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Chair: Mr. John Williamson



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• (1550)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick South-west, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Good afternoon, everyone.

Welcome to meeting number 65 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), the committee is meeting today to continue its study on Report 5, Chronic Homelessness, of the 2022 Reports 5 to 8 of the Auditor General of Canada, which were referred to the committee on November 15, 2022.

[*English*]

I'd now like to welcome our witnesses.

First, we have the Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion.

Thank you for being here today, Minister, and for accepting our invitation along with your colleagues.

From the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, we have Nadine Leblanc, senior vice-president, policy. From the Office of Infrastructure of Canada, we have Kelly Gillis, deputy minister; and Kris Johnson, director general, homelessness policy directorate.

Minister, I believe you know the drill. You have five minutes for opening comments, please. The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Everyone deserves a safe and affordable place to call home, but as we have seen in communities across our country, far too many Canadians face the daily unacceptable reality of experiencing homelessness. Homelessness affects every community in Canada. It is a grim reality for far too many Canadians. It preys on the most vulnerable amongst us, casting a shadow over their lives.

[*Translation*]

Homelessness ultimately has an impact on all of us. It leaves an enduring mark on all of our communities. As a government, we have recognized this and we have heeded the call to action.

[*English*]

The Government of Canada, recognizing the urgency of the matter, has responded through Reaching Home, Canada's homelessness strategy. Launched in 2019, the program committed \$2.2 billion to address homelessness across the country. It has now grown to almost \$4 billion in funding. Budgets 2021 and 2022 strengthened this initiative to further empower communities so that they can better address the needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

[*Translation*]

Reaching Home is the embodiment of hope—a community-based program that empowers urban, Indigenous, rural and remote communities to help them address local homelessness needs.

[*English*]

The Government of Canada supports communities in establishing “coordinated access”, an integrated systems-based approach that prioritizes assistance for those in greatest need to ensure that they find suitable housing and comprehensive services.

The impact of Reaching Home is tangible. It is felt within our communities every day. In just the first three years, Reaching Home has funded over 5,000 projects across the country, helping to place more than 46,000 people experiencing homelessness in permanent housing. Moreover, over 87,000 people in need benefited from prevention and shelter diversion services through the program's support.

As part of our government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Reaching Home, with increased funding, created over 26,000 temporary accommodation spaces. These spaces provided crucial shelter for Canadians, offering them a lifeline during a time of social distancing. In total, more than 214,000 temporary accommodation placements were made to support individuals in need, when it was needed most.

That is the impact that Reaching Home is having across the country. It is playing a key role to support our national housing strategy's target of reducing chronic homelessness by 50% by 2027. We have committed further to ending chronic homelessness by 2030.

This is the goal that is at the heart of the national housing strategy, a bold 10-year plan backed by an \$82-billion investment to ensure that more people in Canada have a safe and affordable place to call home. The national housing strategy is built on strong partnerships between the Government of Canada, provinces and territories, and on continuous engagement with partners, including municipalities, indigenous governments, the private sector and non-profit organizations.

[Translation]

The strategy is the largest, most ambitious federal housing program in Canada's history, and strives to create livable communities for families and individuals. It's a comprehensive approach to addressing housing needs head-on.

[English]

The NHS supports the creation of new affordable homes and purpose-built rental homes, and it preserves, repairs and revitalizes community housing while also committing funding to the needs of vulnerable populations.

To address the overrepresentation of indigenous peoples among those experiencing homelessness, Reaching Home has invested \$370 million since 2019 to indigenous-led and culturally relevant programs and services. This includes funding for 37 urban, rural and remote communities under the indigenous homelessness stream. It also includes funding for distinctions-based approaches co-developed with national indigenous organizations and modern treaty holders to address the specific needs of first nations, Métis and Inuit across the country.

The success of the national housing strategy hinges upon the strength of our partnerships. It is continuously informed by extensive consultations with Canadians from all walks of life, especially those with lived experience of housing need.

The Government of Canada is investing \$18.1 million over three years to conduct action research on chronic homelessness. We stand in support of participating communities in the effort to identify and document persistent barriers to preventing and reducing chronic homelessness.

[Translation]

In addition, we are piloting innovative potential approaches that address these barriers head-on. The research findings obtained will help us to develop strategies and identify pathways to ending chronic homelessness in communities across Canada.

[English]

Homelessness does not discriminate. It affects people from all walks of life. Whether they are seniors, youth, individuals with disabilities, veterans or families, no one should face the reality of being without a home.

According to census 2021, there were an estimated 460,000 Canadian veterans, with over 2,500 experiencing homelessness. That's why last month Infrastructure Canada and Veterans Affairs Canada jointly announced the launch of the new veteran homelessness program. This \$79.1-million program is about providing veterans with rent supports, rental supplements and wraparound services

that meet their particular needs. It is also about building capacity for veteran-serving organizations so that they can engage in research on veteran homelessness to deepen our understanding of this issue and improve our programs and services.

