottom of your screen and choose the language you wish to participate in. If there is an issue, please get my attention. We'll suspend while it's corrected.

As well, please direct all questions through the chair and wait until I recognize you.

We'll begin with up to five-minute opening statements from each member.

We have with us Maxime Rainville, Corporation de développement communautaire de Brome-Missisquoi; Cédric Champagne, Entrée chez soi Brome-Missisquoi; and Sheldon Pollett, Raising the Roof.

We'll begin with Monsieur Rainville for five minutes.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

**Maxime Rainville (Representative, Corporation de développement communautaire de Brome-Missisquoi):** Good afternoon.

My name is Maxime Rainville. I represent the Corporation de développement communautaire de Brome-Missisquoi, or CDCBM. Currently, the corporation is a coalition of multisectoral community organizations with 60 active members. The CDCBM ensures the active participation of the autonomous community action movement in the socio-economic development of its community. In fact, what sets us apart is that we have—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Rainville, I'm going to ask you to stop. There is a sound issue. We'll correct it.

I'm going to move to Cédric Champagne for your opening five-minute statement, Mr. Champagne.

We'll get back to you, Monsieur Rainville.

[*Translation*]

**Cédric Champagne (Director, Entrée chez soi Brome-Missisquoi):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Vice-chairs and members of the committee, good afternoon.

First, I would like to thank you for the invitation to appear that you extended to Entrée chez soi Brome—Missisquoi. I would like to extend special thanks to Mr. Villeneuve, the member for our riding.

Our organization's mission is to support people living with mental health challenges in their own communities. We promote the independence of our members and support their ability to take action. We see ourselves as agents of social change and hope. It is in my capacity as director of this organization, and as a daily witness to the humanitarian crisis unfolding on the ground, that I am addressing you today.

Homelessness is no longer an exclusively urban phenomenon; it is now hitting our regions, our regional county municipalities, or RCMs, and our rural communities hard. To address this, we must adapt our tools.

One such tool is the Reaching Home program, one of the best federal programs offered in recent years. Its flexibility is remarkable. It allows communities to work together and identify their own priorities, particularly by not imposing innovation at all costs as a requirement. It allows for the continuity of structural projects that support people over the long term. However, its main shortcoming lies in the division of funding between the “designated communities” and “rural and remote homelessness”, or RRH, components.

My region, Brome—Missisquoi, falls under the RRH component. For the entire Estrie region, with the exception of Sherbrooke, the amounts received are significantly lower than those of a designated community, yet the needs are just as pressing, if not more so. In rural areas, the population dispersion and lack of basic infrastructure contribute to higher costs for interventions. We can no longer settle for microprojects or the distribution of grocery gift cards, which do not provide sufficient long-term support.

To achieve zero homelessness, we must build sustainable infrastructure. Our first recommendation would be to abolish the rigid term “designated communities” and instead revise the distribution of funding based on natural catchment areas and the actual proportion of needs within the RCMs.

Our second recommendation would be to significantly increase funding for physical infrastructure, bricks and mortar, which is a major blind spot in current public and private budgets.

Let's turn to housing and support for housing stability. Social and community housing is the cornerstone of this support. In Quebec, the Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain estimates the shortfall at 150,000 subsidized housing units. Here in Brome-Missisquoi, the 2021 census revealed that nearly 20,000 people were eligible for income-based subsidized housing, while only 665 units were available in social and community housing. Furthermore, 21% of renters in our RCM spend more than 30% of their income on housing.

The federal government must urgently reinvest massively in public construction models, as it did in the 1980s. But be warned: Simply providing a roof over one's head is not enough. Moving from the street to a closed, fixed and restrictive space can generate significant anxiety for people experiencing homelessness. Without support, their instinct is to return to what is familiar, namely, the street.

Our third recommendation would be to systematically fund services that support housing stability, with guidance to help them make this transition successfully, just as support is provided to a military member transitioning to civilian life, to an employee retiring, or even to a child becoming a teenager. Solutions must be varied, including rooming houses, transitional housing and supervised apartments, in order to respect the freedom of choice of unhoused individuals.

