

## MEDIA STATEMENT

### **HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS CALL ON GOVERNMENTS TO PRIORITIZE VACCINATIONS FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA**

*Below is a statement from the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness and the Canadian Network for the Health and Housing of People Experiencing Homelessness.*

**OTTAWA (February 3, 2021):**

“The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness and the Canadian Network for the Health and Housing of People Experiencing Homelessness call on federal and provincial/territorial governments, COVID-19 Vaccination Task Forces and health system vaccination lead organizations to prioritize, during the earliest phase of COVID-19 vaccination programming, individuals experiencing homelessness, those staying in shelters, and the homelessness and housing sector staff who support them as a matter of urgent public health protection.

At a time when the best public health recommendations available suggest staying at home, limiting all contact with others outside immediate family members, and protecting oneself with masking and sanitizing supplies; not having a home makes it impossible to follow the only known effective strategies for protecting oneself and one’s communities. As a direct result, transmission rates of COVID-19 in the homelessness sector have been high across the country. Some published evidence has suggested the rate of spread is 3X that of the housed population, often spreading like wildfire once the virus penetrates shelter spaces. The fear of COVID has pushed many individuals who use the shelter system outside into encampments, particularly in Canada’s largest cities. Many would rather sleep on the streets, exposed to the elements, and their attendant risks, than face the risk of COVID.

People experiencing homelessness are some of the most vulnerable people in society, living on average over 25 years less than people who are housed while facing deep inequities in access to physical and mental health care, social supports, and affordable housing. Established evidence has demonstrated that people experiencing homelessness who are older than 55 years of age have health profiles and vulnerability similar to seniors older than 70. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, people experiencing homelessness have faced vastly disproportionate infection rates with 20X more hospitalizations, 10X more admissions to Intensive Care Units (ICUs) and 5X greater mortality. This is despite major initiatives across the country that have included specialized testing, tracing, isolation with clinical and social supports and preventive distancing strategies.

“In order to protect society’s most vulnerable, we need to prioritize people experiencing homelessness alongside those in long-term care as being at risk by virtue of their congregate living environment, physical risk, and weakened support structures. Those experiencing homelessness have already been made priority populations in Denmark, as well as cities such as Montreal, Toronto and Detroit who have already commenced either fulsome or pilot vaccination operations. As a country, there should be consistency in the prioritization of this population.

As a society, we already fail to provide housing, adequate income, or food to this population. As such could we not at least provide vaccination as a minimal protection for a group who have none? With more than 235,000 individuals experiencing homelessness in Canada, and with the risk this virus places on them, those who work to support them and the communities they stay in, it is essential we start the process of vaccination of the homeless now. We, as a society, set the moral tone by who we provide supports for, and who we prioritize. It is imperative that we include the most vulnerable who can benefit most from the protection afforded by COVID vaccination. While we do this, we must get on with the long overdue business of ensuring that everyone in Canada is able to realize their right to a home – now enshrined in Canadian law – so that no one needs to experience such deep and scarring vulnerability, pandemic or not.”

For more information visit, [www.caeh.ca](http://www.caeh.ca).

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### **Key Facts:**

- CNH3 is Canada’s network to promote collaborative policy, practice and advocacy between the healthcare, shelter and housing sectors. CNH3’s steering committee includes Dr. Andrew Bond, Dr. Jeffrey Turnbull, Dr. Christy Sutherland, Dr. Monty Gosh, and many others ([for a full list, click here](#)).
- CNH3 is an Allied Network of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness.
- Learn more about CNH3 at [cnh3.ca](http://cnh3.ca).
- People experiencing homelessness are **five times more likely to die of COVID-19** and **20 times** more likely to be hospitalized because of COVID, according to a recent study.
- People experiencing homelessness who are older than 55 years of age have health profiles and vulnerability similar to seniors older than 70.
- The rate of spread for people experiencing homelessness is **three times** that of the housed population.
- People experiencing homelessness live, on average, over 25 years less than people who are housed while facing deep inequities in access to physical and mental health care, social supports, and affordable housing.

### **For more information or to coordinate interviews, contact:**

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