We will bring an end to chronic homelessness in Canada, Mr. Chair. It will end through programs like the national housing strategy and Reaching Home, through initiatives like the veteran homelessness program, and through dedicated service, research and support to identify and address the root causes of homelessness.

Most importantly, it will end through strong partnerships. We can't do it alone. We have to continue to work with other levels of government, indigenous organizations and communities across the country.

• (1555)

[Translation]

Together with our partners, we are improving housing outcomes and reducing homelessness for Canada's vulnerable populations.

[English]

Budget 2023 reaffirmed the Government of Canada's commitment to the things that matter most to Canadians, such as making housing more affordable, fighting climate change and creating good, well-paying jobs. Through these impactful programs and the strong partnerships that I just spoke about, we will continue to make housing more affordable and end chronic homelessness in Canada.

We are committed to addressing homelessness. Our commitment is steadfast and unwavering. Everyone deserves a place to call home and a place to feel safe and secure. Every Canadian deserves a place to build a better life.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll turn now to the official opposition.

Mr. McCauley, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Thank you.

Minister, thanks for joining us. Well done on your French. It's much better than mine.

I'm going to assume that you've read the Auditor General's report. I can't think of a better word than perhaps "damning". I'm just wondering what immediate steps you're taking to address this. I'll go over some of the findings.

Infrastructure, ESDC and CMHC “did not know whether their efforts improved housing outcomes for people experiencing homelessness”. You’ve mentioned all this money spent, as you do in the House all the time, and the AG says the departments can’t even say if you’re helping anyone. The report also says, “As the lead for Reaching Home”, which you’ve talked a lot about here today, “the department did not know whether chronic homelessness and homelessness had increased or decreased since 2019”. It says the CMHC, “as the lead for the National Housing Strategy...did not know who was benefiting from its initiatives”.

Then we have CMHC pointing fingers, saying that it should be Infrastructure. Infrastructure is saying, well, we’re not accountable; someone else is. This is an absolute mess. I appreciate the sentiment of what you’re trying to say, but it doesn’t match the reality. You’ve talked about how you’ve done this, this and this. We know that housing prices in Canada have doubled. Homelessness in Edmonton is through the roof, even though we have relatively stable housing prices. You’ve claimed that you’re doing this, this and this, but the results are different. Again, the Auditor General says your departments don’t know if you’re actually helping anyone.

Why are we pushing out all this money and we don’t even know if we’re getting results? When we look at what’s actually happening out in Canada, we see rising homelessness, unaffordable rent and unaffordable mortgages. I’d like to give you the benefit of the doubt, but all it comes back to is failure. How are we going to fix this? What are we going to do to actually get results?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I think what I get from that monologue is a conflating of a number of things. You’re mixing homelessness with housing prices and—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I’m sorry. Are you saying high housing prices aren’t linked to homelessness? That’s news to me, but please go ahead.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: No, I’m suggesting that we have different programs for different things. You’re conflating what the Auditor General actually said with everything else that we do.

I want to provide a few numbers to you so that you can have a better sense of the actual impact that these programs have. I think the concern of the Auditor—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: We’re short on time. Can you just provide them to us in writing?

I guess what we’re looking for is accountability and concrete results—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I thought you wanted answers to your questions.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Maybe you can just provide them in writing.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: If you want a monologue, I can just stay out of it.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I’m not asking for that. I’m just asking that you table them, because we’re short on time.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: For you to ask a question, you have to listen to the answer.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: We’re looking for results. The AG was very clear. Your departments are with you today. You’ve spent all this money, but you don’t know what results you’re getting, yet—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I’m actually trying to give you the results, but you won’t let me.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: —anecdotally, we see that homelessness is through the roof.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: You won’t let me give you the results. These are results: 87,000 people were prevented from entering homelessness because of our investments. These are results: 46,000 people who were already experiencing homelessness were provided with permanent housing solutions through Reaching Home.

These are results. I think what you’re confusing it with—

● (1600)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: How are you measuring 46,000 when the Auditor General says your departments are not able to—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I’m trying to answer, but you won’t let me.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: But you’re not answering—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I guess you want a monologue for your clip, so go ahead. No problem.

The Chair: Just one second, Mr. McCauley.

Ms. Yip, you have a point of order.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Yes. If we could have the minister be able to finish his answer—

The Chair: Well, there was fair bit of interruption on both sides.

I’ll turn things back over to Mr. McCauley.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I didn’t interrupt the honourable member, Mr. Chair, but—

The Chair: Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I’ll ask just one quick question, and then you can provide it. You mentioned 46,000. Can you provide to us, please, to this committee, where you’re getting these numbers? Obviously, the Auditor General is saying your departments aren’t able to say whom you’re helping or if you’re helping. Maybe you can say how you’re coming to those numbers.

Ms. Kelly Gillis (Deputy Minister, Office of Infrastructure of Canada): Certainly.

Just to bring in some context, the Auditor General did this particular audit during the time of COVID. At that particular time, we had asked community entities, because they had asked during the emergency situation, not to report on data. Since then, the community entities that we fund have begun reporting on data. We've put a system in place for them to automate this.

