



Naheed K. Nenshi, Mayor

August 7, 2020

The Honourable Ahmed Hussen
Minister of Families, Children and Social Development
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada K1A 0A6

Re: Ending Homelessness in Calgary

Dear Minister ~~Hussen~~, *Ahmed!*

Thank you for your service in these difficult times. Calgary is facing severe economic challenges due to COVID-19. Unlike other major Canadian municipalities, the economic impact of efforts to contain COVID-19 have been compounded by a concurrent precipitous decline in the value of our energy sector. As I know you are aware, Calgary already had the highest unemployment rate of any major city in Canada before the pandemic. These two unprecedented events are greatly impacting our most vulnerable citizens which includes those who have lived experiences of oppression or vulnerability: Black and racialized people; Indigenous peoples; those living in poverty; living with chronic health, mental health or addictions; older adults; and those experiencing domestic abuse. Appended to this letter is Calgary's COVID-19 Community Affordable Housing Plan which we are asking for your leadership and support in advancing. When implemented, it will make considerable strides towards ensuring Calgary is a more just, equitable city where more of our citizens can live with dignity and access opportunities to improve their lives. To achieve these goals, we are seeking a Federal investment of \$314.6M into Calgary's non-market housing sector. This is a big investment, with massive system-changing returns.

The unique challenges experienced with COVID-19 has demonstrated just how essential it is for all Canadians to have stable, dignified places they can afford to call home. COVID-19 has highlighted gaps in our system, but also created opportunities to permanently secure non-market housing options for our most vulnerable citizens. As the potential for future waves of COVID-19 remains and the energy sector continues to struggle, Calgary must innovate to address our long-standing non-market housing challenges differently and work with a sense of urgency to invest in the economy, and ensure Calgarians are safely housed.

As a response to the health, social and economic crisis in Calgary, a committee of 65 individuals from 42 organizations from private, non-profit, and government housing sectors, representing more than 45,000 homes in Calgary have created a plan that:

- 1. Collectively ends functional homelessness,**
- 2. Increases the supply of non-market housing, and**
- 3. Invests in vulnerable Calgarians so they have a community to call home.**

1 of 3

The COVID-19 Housing Provider's Committee, which includes the Community Housing Affordability Collective (CHAC), considered the following when creating the enclosed advocacy plan:

1. Generating economic stimulus via construction of new affordable homes;
2. Repurposing vacant hotels due to decreased tourism; and
3. Capitalizing on private rental vacancy.

To bring this plan to fruition, support from both the provincial and federal government is needed. Now is the time to fully and urgently implement your government's long-held human rights-based approach to housing every Canadian, starting in Calgary.

Calgary has more than 50% of Alberta's homeless population with almost 3,000 people experiencing homelessness on any given night. The temporary COVID-19 solutions created to accommodate social distancing and isolation for people experiencing homelessness are coming to end. Without a permanent plan to address the housing needs of Canadians experiencing homelessness in Calgary, there is a risk that these vulnerable citizens will return to the streets or unsafe living arrangements. We must act now.

The *COVID-19 Community Housing Advocacy Plan* for Calgary **will create 5,400 homes** in the non-market housing sector, including adding 1,250 supportive housing spaces over four years. The Calgary COVID-19 Housing Provider's Committee is advocating for a Federal investment of **\$314.6M** into Calgary's non-market housing sector which will improve the lives, and resiliency, of vulnerable Canadians living in Calgary. Of this, \$164.6M would be immediately invested into shovel-ready capital projects and \$12.79M to provide supportive housing, ending the experience of homelessness and addressing the immediate housing needs of 600 of Calgary's most vulnerable citizens. The remaining \$150M would be used to increase access to housing for 3000 Canadian families living in Calgary over the next four years.

The COVID – 19 Community Affordable Housing Advocacy Plan stimulates Calgary's economy through construction job creation and repurposing of stranded building assets. Strategic investments in affordable housing can mitigate potential collapse in construction, development and tourism sectors. **An immediate residential construction investment of \$450M across 22 non-profit affordable housing construction projects will create 2,800 jobs. The overall economic activity generated in the region would be \$765M.** In addition to this, ending homelessness saves public systems \$70K to \$135K per person, per year. In Calgary, by housing 600+ individuals that are currently homeless the public system would see savings between \$42M - \$81M per year.

The opportunity exists to enable individuals to build a better life and contribute to the economy from a safe and affordable home, as well as support housing providers to build an asset base increasing their capacity to be more self-sustaining and less dependent on government support. Calgary is uniquely poised to respond to a community-level investment at this scale – and we will achieve results. We have the aligned commitment, the surplus assets, and the expertise. For years, Calgary led the nation economically, contributing \$126B to GDP in 2019: now is our time of need.

Attached with this letter is Calgary's COVID-19 Community Housing Advocacy Plan that I implore you to urgently consider. I would be pleased to further discuss this plan in detail and where possible, participate in creating homes, better lives, and economic prosperity for Canadians living in Calgary. Thank you for considering these points in your review.

Sincerely,



Naheed K. Nenshi
MAYOR

This is the most impactful opportunity I've seen in all my public life. Let's do this!

**cc: The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister, Government of Canada
The Honourable Bill Morneau, Minister of Finance, Government of Canada
Calgary City Council
David Duckworth, City Manager, The City of Calgary**