Third, let's discuss mental health disorders combined with homelessness. More than one in two people experiencing homelessness lives with a diagnosed mental health disorder, not to mention those who remain undiagnosed. Housing is a major determinant of health. The stress of being unable to pay rent causes anxiety. A psychotic episode can lead to eviction. Extreme heat waves with no way to

cool off exacerbate symptoms and interfere with medication. It's a vicious cycle: living on the street worsens mental health, and worsening mental health leads back to the street. Added to this are persistent prejudices from landlords during viewings and stigma from neighbours.

Our third recommendation would be to create flexible funding envelopes dedicated to mental health disorders, addiction crises and housing crises, to be managed by frontline workers who know the faces of this distress.

Fourth, there is an urgent need for an intergovernmental truce. I must mention a major obstacle: overlapping jurisdictions and jurisdictional disputes, particularly in Quebec. To receive federal funding, Quebec organizations must obtain authorization under the Act respecting the Ministère du Conseil exécutif, Bill M-30, which leads to administrative delays of approximately eight weeks—and that's when the funding process isn't simply stalled for two or three years while the various levels of government reach an agreement.

• (1655)

The field should never bear the brunt of political friction. This leads to our fifth recommendation: that the federal and provincial governments enter into a permanent agreement to exempt funds intended for vulnerable populations from the delays caused by Bill M-30, and that the federal government refrain from imposing rigid sector-specific conditions, allowing communities to decide their own priorities.

In conclusion, people experiencing homelessness are full-fledged citizens. They have the right to dignity, safety and hope. Give us the means to act effectively in our communities.

Thank you for listening. I will be pleased to answer your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Champagne.

Mr. Rainville, we're back to you, and you have the floor for five minutes.

**Maxime Rainville:** Thank you for inviting the Brome-Missisquoi Community Development Corporation, or CDCBM, a multisectoral coalition of community organizations dedicated to supporting and assisting its 60 members and advocating for their issues, interests and contributions. The CDCBM ensures the active participation of the autonomous community action movement in the socio-economic development of its community from a social justice perspective.

I would like to begin by stating that, for us, there is an inseparable link between homelessness and the housing crisis that is hitting households hard, particularly in the wake of the pandemic. The skyrocketing rise in property values, the increase in the cost of building materials, rising rents and, incidentally, the rise in abuse and discrimination of all kinds against the most vulnerable populations have weakened the social fabric and exacerbated the disruptions in the life trajectories of people who were already vulnerable.

Homelessness, however, is not merely a phenomenon of housing scarcity. It is also a phenomenon of social disaffiliation in the lives of individuals within a context marked by rising social inequalities, the deterioration of public services and the general fragility of populations in terms of mental health, among other factors. All of our community organizations are affected, as are the public services with which we collaborate, and they face an increasingly difficult workload.

The core intervention approach advocated by community stakeholders regarding these vulnerable populations is based primarily on harm reduction and a holistic approach. This involves welcoming people as whole individuals, without seeking to penalize their behaviour, by guiding and supporting them toward the right resources and best practices to improve their living conditions.

While the implementation of financial support measures that promote an intervention and support approach is essential for these individuals, the component related to the supportive environment is equally so. Access to housing, free and universal public services, and an affordable basket of goods remain essential foundations for enabling people to live their lives with dignity. It is also important to remember that these individuals are full-fledged members of society with the right to citizenship and freedom of movement. By fostering a stronger sense of belonging to their community, they should have the best opportunities to contribute to and engage with their community.

More specifically, Brome-Missisquoi is, after all, a very rural area. Nevertheless, local stakeholders saw fit to create a round table on homelessness and a round table on housing, among others, in which the CDCBM actively participates. These round tables have achieved several milestones, notably the creation of warming centres, which are now supported by my colleague Mr. Champagne, who oversaw them last season. There are also plans to create a day centre for homeless people.

In the Brome-Missisquoi region, the largest city is Cowansville, with a population of 17,000. Another town, Farnham, has 11,000 residents. Nevertheless, homelessness is becoming increasingly prevalent. Issues related to homelessness are becoming more widespread. In the past, homelessness was more hidden or isolated, but it is now increasingly visible. We see people sleeping in ATM areas or in their cars. There are also encampments and small tents popping up in the underbrush near stores or in parks.

● (1700)

In more urban areas or cities, people can find many more services, whereas in rural areas, the issue of these people's safety is much more of a concern.