So we have the data for the first three years of the program. The minister quoted some of the results from that, but I can actually give more than that: 5,900 people got job training from that program; 8,900 got new paid employment—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Is that up or down since 2019?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Pardon me?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Is homelessness up or down across the country?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: We've done point-in-time counts in 55 communities, working with our community entities, and overall within the country homelessness has increased. What we've published recently is 12%. We do know that, and that's not unusual coming out of a time of crisis.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: With all the work you're doing, why is homelessness continuing? Are we just not getting the right results?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I think the philosophical problem here is that we're actually trying to do something about the problem and you don't even acknowledge that it exists. Your housing plan doesn't have the word "homelessness" in it. How can you sit there and—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Sir, this is about your failures in your role, not me as an opposition member—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: No, no, but I'm trying to answer your question, and I'm giving you our results. You won't let me.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Homelessness is up 12%. We would like results for the money.

I appreciate what you're trying to do, and I think you would like the same results. I think we all would.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Absolutely—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: You're saying that you're spending all of this money. Homelessness is up 12%, and you're trying to blame me, a backbench opposition member. This is on you.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: No, I'm trying to provide the results of the work that we've been doing over the years—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: But we're not getting results—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: —and I gave you the numbers. One is 87,000 people prevented from joining homelessness, and 46,000 people diverted away from homelessness into permanent housing. That's results—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Where's the problem coming from if we're up by 12%, then?

The Chair: Mr. McCauley, that is your time.

We're turning now to the next member.

Mr. Sidhu, you have the floor for six minutes, please.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the minister for taking the time to be with us here today.

I know that when I'm speaking to residents in my riding of Brampton East, there are concerns around housing for the most vulnerable—affordable housing. I know that the minister was in Brampton East just recently to announce affordable housing units in my riding. I know that the Prime Minister was recently in Brampton to announce over \$100 million for 300 units for those in Brampton who are the most vulnerable.

When we speak to women who are victims of domestic abuse, we need to be there for them, and I see that we are making progress on this. The progress we're making is in our relationship with local municipalities and the provincial governments, because we know we alone, at the federal government level, cannot tackle this.

Minister, I'm hoping you can share some of your views on what your insights might be and how the federal government is working with other levels of government to help tackle this problem.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I want to thank the honourable member for pointing out the success of our efforts, which are based on really trusting the communities. When you look at the over 5,000 projects delivered by over 1,000 community organizations across the country, we provide them the support, but they're the ones who are on the front lines providing these services, and these services are making a difference.

I think what the Auditor General highlighted was that we need to do more work to enable those organizations to build the capacity to collect more granular data on the impact they're having on the ground, but make no mistake: These programs are making a difference. Particularly, they performed even better than expected during COVID. They saved a lot of lives by introducing health measures, procuring more space, procuring PPE and health professionals and enabling people to actually stay safe during that really difficult time.

We will continue working with those grassroots organizations. As I said, they deliver 5,000 projects across the country, but we also have to have permanent housing solutions. Through programs like the rapid housing initiative, we've been able to provide 100% capital funding to build deeply affordable homes for the most vulnerable: people who are either experiencing homelessness or are at risk of experiencing homelessness. We've been able to provide funding for the rapid construction of units that are then supported through wraparound supports by other orders of government or other partners.

That model really works, and it has resulted in a lot of people being able to find deeply affordable homes and being taken off the streets.

• (1605)

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you, Minister.

You spoke about rapid deployment of housing. I see your advocacy efforts and your time in meeting with local municipalities, with mayors of different cities across the country. Can you speak to how we're using innovation or how local municipalities are using innovation with builders and contractors on prefabricated homes to get homes up faster?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: That's a very good question.

I think a lot of this will be encouraged even further with the housing accelerator fund. This is the first program in the national housing strategy that will directly invest in the system changes that are necessary to unlock additional housing supply. We will be investing directly in efforts to improve and speed up the permitting and delivery of housing of all types, including affordable housing, but also more rental housing and more home ownership options.

We will do that by partnering with municipalities and other orders of government that are responsible for the permitting and delivery of housing to help them get there, because we need more supply. We need a healthier mix of housing and we need more affordable housing. To get there, we recognize that we're not the only partner in this, but we are ready and able to invest in the ability and the capacity of local governments to do more.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Mr. Chair, do I have time for one more question?

The Chair: You do. You have a minute and 30 seconds.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Okay, perfect.

When I'm travelling across the country and speaking to friends and family.... There is a project, I think in downtown Toronto, with prefabricated housing. It's something very unique.

The zoning and some of the permitting processes take a long time. We're looking forward to seeing some of the funding through the housing accelerator fund from the federal government being used at the municipal levels. We know there's a bottleneck there on the municipal side to get some of those permitting processes to be more efficient and faster. A lot of my constituents are looking forward to that.

