

Ottawa Journal: housing first

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Canada has emerged as a leader in the battle against homelessness. Our political opponents would prefer you believe their misinformation, but the facts are clear.

Since launching the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) in 2007, we have helped over 26,000 homeless, at-risk Canadians obtain education and training opportunities, helped over 27,000 find work, and created more than 4,800 new shelter beds. Furthermore, we've done this in accordance with solid conservative fiscal principles. For every dollar we've invested, over two dollars has been invested by partners, including other levels of government, community stakeholders, and the private and non-profit sectors.

Building on this success, April marks a new phase of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. Despite false claims that funding has been cut, we've renewed funding under this program for the next five years. Communities will continue to receive the same amount of funding for programs to prevent and reduce homelessness, as they did previously.

What has changed is that we are moving towards a Housing First approach, in line with our commitment to deliver value for money for taxpayers and ensure our investments actually make a long-term difference for the most vulnerable in our society.

Housing First is effective in reducing chronic homelessness while alleviating pressure on shelter, health, and judicial services. Once stable housing is obtained, the focus shifts to addressing more ongoing issues, such as addictions or mental health. Evidence has shown that this is the most effective way to combat chronic homelessness. Because the ultimate goal is to ensure these individuals learn the skills required to obtain jobs and become fully participating members of society.

Canada has funded a pilot project that took place in five Canadian cities. It was the largest research project of its kind in the world. The preliminary results showed that two years later almost 80 per cent of the participants remained housed. These are stronger results than we've seen under any previous approaches to address homelessness. I'm looking forward to the final results of the project which will be coming out in a few weeks.

And while Housing First will be the cornerstone of the new Homelessness Partnering Strategy, communities will retain flexibility to invest in other proven approaches that reduce homelessness at the local level, such as shelters and transitional housing. The Government is proud to be ensuring hard-working taxpayer dollars are directed to where they will have the largest, long-term impact.

David Tilson, MP