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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Dignified Housing is Needed Now**

Housing is a human right. Everyone can agree that encampments and shelters are not dignified solutions that support the human right to housing. The conversation in our community has been swept into the debate of whether encampments should exist or be criminalized.

What has fallen out of the public discussion, however, is a level of compassion and understanding that people are hurting. That hurt is not generated from a series of self-inflicted actions or poor decisions. It is born of decades of structural policy failure. This failure has resulted in the extreme commodification of housing and the decline in community based (truly affordable choices) housing. In the last few decades, community housing in Canada dropped from a height of almost 20% to only 4% of all housing options in the country. This has serious implications for everyone.

Many feel we can build our way out of this crisis, but those of us working in the field know that this is not the case. Yes, new builds are needed to manage rising population. We're excited to see more youth and newcomers staying in our province. However, these new builds are based on housing as a commodity, not as a human right. In fact, for every new unit of affordable housing built in Canada, some estimate that 11 are lost to the market<sup>1</sup>.

These new units will not help people who are living in tents or in shelters, as they are not truly affordable, nor do they come with support.

Last week the National Right to Housing Advocate released a report entitled, "Upholding dignity and human rights: the Federal Housing Advocate's review of homeless encampments", which highlights seven recommendations to uphold human rights as related to encampments:

1. Act immediately to save lives.
2. End forced evictions of encampments.
3. Work with all governments and provide support to municipalities.
4. Respect the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples.
5. Respect and uphold human rights.
6. Offer people permanent housing options as rapidly as possible.
7. Address the root causes of encampments.

At Phoenix we support these recommendations and especially ask people to educate themselves and commit to being part of a permanent solution. Without addressing the root causes of homelessness, the cycle will continue. Tents will be emptied, but others will be set-up. Shelters are meant to address one-off, emergency situations on a short-term basis, they offer no permanent solutions.

When encampments are torn down, we take notice. Yet the pervasive, fundamental failure to ensure a person's right to dignified housing has been unfolding for years.

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Housing Evidence Collaborative (2024). "Filling the hole in the bucket: Loss of existing affordable rentals massively undermining new affordable supply."



So, what will we do? We must end forced evictions that multiply the violence and trauma people are facing. Again, this does not lead to permanent solutions.

Community sheltering organizations are working with those living in tents, whether in the impacted areas or elsewhere to try to find suitable options for each person to shelter indoors. This is challenging work, and we appreciate the public's support and patience as we try to find safe options for everyone.

We will be compassionate and offer dignified, supported routes out of homelessness that call on policy makers, and all of us, to act and be collaborative. At the same time, we must also strategize and implement changes to decrease entry into homelessness. Prevention is much less expensive and has much better outcomes to offer than crisis management. This problem can feel so complex. It can feel hopeless, but it's truly a matter of care and collective will. We deeply value and count on our collaborative work with our government partners. These relationships are more important than ever.

Let's not get lost in the frustration. Press for effective policy and offer compassion and care for your neighbours. We are better than this – we can do better than this.

Together we will!

- Phoenix Youth Programs