Can you speak to some of the innovation you've seen across the country?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: There is absolutely a lot of effort being made by local governments to speed up the permitting process, the delivery of housing, but also to adopt inclusionary zoning policies that will encourage more density and a healthier mix of housing. It's also focusing on transit-oriented development, building more densely around transit nodes so that you take advantage of access to transit and other community services.

I think the housing accelerator fund will definitely help with all those efforts that are already under way. Recently, the City of Toronto passed a council resolution that allows single-family

homes to build up to four units in a multiplex fashion across the city, as a right. That's a big step forward. A number of other communities are taking similar approaches.

We need more housing supply in Canada. We have the fastest-growing population in the G7. We have a very low housing supply of all types. We need to encourage that, and the housing accelerator fund will help us get there.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That is the time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll be fairly brief because I have a notice of motion to file now. The motion reads as follows:

That the Committee request that the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics forward to the Committee all documents and correspondence received from Ms. Pascale Fournier, ex-President and CEO of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation.

I will yield the rest of my speaking time to my colleague.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

This information will be forwarded to the members and the motion will be set for deliberation on Monday.

Mr. Trudel, you have the floor.

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Mr. Minister. We've seen each other often recently. We met for half an hour on Monday evening. Let me tell you, you're certainly determined to get the job done. It's a pleasure to meet you and to talk to you again.

Housing and homelessness go hand in hand. They are closely connected, and part of a continuum. Basically, we want to find housing for people in Canada. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or CMHC, released a study you're familiar with, since you yourself quoted from it this past Monday evening in the House of Commons committee of the whole. The study says we need to build 3.5 million homes in Canada by 2030 to address affordability and accessibility. The study dates back to June 2022.

This year's budget includes investments in Indigenous housing in rural and northern communities, but no new funding to increase the supply of housing in Canada.

Given this figure of 3.5 million housing units, which is a major amount, do you have an action plan? At any rate, do you plan to meet this target by 2030?

Ms. Nadine Leblanc (Senior Vice-President, Policy, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation): Mr. Chair, I'll answer the question, if I may.

The CMHC did produce a study indicating that we need 3.5 million units by 2030. We just launched the housing accelerator fund, which is designed to help build over 100,000 units. That was just announced.

The national housing strategy has helped us build over 118,000 units. We have also repaired 298,000 units.

I'd like to mention that 95% of housing in Canada is built and delivered by the private sector. Meeting that target will require a collective effort from all three levels of government, the private sector and home construction businesses.

Mr. Denis Trudel: If I understand correctly, we're going to build 100,000 units by 2030, but we would need to build 3.5 million units. Is that right?

Ms. Nadine Leblanc: Mr. Chair, the housing accelerator fund will help build 100,000 housing units over five to seven years.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Okay.

According to a CMHC economist, Quebec will need 1.1 million housing units over the next 10 years. You talked about the private sector building 500,000. We will need them one way or another, because the private sector won't do all the work, that is to say it won't build all the housing. The private sector is building condos everywhere, but that doesn't help us in terms of affordability.

The programs the government is putting in place don't solve the problem of housing affordability. In Quebec alone, the private sector is going to build 500,000 units. All levels of government must work together to build 600,000 housing units in Quebec over the next 10 years to address affordability and accessibility issues.

Can we meet that target? Has a supplementary plan or another approach also been proposed to address the problem?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Right now, Canada is building about 200,000 units a year, but we know that's not enough to meet the demand for affordable housing. That's why the 2022 budget introduces measures so we can double that number over the next decade. More than \$14 billion in additional federal funding has been allocated to help create more housing.

Mr. Denis Trudel: How many housing units will be created, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We will double the number of housing units.

Mr. Denis Trudel: How many housing units does that represent?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We will build 3.5 million housing units.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Will 3.5 million housing units be built over the next 10 years, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Absolutely.

[English]

When you add the private sector and our efforts, it's 3.5 million additional homes. Just to add to what Ms. Nadine said, with the housing accelerator fund, the 100,000 figure is just the immediate acceleration and the unlocking of that, but the systems changes that the program will fund over five years are supposed to set Canada up for a doubling of the number of homes that we currently build. That's the plan, and the idea is that those systems changes will outlive the program.

• (1615)

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Okay.

According to the National Housing Council, 115,000 have been built since the national housing strategy was introduced. You say we're going to build 250,000, but we need 3.5 million units.

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I think you're referring to the 150,000 for affordable housing, not all the homes. I think that's what you're referring to. Is that correct?

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Not quite, Mr. Minister.

In fact, the National Housing Council said the opposite. It says that 115,000 housing units have been built. However, for those in core housing need or those experiencing homelessness, the vast majority of housing being built is not affordable, and the subsidies administered through the Canada housing benefit are having zero effect. According to the National Housing Council, which is responsible for overseeing the strategy, we're not making it right now.

Will all this be reorganized?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: That's not true. The national council, for example, said that the rapid housing initiative was the most affordable program. They also acknowledge that although the national housing co-investment fund is building affordable housing, it should go deeper than that, so they asked us to do more. They didn't say we're not doing anything. Let's be honest about this.