I'd say that's pretty much it. I have other things to say, but I'll answer questions later.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Rainville.

[English]

Mr. Pollett, you have five minutes.

**Sheldon Pollett (Executive Director, Raising the Roof):** Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about Canada's

homelessness response and specifically the role of the federal government's Reaching Home initiative.

For context, Raising the Roof is a non-profit charity committed to providing housing solutions to Canadians by developing and preserving affordable housing and offering housing at deeply affordable rates with corresponding wraparound support services wherever possible. We have an integrated model that includes workforce development through social enterprise contractors during construction and ongoing support services for tenants through local social service agencies that know their community, know their needs and have the system navigation expertise to connect them to both their own services and other complementary services in the community. It is from this perspective as an owner, operator and service provider that we are providing input to the committee today.

First, I want to acknowledge that Reaching Home has played an important role in helping communities across Canada respond to growing and increasingly complex homelessness challenges. It has strengthened community-based planning and supported frontline organizations delivering critical services in increasingly difficult conditions. Across the country, communities are facing pressures unlike anything we have seen in decades: rising housing costs, worsening mental health crises, toxic drug supply impacts, growing encampments and an increasing number of people falling into homelessness for the first time.

The reality is that homelessness is rarely caused by a single issue. As Dr. Stephen Gaetz of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness has often said, homelessness is a "fusion" policy issue. It sits at the intersection of housing affordability, mental health, addictions, health care, income security, child welfare, justice systems, education and employment. If we are serious about reducing homelessness, our systems and funding models must reflect that complexity.

One of the biggest challenges today is that homelessness-serving organizations are being asked to coordinate responses in the absence of true systems integration. Health care, housing, mental health, addictions, employment, justice and income support systems all operate in silos. Discharge planning, service coordination and data systems remain fragmented across departments and sectors. As a result, frontline organizations are left bridging gaps that should not exist in the first place.

We see the consequences every day. Shelters are becoming de facto mental health facilities. Outreach workers are responding to addictions crises without adequate clinical supports. Housing providers are increasingly expected to deliver complex health and social interventions without the operational funding required to do so effectively. At the same time, many people experiencing housing instability are looking not only for housing but also for pathways back into stability, purpose, community and employment.

That is where the next evolution of Reaching Home should go. We need to move from a crisis response model toward a more integrated prevention and stabilization model, because homelessness is rarely sudden. In many cases, it is a cumulative result of missed intervention points across, again, housing, health care, child welfare, mental health systems, addictions systems, education, employment and income supports. Because systems remain fragmented, these warning signs are often treated as isolated issues rather than signals of escalating housing instability. As a result, intervention frequently happens only after the crisis has intensified and costs have multiplied across shelters, health care systems, policing and corrections.

We need to shift from managing homelessness to preventing it. That means investing concurrently, earlier and more intentionally across departmental domains in housing stabilization and eviction prevention, mental health and addictions care, discharge planning, youth intervention, employment pathways, income supports and community-based supports.

Prevention is not only good social policy; it is also sound fiscal policy. The evidence is clear that preventing homelessness is significantly less costly than responding after people have entered repeated cycles of crisis care and emergency system use. We also need to recognize that integrated systems produce better outcomes than fragmented systems. That includes stronger alignment between affordable housing development, supportive housing and workforce development that includes social enterprise, health care and long-term community inclusion.

Within that continuum, supportive housing is particularly important, but it is also significantly more complex to deliver than housing alone. It requires not only capital funding for units but also long-term operating funding for mental health supports, addictions services, case management, staffing and ongoing building operations. Too often, capital and operating systems remain disconnected across governments and departments. This makes supportive housing difficult to finance, scale and sustain over time, particularly for the most vulnerable populations. If we want supportive housing outcomes, we need funding and policy structures designed to support integrated service delivery alongside housing itself.

- (1705)

On affordable housing more broadly, we also need to recognize that new supply alone is not enough. Preserving existing affordable housing is equally critical, because every unit lost through disrepair, conversion or market displacement increases pressure on homelessness systems. Preservation is often faster, more cost-effective and more stabilizing than rebuilding alone. There is a clear opportunity for Reaching Home, as part of a broader system strategy, to work more intentionally alongside efforts to preserve and expand deeply affordable housing.

