

“Bring Me Home”: The Canadian AIDS Society’s Position Statement on Housing and HIV/AIDS

Adopted by the Canadian AIDS Society Board of Directors, May 8, 2009.

The Canadian AIDS Society (CAS) adopts a holistic approach to health as part of its core values and beliefs. Housing is part of a person’s social and physical environments, which has an impact on health. Currently, 58.5% of CAS’ member organizations provide housing or housing support. The Canadian AIDS Society’s Board of Directors endorsed the 2008 International Declaration on Poverty, Homelessness and HIV/AIDS, which demands that policy makers address the lack of adequate housing as a barrier to effective HIV prevention, treatment and care, and that governments fund and develop housing as a response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This position statement, and accompanying background document, is a call for action to address housing as part of the response to HIV/AIDS in Canada.

Given that adequate and secure housing is a human right under Article 25 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

Given that homelessness and unstable housing have been associated with higher rates of HIV and seroconversion, more frequent injection drug use, needle sharing, and sex exchange, a greater number of sexual partners, more frequent unprotected intercourse, more violence, and poorer mental health;

Given that homeless or unstably housed people living with HIV/AIDS are more likely to have lower CD4 counts, higher viral loads, and higher mortality and are less likely to initiate or adhere to antiretroviral medication regimens or access health care and social services;

Given that one longitudinal study in Ontario revealed that almost half of the people living with HIV/AIDS had problems with housing;

Given that lower income, drug use and recent incarceration act as barriers to housing;

The Canadian AIDS Society calls on the federal government to develop a long-term Canadian Housing Strategy that addresses the fundamental causes of homelessness and unstable housing in Canada, as part of a response to HIV/AIDS. Leadership needs to come from the federal government, and involve provincial and territorial governments, municipalities, community-based organizations, the private sector, as well as homeless and unstably housed people.

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- The strategy must address both the association between housing status and the risk of HIV transmission, as well as the association between housing status and the health and well-being of people living with HIV/AIDS.
 - The number of rental units targeted to low and moderate income households, especially for people living with HIV/AIDS, must be increased.
 - More income assistance and rent supplements must be made available to low and moderate income households.
 - A Housing First approach, which offers supportive housing with specific programs for those who require special services, must be expanded and adopted universally across Canada.
 - Investments into programs such as the Home Renovation Tax Credit and the Homeowner Residential Rehabilitation Program must be long-term.
 - The Homelessness Partnering Strategy and the Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative must also be enhanced and must be long-term to increase the capacity of communities to address the homelessness situation.
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