[Translation]

The Chair: I'm sorry, but your time is up.

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor for six minutes.

[English]

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the minister for being present with us, and the officials.

It's quite a serious issue, and I'm sure that you're more than seized with this. I have some particular questions that I hope we can find answers for, in particular the social conditions that we find people in.

When the Auditor General came and gave us this report, of course, we were dismayed. We don't like it when the Auditor General, an independent officer of Parliament, says that our investments are not working.

She mentioned in particular a concern I had—this is from the report—which is that when folks are cycling through chronic homelessness they are constantly at the whims of bureaucratic processes that make them develop a lack of trust, and that exacerbates the issue. Homeless folks do not have the capacity to go through tenuous systematic processes of paperwork and waiting, because all of their energy is spent figuring out where their next meal will come from.

Minister, this is the Auditor General, who is describing a very serious fact.

Yes, you can build stock. I believe my colleagues have mentioned some of the realities in relation to housing supply. I know that you're seized with trying to increase that housing supply, so I thank you for your hard work on that.

The biggest problem that I want to address with you today is to bring to light the real consideration that this is an ecosystem. Housing isn't a static thing. We don't have a static homeless population where there are, like in Edmonton, 3,200 homeless folks. The number has increased in the last five years. It's very large and it's continuing to grow.

The Auditor General mentioned the fact that they have distrust and they are unwilling to engage in the bureaucratic system that is CMHC to actually get results, because of that mistrust. That mistrust has also found its way into our systems. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada calls for specific systematic changes to CMHC and to other areas within the Government of Canada that would see the end of what produces homelessness.

Minister Hussen, do you know what produces homelessness in this country?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: There are a number of factors that contribute to homelessness in Canada, yes.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Would you agree that some of them are perhaps directly related to the outcomes and the situations that indigenous peoples find themselves in, in particular the trauma they find themselves in because of the sixties scoop, the residential schools?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: In my city, about 60% of the homeless population is indigenous. It's a massive number and it's continuing to grow. The reality is that they have a distrust of the federal government and a distrust of the services because of the inability for them to find support. They often don't even have ID.

I will also speak of a real person in my community, who has now passed on. It was my birth mom. She was a homeless person for a period of her life and it's because she was a victim of the sixties scoop. She was taken as a child. She went through many homes. She found herself on the streets of Edmonton.

The child and family services ministry has produced homeless folks. Have you ever had a conversation with your colleagues, in particular in Indigenous Services Canada, to try to address the reality that the numbers are increasing? Even if you increase the stock, the homeless population is increasing because of the government's inaction on solving the issues related to child and family services.

Do you recognize that as a problem?

• (1620)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Of course. Family and child welfare services and the systems around that are one of the pipelines into homelessness.

You recognize that our government has done a lot of work in that space. Although it's mainly a provincial matter, we have taken that on.

It is not true, as you say, that we're just building homes. Reaching Home is about the services. These are 5,000 projects that include employment supports. It includes counselling, mental health supports. It includes addiction supports.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Do you think it's enough?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: No, there's always more work to be done.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Minister, that's the part that I want to have your attention on.

You're going to hear from various members today. From your bench, of course, you're going to hear many good things, and good questions from the opposition. I've seen you challenge the official opposition in a way that I believe is not the most appropriate. They have really good questions.

In particular, I want to find ways to get answers for the homeless community I represent. I represent thousands of homeless people in Edmonton. They want real answers. The Auditor General has made it clear that red tape and bureaucratic mistrust are barriers to ensuring that we actually see solutions in Edmonton, for example.

What do you have to say to the homeless community in Edmonton that's growing? We've seen an increase in the homeless population. That's a fact. What do we say to those people, and what do you expect them to take away from our questioning today?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: To go to the question on how we support the homeless community better, the Reaching Home program is a transformational program. The government provides funding to communities to work—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Yes, we got that. It's not enough, though.

I really want to avoid this tactic of the government ministries of tentimes coming here and saying, “Look at what we've done.” Here at public accounts, our work is to ensure that we actually address the issues pointed out by the Auditor General, and she's saying that all the culture of CMHC and the ministry.... It's the culture that is the issue.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I want to correct you there. These programs are delivered by organizations on the ground, not by CMHC.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: But I want to address the gap. Let's talk about the gap, though.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: No, but this is the second time you've talked about how the people on the street don't trust CMHC.

These are 1,000 community organizations across the country that have credibility—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: You said it wasn't enough—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I just want to correct something you said. You said that—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Why won't you answer the question, Minister?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'm trying to answer—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: What are you going to say to the houseless people in Edmonton?

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, you're out of time. I will allow the minister to respond briefly, though.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I just want you to acknowledge that there are 5,000 community-owned projects that are delivered by 1,000 organizations on the ground, not by CMHC.

By the way, we do have a dedicated indigenous homelessness stream delivered by indigenous governments and communities.

We are already implementing a number of the recommendations of the Auditor General, including expanding coordinated access.