Finally, we must strengthen the data and evaluation systems that support coordination and prevention. Community organizations need accessible, real-time tools that help them identify housing instability early, coordinate care across systems, and measure long-term outcomes. Without strong data and evaluation systems, we are making some of our most important investments without the feedback loops needed to improve them.

Ultimately, homelessness reflects the systems we build and the policy choices we make. Reaching Home should continue to evolve not simply as a homelessness program but also as part of a broader national social infrastructure strategy that recognizes housing, mental health, addictions care, employment and community inclusion as inseparable.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Pollett.

We'll now begin our first round with Mr. Aitchison for six minutes. I will be fairly disciplined on time.

**Scott Aitchison:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses.

I'd like to go right to Mr. Pollett.

I really appreciate your comments about the fragmented nature of the system that exists, and not just among levels of government—though there is some fragmentation there, of course.

Interestingly enough, I was just chatting this weekend with the Ontario Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. He happens to be my provincial counterpart in Parry Sound—Muskoka, and he's a good buddy. We went to high school together and have known each other for a long time. I also chatted about this issue with Minister Parsa, the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. It was Minister Smith who said that the way we provincially fund shelters in Ontario, for example, is that there's often money from one ministry. There is a bit included, as well, for health care, and housing is part of that too. Oftentimes, that money goes to a local service provider like a regional government, as is the case in Niagara. All too often, those funding models are based on the number of beds and don't always take into account everything else that needs to go with that.

I'm wondering if you could speak to what you would do. Let's say you could wave a magic wand and you now run everything in Canada. How would you change the system so that it isn't so fragmented at all levels of government, particularly at those levels of government that deliver this service?

• (1710)

**Sheldon Pollett:** I'm happy to answer the question.

Taking into consideration what the former panellists have talked about, not everyone experiencing a mental health issue is at risk of homelessness, to be really clear, so you still want to make those investments.

Think about investments through Health Canada, for example, around mental health challenges or youth experiencing homelessness. What is the common set of goals you want to achieve with those investments? The youth employment strategy...and the list goes on. For young people in that case, who have that common set of concerns or issues and happen to be falling into homelessness or housing instability, can you not create a common set of goals you want to achieve with those multiple strategies?

First, in any good organization, it starts with getting your own house in order. It's about bringing these departments together and saying, "Look, when we touch each other's clients—the people we're trying to support—what are the indicators we're looking for? What are the outcomes we're trying to achieve? Can we not co-invest?" It's like the federal government coming up with its own investment strategy.

I could go on, but perhaps I'll leave it right there for now.

**Scott Aitchison:** Thank you for that.

Since this is Parliament we're talking about, and the federal level... There's going to be a report coming from this committee, which will be presented to the House of Commons. It might be safe to say that there may be some comments in there about what provinces can do.

Is there something specific the federal government could be doing, in terms of the work it does with provincial governments, to change the way we look at this? I'm wondering if you have any specific thoughts about federal policy.

**Sheldon Pollett:** From my perspective, the best way to answer your question is with an example.

Look at what the federal government is trying to do in terms of labour market attachment and what you're trying to do from a business development perspective. I happen to know this, and I know you know this as well. We've had these conversations around a growing number of social enterprises built and designed to support people's needs. When they have that and we actually have a pathway to a viable social enterprise, they not only create tremendous value in labour market attachment, business development and value for communities; they also go a long way to providing people who also need affordable housing with a pathway to a brighter future.

Is that not an opportunity to coinvest, based on a combined set of principles and goals that both of those parts of the federal government are trying to achieve? You can take that and break it out to any combination of departments, such as health, justice, employ-

ment and education. All of those investments are being made by the federal government now.

How do you jointly target a group of people who at the same time need housing stability for the experiences?

**Scott Aitchison:** It sounds like what you're talking about is real partnership between levels of government.

**Sheldon Pollett:** Absolutely. If the federal government was able, as I said, to get its house in order around those common objectives it wants to achieve....

I'm not an expert in federal-provincial policy. Don't get me wrong.

**Scott Aitchison:** It's convoluted. Yes.

**Sheldon Pollett:** I think you then have an opportunity to go to the provinces with a much more coherent strategy: These are the factors. We want to coinvest across all of these domains and across various departments in the federal government. Now, have a conversation across those same domains with the provinces. I think you're more likely to achieve your goals if you know what you're trying to achieve in the first place.

