

Réseau SOLIDARITÉ Itinérance du Québec & The Alliance to End Homelessness

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate distribution

Opposition parties support homelessness agencies on continuing federal funding

Ottawa, October 26th, 2006. Gilles Duceppe, Bloc Québécois leader, Jack Layton, NDP leader, and Marcel Proulx, Liberal MP delegated by Bill Graham, Acting Liberal MP leader, decided to add their voices to those of homeless people and agencies asking Prime Minister Harper to immediately announce a renewal and enhancement of federal homelessness funding for the next several years.

The Conservatives have not yet revealed their intentions on extending federal homelessness funding all due to end on March 31st, 2007, despite repeated requests by Réseau SOLIDARITÉ Itinérance du Québec (RSIQ), the Alliance to End Homelessness (ATEH) and other groups throughout Canada. Agencies right across the country are very concerned about the impact on their communities if the federal government stops helping to end homelessness. They need an immediate commitment to avoid service disruptions and cut backs in programs that currently help families, youth, women and children who are homeless or struggling to avoid becoming homeless.

Programs such as the Supportive Community Partnership Initiative (SCPI) were intended to strengthen a community's existing capacity to deal with homelessness. Here in the Nation's Capital, \$5.6 million in SCPI funding for 2006-7 is helping to support the work of 16 local agencies. Taking that much money out of Ottawa each year is a huge loss for a community committed to helping homeless people access services and find and keep their homes. Some of the Ottawa agencies are receiving SCPI funds until the end of March 2007 are: the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, Options Bytown, the Catholic Immigration Centre, Youth Services Bureau and the Housing Loss Prevention Network.

Marion Wright, a member of ATEH Steering Committee, warned at the media conference that "the loss of \$5.6 million a year in federal homelessness funding will have ramifications right across the community here in Ottawa. It isn't just the agencies currently receiving SCPI who are going to face difficult times. More families, youth, women and men will become homeless, leading to increased demands on other services and adding to the challenges of finding a home and much-needed help."

"The Prime Minister should be asking himself who will help the individuals and families at risk of becoming homeless when 10 frontline workers from the Housing Loss Prevention Network can no longer be paid. They're currently funded by SCPI right here in the Prime Minister's own local community."

François Roy, Chair of RSIQ, stated that homelessness agencies need 3 times the previous funds through SCPI: "SCPI has helped improve homeless people's living conditions and helped them get off the streets. Of course, other policies are needed to prevent homelessness, like more social housing units."

“Since 2001, SCPI has made it possible to invest \$400 million in services and programs to help the homeless and in buildings and equipment throughout Canada. Today, many communities in the country are receiving SCPI funds. Now they fear a federal government withdrawal will result in severe cuts in many services for homeless people, and could even close down some agencies.”

Since the Conservatives came to power, the opposition parties, 400 social agencies in Canada and Quebec, as well as several Mayors and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities along with groups such as the Alliance to End Homelessness, Réseau SOLIDARITÉ Itinérance du Québec, the National Homelessness and Housing Network and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association have urged the Conservatives to make a commitment. In May 2006, even the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights urged Canada to do more for homeless people.

After the press conference in the National Press Theatre with opposition leaders and representatives from ATEH and RSIQ, people from Ottawa, Quebec, and Toronto walked to the Prime Minister’s office in the Langevin Building for a Rally for Federal Homelessness Funding. Representatives from several groups spoke about the impact of losing federal funding to end homelessness in their community and urged Prime Minister Harper to renew and increase federal homelessness funding including community-driven funding such as SCPI.

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