Is there more to be done? Absolutely. Are child and welfare services a pipeline to homelessness? For sure, and we have to deal with that, but to suggest that somehow CMHC is the bureaucratic entity that is delivering these services is not true.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: That's what the Auditor General—

The Chair: Thank you very much. We will come back to you, Mr. Desjarlais.

Turning now to the start of our second round, there will be six members with various lengths of time questioning the minister.

[*Translation*]

I said, we will consider Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné's motion on the Monday after next week's break.

[*English*]

Mr. Perkins, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for coming.

You are the lead or the sole minister responsible for the national housing strategy for the Liberal government. Is that correct?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Yes.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

So the results of this audit by the Auditor General.... Ultimately, the responsibility for the performance rests with you.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: That's correct.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

I'd like to follow up on an earlier question.

The CMHC annual report lists that for Canada to get to housing affordability and to essentially be out of this housing crisis, if I understand correctly, 3.5 million houses need to be built by 2030. If I heard you correctly—and correct me if I'm wrong—you said that this will be done by 2030. Is that correct?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: In collaboration with our partners, yes.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Right, so I'm curious as to how it's going to happen, because that's a little over six years from now.

Last year, completed new houses or housing units built in Canada were at 200,000, and that's about the average over the last few years. In order for you to produce 3.5 million more houses by 2030, the completion rate is going to have to be 875,000 houses per year. That's 675,000 more than we're completing now.

Can you tell me how, between this year and next year, we will jump from 200,000 completed housing units to 875,000?

• (1625)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The main point that I want to start off with is that housing is not just a federal responsibility. We have a role. We have a leadership role. We have a resource role to invest. We have a partnership role, but we're not the only players in this space.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I understand that. It's just that you said that through all those partnerships we would get the 3.5 million, and I just don't see it, because that's basically a tripling of the annual completed houses here. I don't think we're going to get there, and I don't see any path in this, particularly when you see the performance of the national housing program that the Auditor General has laid out.

For example, the Auditor General found that in the program that funds housing placement or “housing placement activities”, you've reached only 30% of the goal, and the goal has to be completed within the next year or so. In other words, in the next year or so, you have to find 94,000 new placements in order to actually be successful in that program, and you haven't come close to that in a single year. The program is a failure.

It says that 31% is the target that you've set for reducing chronic homelessness by next year, but by previous testimony just in this meeting, it's already gone up 12%. It hasn't gone down by 31%. You now have to reduce chronic homelessness by almost 50% in one year. Where is all this money going? It's going in but no results are coming out.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Chronic homelessness and homelessness in general are two different things. We have committed to cutting chronic homelessness in half by 2027-28 and then eliminating chronic homelessness by 2030. That's our focus.

Of course, our programs, and the 5,000 projects that I mentioned, are available to anyone who's either experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness. It's the same thing with the rapid housing initiative. The key to our focus is chronic homelessness.

For example, even among the veteran population—

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's so effective that it's going up. It's not going down. It's going the wrong way. You've spent, I believe, \$138 million already on this—I think that's the number or something more than that—and it's not going anywhere. It's going the wrong way.

Tell me how, in the next year—because 31% is the target you set for next year—it's going to go from increasing by 12% to down by 31%? That's what the Auditor General report says is your target next year.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: First of all, we had a once-in-a-lifetime event called the pandemic that we went through. I'm glad that our investments were able to save lives among people experiencing homelessness. They were able to get more PPE. They were able to get more spaces. They were able to procure—

Mr. Rick Perkins: These trends were there before COVID. COVID is not the reason that homelessness continues to go up.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Look, I'm trying to finish my answer.

I'll just end by saying that we recognize it's a problem. We are committed to a program to end chronic homelessness. You don't even have homelessness in your plan. You have a housing plan that doesn't even have the word "homelessness" in it.

The Chair: Gentlemen, that is the time.

Ms. Yip, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Jean Yip: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for coming. I have to say that it's not usual to have a minister come to the public accounts committee, so I thank you for coming and answering our questions.

In my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt, we have one of the last remaining pandemic-started shelters. It has 350 units. What can be said to some of the residents and businesses that have been impacted by the shelter and, at the same time, to others who are concerned about the state of homelessness?

• (1630)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I think it's important to recognize that when people are taken off the street and are provided permanent housing solutions, they tend to do better. They restart their lives. They have stability. Their health improves. They're able to go back to work or to school, or to pursue a business opportunity and so on.

It's not only better for that community but also better for all of us. Those individuals tend to have fewer interactions with the criminal justice system, with the law enforcement system, with the

health care system. Overall, as a society, it is not only humane and proper to house homeless individuals but also better for our long-term fiscal framework. In other words, society does better when we are all doing better.

By the way, those shelters are supposed to be a temporary solution. They're not meant to be a permanent housing solution for those individuals, but they're necessary. They're supposed to be a stage in a continuum of providing permanent housing, eventually, for individuals. That's why I think the rapid housing initiative—which has, by the way, delivered a number of really good, affordable units in Scarborough—is so effective. It gives people the next stage of permanent housing beyond shelters.