**Scott Aitchison:** Okay. Thanks very much.

I'd like to have an hour.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Aitchison.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Villeneuve, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Louis Villeneuve (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I would like to welcome our witnesses and thank them for making themselves available.

I would like to extend a special greeting to Mr. Rainville and Mr. Champagne, who are both from my riding. I am very pleased to have them here.

Gentlemen, as you mentioned earlier, the Government of Canada has invested significant funds in the fight against homelessness through the Reaching Home program. In Quebec, as you mentioned, a significant portion of these funds is transferred to the Quebec government under the Canada–Quebec Agreement, meaning that their management then falls under the jurisdiction of Quebec authorities. What I'm hearing is that you're caught between the two levels of government, and that doesn't always help. I can tell you that I also experienced this when I was mayor. So I understand the situation you're in.

We've had the opportunity to meet on several occasions. I have plenty of notes on that. Among the issues raised during our meetings were calls for projects often launched at inopportune times, such as during the holidays or in the summer; application deadlines that are sometimes very short; and review and approval processes that can take several months, among other things.

Mr. Rainville, in your opinion, where does the main challenge lie today? Is it in the level of available funding or in the way funds are distributed and administered?

**Maxime Rainville:** First of all, I think it would be the available funds. Much like Mr. Champagne said, the Brome—Missisquoi riding is a region that is not a designated community for these funds.

However, as I was saying, the issue of homelessness has grown significantly since the pandemic, which has created new needs. For example, in Cowansville and Farnham, winter warming centres have been set up. Mr. Champagne could speak to this; there has also been a project for a day centre and temporary housing. These are initiatives that have emerged in recent times. To achieve this, the community has mobilized.

We must therefore take into account the fact that more and more rural communities, so to speak, are experiencing homelessness and that the community is not always prepared to deal with it. Furthermore, new initiatives must be created to meet these needs. Obviously, the community must adapt to all of this. Organizations must also adapt to this new reality, because we are committed to helping these people effectively.

**Louis Villeneuve:** Mr. Champagne, how has homelessness changed in your community over the past five years?

**Cédric Champagne:** Over the past year, we've seen a twelfefold increase in the number of people using warming centres. So, compared to last year, there are twelve times as many people using them.

In 2022–23, our unit recorded approximately 50 people experiencing homelessness. Now, in 2025–26, there are over 100. So, in recent years, the number of visitors has effectively doubled.

**Louis Villeneuve:** I want to ask both of you several questions, because I have plenty.

Mr. Rainville or Mr. Champagne, have you ever had to reduce or even completely suspend a service due to delays in the allocation or disbursement of funds?

**Cédric Champagne:** Mr. Rainville, I'll let you answer.

**Maxime Rainville:** You are asking us if we had to discontinue a service due to a lack of funding under the Reaching Home program. Is that correct?

**Louis Villeneuve:** No, I am referring to delays in the allocation or disbursement of funds.

**Maxime Rainville:** To my knowledge, that is not the case. However, as you said, there are times when we have to react quickly. When money is available and the deadlines are fairly short, organizations have to act quickly to make requests. However, I don't believe any services have had to be interrupted because of a funding delay.

• (1720)

**Louis Villeneuve:** How do you feel that the current funding mechanisms could be improved to better support rural areas? This should be my last question.

**Cédric Champagne:** As I mentioned in my remarks, the money should really be allocated directly to the various RCMs and rural

communities. That requires an agreement with Quebec in connection with Bill M-30.

**Louis Villeneuve:** I still have a little time left. We have leeway.

Do you see different realities in rural areas compared to large urban centres?

**Cédric Champagne:** Absolutely. There's a lack of funding, and urban centres are already well organized, whereas we still need to build everything.

**Louis Villeneuve:** Thank you, gentlemen. I would have had enough questions for 20 minutes.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve. You had three seconds left.

Mrs. Larouche, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I want to thank Mr. Pollett for being with us today.

This study obviously reminds us of the urgent needs of people experiencing homelessness, but my questions are for both of you, Mr. Rainville from the CDCBM and Mr. Champagne from Entrée chez soi. You are both involved with the Corporation de développement communautaire, which recently celebrated its 35th anniversary in Brome-Missisquoi. You wear two hats, and perhaps even more, knowing you.

First off, congratulations on the work you do every day. I know, we say it and we say it again: You change lives, and you welcome people in all their humanity through your humanity. Thank you so much.

I'm the member for Shefford, so we have a region and even some organizations in common. I, too, clearly have a lot of questions. I agree with Mr. Villeneuve that there are a lot of questions to ask.

You raised the issue of the rural aspect, but I have trouble with that because, when we talk about designated communities, it has a clear impact on the Reaching Home program and in the Eastern Townships, where Sherbrooke gets money. As a result, Granby and Cowansville don't get enough money. As you rightly said, urban communities are much more organized. As you said about the warming centres and drop-in centres that you've opened, we obviously still need to build everything.

Tell us about the importance of expanding the Reaching Home program to other designated communities.

**Maxime Rainville:** I think that the definition of a rural community refers to around 10,000 people. As you know, Granby has a much larger population than that. As I said, Cowansville and Farnham are also small municipalities, but the fact remains that something happened to increase the population of both cities enormously over the past 10 years. All of this means that living together can be a challenge when there are people who may be having trouble and who are more visible and others who see and run into them. It also raises more questions and, in some cases, makes people more closed-minded.

However, once again, I think we have a lovely community.

**Cédric Champagne:** Let me mention that it's important to respect the natural communities that already exist. For example, in Brome-Missisquoi, 21 municipalities form a community, whereas for Granby, the reality is different with the rest of the Haute-Yamaska regional county municipality. The communities that are designated and the way in which they are divided really have to respect the natural communities.

**Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. Champagne, you did a good job of explaining how Reaching Home is making a difference for people experiencing homelessness. Early in the year, I met with organizations in the riding of Shefford that had concerns. You mentioned that we sometimes wait for funding. Early in the year, no one knew whether the encampment program would be renewed. There were consequences for some organizations in Granby.

Could you tell me whether, to your knowledge, there were also consequences from the delay in announcing the renewal of the program in Brome-Missisquoi?

• (1725)

**Cédric Champagne:** We were forced to shut down our warming centres, as we did not know if the program was being renewed. However, on April 1, it was still very cold. The fact that the funding date had just passed didn't make it any less cold.

We also know that, because Reaching Home had been overhauled and we didn't know whether there were other funds to cover non-encampment initiatives, some organizations lost their outreach workers, who are the link between the population and other organizations.

We are currently taking steps to find out.

**Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. Rainville, do you have anything to add on your end?

**Maxime Rainville:** I would note, as Mr. Pollett mentioned, that there's also the homelessness prevention component. Allow me to put on my other hat: I also represent a community organization for young people. In that regard, I think prevention is also important. The faucet keeps flowing and people keep ending up on the street, so I think we also need measures to try to reduce the number of people affected. Prevention is also important.

As for the Reaching Home program, the different aspects of this type of funding can also meet other needs and prevent young people and others from ending up in precarious situations of homelessness.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[English]

Mr. Reynolds, you have five minutes.

**Colin Reynolds (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to the witnesses for coming here today to discuss this important topic. Thank you so much for all of your hard work to address this important issue, which is a growing problem in our communities.

My first question is for you, Mr. Pollett. You mentioned in your opening statement that prevention is where the money is going to be best spent. What is the number one thing the government can do to prevent homelessness?

**Sheldon Pollett:** It's easy to think about prevention when you think about young people, but let's be clear, it is an opportunity for all populations. It's about that moment in time when someone is about to become homeless and, if you cannot prevent it, then intervening as quickly as you can to get them out of that circumstance as quickly as possible.

The Observatory on Homelessness, for example, created a graphic many years ago now that talked about how the largest part of our money right now is going into a crisis system, with very little going into prevention and very little going into interventions that are better options than a crisis-driven intervention. The model really talked about shrinking the crisis response. It will always be necessary: The example I use is always that someone is going to break their leg in the middle of the night and you will need a crisis response, similar to health care, but most of your money should be going into prevention and/or getting people out of that situation as quickly as possible.