The last time I was in Scarborough to announce a rapid housing project, the neighbourhood initially had some concerns, but the people came around. These were, in particular, rapid housing units dedicated to men experiencing addictions and mental health challenges. People recognized that these men—this population of people who were sleeping on the streets—were better off in permanent housing with the right supports around them, and it was not only better for them but also better for the community.

Ms. Jean Yip: In the report, there was some mention of challenges in data collection. Could you, or maybe another associate, speak to that?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Thank you for the question.

The time of the audit was during the COVID period. The non-profit organizations in the homeless-serving sector were dedicated to saving the lives and protecting the health of the clients they were serving and could not provide the data at that time.

Since that time, they've started to recoup and are providing us with data and working with us on the data collection. We've done point-in-time counts with 55 communities across the country. By fall of this year, they will be completely caught up on their cycle of reporting on data, and they have already started reporting up until 2022 on the results that they achieved.

This gets back to the 5,000 projects we talked about: the 87,000 people who were prevented from becoming homeless, the 46,000 people who are placed in permanent housing, as well as a number of other supports like job training, new paid employment, education, temporary placements. Those are some of the differences that this particular program has made.

We've now been able to work with community entities. We have 60 of them across the country that we fund, and 43 of them have put coordinated access in place, where they have no wrong door for the clients they're serving. They can go to one place and they can be provided with all of the services they need. That particular community entity will find the right support for them to help their trajectory in life. That is making a big difference in communities right now.

Ms. Jean Yip: One recommendation was to finalize the implementation of the online reporting platform. Has this been done? Can you tell us a bit more about what this is all about?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: That particular platform was put in place in the fall of last year. That is the system that community entities can use in a very efficient way to give us results in a timely way. That's how we collected the data on the 5,000 projects. That is now a way that community entities can save time, energy and effort and direct their capacity to actually serving the clients, but at the same time being accountable and transparent in the difference they're making in their communities.

That particular system is now in place. It's effective and being used and reported on.

Ms. Jean Yip: Chair, do I have more time?

The Chair: You have time for a question, yes.

Ms. Jean Yip: Okay.

Minister, I know you touched upon working with municipal governments, but how about the provincial governments?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We indeed do work with all orders of government. We welcome those partnerships.

Through the national housing strategy, for example, we fund provincial priorities, which includes federal money to help provinces maintain, renew and rejuvenate their community housing stock and build new units.

I think the rapid housing initiative is a good example of where the federal government provided 100% capital, and then the provinces, or in some cases a particular non-profit or municipality, provided the wraparound supports for people who were experiencing homelessness and who were given permanent housing solutions.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Minister, for being here today.

My husband is a supply teacher in the Gatineau region, and yesterday he came home and told me that he had contributed to a fundraiser. The teachers at a school were chipping in so that a special education technician who was a mother of two could pay her rent, which has gone up so much that she can't even do that anymore.

For a while now, I've been hearing you talk about programs over five to seven years, building millions of housing units, massive targets, but what are you doing to help that individual who's unable to pay her rent right now? Obviously, there are many other issues. Her salary may be too low, and that's a provincial jurisdiction.

However, you do have tools at your disposal, Mr. Minister. One of them is to create an acquisition fund, which we've suggested to

you several times. In fact, some provinces have already acted on this. It's about acquiring housing from the private sector and renting it out at an affordable price. It would be a meaningful solution you could apply today, not three, five or seven years from now, to help people in this situation.

What are your thoughts on the federal government creating an acquisition fund?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Quebecers struggling with the cost of rent need help. We've invested \$454.3 million to provide 145,000 Quebec households with monthly assistance under the Canada-Quebec housing agreement.

We're also taking action by providing an additional \$500 to those and other eligible families. This amount will be paid to 1.8 million Canadians, including 467,000 Quebec households.

The Chair: You have enough time for a very short question.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Are you following up on those numbers, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Yes, absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We got no information in the last round when I questioned you about this. You had no advice for the houseless community in Edmonton, which is growing. I spoke to the mayor of Edmonton, and he said to me that you, the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister met with the City of Edmonton. You committed to a project. They forwarded to me the correspondence for that request, and then they were systematically denied.

What do you have to say to the City of Edmonton, which supplied many shovel-ready projects—and many of these would go directly to supporting people in my community—but just a month and a half ago they were denied?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: First of all, I would say that I did provide as many answers as possible in the previous round, so I reject that assertion.

In terms of Edmonton, we've invested in all three rounds of the rapid housing initiative. We were able to select Edmonton as one of the cities that would receive money under the city stream of the rapid housing initiative, and also the project stream, so I expect that the third round would be exactly the same. We have a good record of collaboration and support to Edmonton.

The same goes for—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I just mentioned that the City of Edmonton came to me—your former colleague—and they said they were disappointed that they weren't able to receive a positive response from their—

• (1640)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: For which project? You'd have to give me details on the project.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Excuse me, Minister. I'm just going to finish my sentence, please.