Like Michael Lethby from Raft—I've known Michael for a long time—I ran a youth organization for 24 years. Twenty-odd years ago, we created a shelter, and then we made a decision that we would never apply for funding for another shelter bed again. We pivoted our attention to building housing, as much of it as possible supportive.

One of the challenges right now in the country—I'll talk about housing specifically, and housing development—is that we all want to house the most vulnerable in our communities. We often want to do it with very challenging and sometimes limited capital resources, which means that the depth of affordability is affected and so on and so forth, but the other side of it is that we often want to house people with some pretty high needs with the lowest possible investment in support. I think one of the other panellists also talked about it.

We know very clearly after 30 years how to set people up to fail. It's not because the people in those systems want to set people up to fail, but as systems, we are so addicted to crisis that the only investment we ever think about making is, "What do we do tonight?" The federal government shifting to prevention means that we have a longer view of what we're trying to solve for, and the prevention work and intervention work follow.

• (1730)

**Colin Reynolds:** Thank you.

I have another question for you. You mentioned that homelessness is obviously very complex. It's a very complex issue. In your opinion and in your experience, what would be the number one reason for homelessness, the number one cause?

**Sheldon Pollett:** The number one cause is obviously something going sideways in someone's life that causes their housing to break down. In the case of youth, obviously something is going on in the family unit that doesn't work for either the family or the youth, or both, and therefore you have youth homelessness. For older adults, it could be a combination of a serious workplace injury, addictions or mental health, all of the.... The list is long.

I work from the perspective that, across all these systems I mentioned earlier, if you solve for what's getting in the way of someone thriving and succeeding, the outcomes will follow that. For example, if you have an employment or labour market strategy that targets to some degree people who are at risk of homelessness, your intervention cannot simply be, okay, let's get them a résumé, let's do X, or let's only do employment-related interventions.

If you have interventions that are more broad around housing, employment and education, they will hit what you want to see them do from an employment and labour market attachment perspective. It's being more holistic in terms of how it's not about the activities as defined by individual departmental mandates. It's about the outcomes. Hopefully, that answers your question.

**Colin Reynolds:** Thank you.

There's been a lot of discussion about wraparound supports that are needed for individuals. Can you explain the phrase "wraparound supports" and what that means to you?

**Sheldon Pollett:** What that means to me is—again, I go back to my previous comment—whatever is getting in the way or causing someone to experience housing instability or homelessness. Again, I will go back to my youth homelessness days, when I've often said to our staff that they could be working from a housing perspective. Some staff are working from an employment perspective and some from a mental health or addictions perspective. Those are just variations on the theme. Your job is to support that young person about whatever is not going well for them in their life and address that, and then the outcomes will follow.

Wraparound support is that you show up to work one day, and whatever's not going right for the people you're trying to support, that's your job: helping them navigate those challenges and then some of the other outcomes that you would like to see them achieve. In 25 years of work, I've never met a young person who didn't want a better life: their life was just in a very different place right then. It's being realistic about what the challenges are and making sure the support is there.

We did a lot of work with pregnant and parenting young moms. It wasn't about offering them parenting skills—important skills; don't get me wrong—but if you support that young woman as a human being first, give her what she needs by way of support and access to decent, safe, affordable housing, the first thing she wants to do is go to school and create a better life for her and her kids—that's the first thing—and then she wants to go to work.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Reynolds and Mr. Pollett.

You may be able to capture that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Desrochers, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Caroline Desrochers (Trois-Rivières, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll be sharing my time with my colleague Mr. Joseph.

Mr. Rainville, Mr. Champagne and Mr. Pollett, thank you very much for your comments today. They are really helpful. We are developing an action plan and the national housing strategy. I just want to reassure you about the difference in our approach for rural communities. We clearly heard what you said, and it's really our top concern. I just wanted to reassure you a bit on that, because we're really looking into it.

[*English*]

My question is for Mr. Pollett.

You talked about workforce development. I'm assuming that means that, on site, we're helping residents with training that they can take into the workforce after.

What are some of the lessons learned that you can share? Is there any targeted federal training program that you are able to access or that we should consider putting in place? Also, what else can we do to be helpful, specifically with workforce development?

• (1735)

**Sheldon Pollett:** When I think about it.... I'll give you some examples, as well, from my past, such as developing five units of affordable housing. That's fantastic. The benefits to the community start when you give the keys to individuals who desperately need that affordable housing. However, 18 months earlier, there was training and employing 45, I think, young people over the course of that period to build it in the first place, so there were skills and opportunities that were created as a part of that.

It was real-time costs that.... A lot of the time, on the return on investment, the criticism is that it's hard to calculate what is going to save you 20 years from now. However, this was savings today, savings to the income support systems, income taxes paid—and the list goes on and on.

What we talked about.... Guess where these young people weren't when they were working for us full-time, creating that housing? They weren't in jail or in hospital, and the list goes on there as well.

A really simple but yet somehow—in systems—complex goal to achieve is answering this: What are the benefits of taking an employment strategy approach to developing affordable housing?

One of the things we recommended to the federal government a number of years ago now was to take a percentage—3% or 5%—of the national housing strategy and say, “We want to see social enterprise engagement as part of that spend.” What that would have done to the social enterprise ecosystem across the country, for one.... Also, there's the meaningful training and employment that would have been driven for people who also need affordable housing.

It's thinking that way in terms of how we squeeze every ounce of value out of every dollar we're going to spend. That's a much better use of money for better outcomes, quite frankly.

**Caroline Desrochers:** Thank you very much.

If there's anything else you want to add on this, please do, absolutely, send it our way. I'll be in touch separately, as well, to follow up as part of the national housing strategy renewal.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joseph, I'll give you the rest of my time.

**Natilien Joseph:** Thank you, Ms. Desrochers.

Mr. Champagne, thank you for being here. We see that a large number of people experienced homelessness for the first time before the age of 25. What measures targeted to young people should be strengthened to prevent them from becoming chronically homeless?

**Cédric Champagne:** I'll let Mr. Rainville answer that, because he's an expert on youth intervention.

**Maxime Rainville:** Thank you, Mr. Champagne.

We do recognize that one third of young people who go through social services, through the director of youth protection, experience homelessness in the years following their time in youth protection.

To answer your question, I would say that various supports can be provided, particularly by social services. Supervised apartments can also help young people become independent.

Now I'm going to put on a second hat. There are supervised apartments where young people are encouraged to learn basic skills to increase their independence. They learn how to cook, what a lease and shared housing are, how to express their frustrations with a roommate and how to live together. It can also be about finding more flexible ways to pay the rent, such as a kind of fund that could enable young people, if they lose their job and their budget is rather tight, to get a loan and find a way to pay their rent later.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Natilien Joseph:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Joseph.

Lastly, Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, Mr. Pollett, thank you for being with us. However, for my last round of questions, I will come back to Mr. Champagne and Mr. Rainville.

Mr. Rainville, you've been wearing this second hat for years. You work with Espace Vivant Living Room to support young people.

Mr. Champagne, you wear your second hat with Divers-Gens. I'm going to make a connection here, because earlier, Mr. Rainville was talking about the rise in discrimination. From your perspective, as someone who works at Divers-Gens with people in the communities, does that make finding housing harder, leading to additional risks of homelessness?

● (1740)

**Cédric Champagne:** Yes. The worse intolerance gets, the more people will be thrown out on the street. They may be rejected by their families or drop out of school because of experiences like bullying. There are many different situations.

Earlier, we mentioned that the challenges for people of sexual diversity and gender plurality are really huge, because most places are gendered. There are trans or non-binary people who can't find shelters to take them in, since they're neither men nor women, or not man enough or woman enough to go to the various assistance services.

**Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you for that very interesting and important addition, Mr. Champagne.

I have less than a minute left to ask both of you a question, so I'll conclude by coming back to the Reaching Home program. The minister tells us that, right now, there is uncertainty about what Reaching Home will become. That is pretty much what we sense: The government is wondering what to do with the program. What impact does this uncertainty about the future of Reaching Home have on your organization and on the services it can really help provide on people experiencing homelessness?

**Cédric Champagne:** I'll answer in 30 seconds, then I'll turn it over to Mr. Rainville.

For us, that could completely cut the only structuring program we have for a drop-in centre, a warming centre and temporary emergency housing under one roof.

**Maxime Rainville:** My answer is not going to be much different from Mr. Champagne's. For us, it means that eight supervised housing spaces will close.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[*English*]

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing before the committee today and providing testimony.

With that, is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** We are adjourned.





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