They told me they were unable to have a positive response following your commitment. I'll leave that for now. Hopefully, you can provide a response in writing to this committee at a future date. I'll move on to my next question.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Please provide details.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I've asked you what advice you had for the houseless community. You said that jurisdiction is not your problem—

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Desjarlais.

Minister, is it possible that you can provide that?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: You will have to provide details about the project. I don't know what project the member is referring to. I'm happy to support the member's request—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: It's the City of Edmonton's ending houselessness plan.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Okay.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: They have one. It's been 10 years. You should know about this. It is shocking—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Well, I do, about—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: —but I will now move—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: You will have to provide details.

The Chair: Gentlemen, go through me, please. I appreciate it, but try to minimize the back-and-forth as much as possible.

Mr. Desjarlais, you have about 40 seconds left. I'll turn it back to you.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much.

You mentioned jurisdiction as one of your defences today, that it's not all your problem. You've said that you're doing enough, but the reality is, Minister, that you have to recognize that people are dying of houselessness in Canada. We had 46 deaths in the city of Edmonton, one of the highest recorded deaths of houselessness in this country. It happened.

Do you take any responsibility for the fact that these programs aren't in fact touching the lives of the people who need them most? Those are not my words. That is the report of the Auditor General: that the ministry didn't have knowledge of whom it was serving and that at times could not identify whether or not the programs had matched the results to those who need it most.

The Chair: That's your time, Mr. Desjarlais, but I will allow the minister to answer, please.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: First of all, I never said that we've done enough. I clearly said that we've done a lot but there's more work to be done. That's number one.

Number two, our programs are impacting people. The Auditor General pointed to a lack of adequate data from the organizations. We're working with them to get that data and to better report.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're turning now to Mr. Perkins.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just in order to save time, Minister, could I ask you or your team to table a couple of things in writing?

Paragraph 5.9 of the Auditor General's report lists six metrics for the national housing strategy. I'm wondering if you could provide to the committee in writing the progress to date on the numbers, the metrics that you used for that, and where we are in achieving that progress, if you could. Is that okay?

The Chair: I'll confirm at the end, Mr. Perkins. Just continue.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Second, could you provide to the committee, also in writing, the administrative cost for each of these programs as a percentage of the overall budget?

Thank you.

The Chair: Is that it?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have more questions, but yes, that's it.

The Chair: Okay.

Minister, is it possible that your team could provide that to the committee? I'm seeing yes. Thank you. I appreciate it.

Mr. Perkins, you have just over four minutes now. The floor is yours.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

One metric that is in your program is the national housing co-investment strategy, which deals with this issue of what is an affordable place to rent. I think, if I read the program correctly, it's trying to help low-income people find accommodation that is 20% or less of their income.

When I look at the Auditor General's analysis on page 22 of the report, it has a nice graphic here and it also has a chart that basically shows that not a single province is delivering housing that's below 20% of costs.

In my province, Nova Scotia, the low-income average set out by the Auditor General is a little over \$22,000. The way it works out in this formula, for it to be below 20%, rent would have to be \$560 a month. I can tell you that in the largest town in my riding, Bridgewater, if you can find a place, a one-bedroom apartment in that town, above a pizza shop on the main street, it would be about \$1,200 a month.

While you're spending the money, I'm not seeing the evidence that it's actually helping people with low income. In fact, the Auditor General says it isn't. Basically, it's not helping those in that critical low-income area. It may be helping people with a little bit higher income who can afford some of these apartments, but it's not helping those who have lower income.

I wonder if you could comment, just quickly, on that part of it.

• (1645)

Ms. Nadine Leblanc: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

I think the question relates to the co-investment fund. I do want to say that the affordability level of this program is around 80% of the median market rent. At this point in time, this program is actually overachieving its affordability. The way it's structured it actually is at 59% of median market rent income.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

Could you table that information, the details on that? To me it appears different from what the Auditor General is saying.

I'd like to ask the minister again, if I could. It was a question we asked in committee of the whole this week. I think, given your testimony today, you probably have a different answer. Do we have a housing affordability crisis?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I keep hearing the opposition trying to get these sound bites without really even acknowledging—

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's not a sound bite, Minister. It's a simple question.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Well, I'm trying to answer the question, if I may.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Well, you can without the political chatter. This is the public accounts committee. Your job is to be accountable for what you say.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, you are burning your time.

Minister Hussen, go ahead.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I know I am. I have a clock running.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Let me know when I can answer your question. You've been interrupting me—

The Chair: The floor is yours.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The floor is yours. I would like to hear an answer, for a change, on whether or not we have a housing crisis.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Can I answer your question or are you going to keep interrupting me?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I don't know if you can, but you're certainly free to try.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Okay, I will answer your question if you stop interrupting me.

The fact of the matter is that the fundamental difference between you and your party and the rest of us here is that you don't believe in Canadians' right to housing, a basic human right.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's not actually true.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: No, actually, you don't. I asked you that—

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's not actually true, and you're to be accountable for your actions here. That's your job, to be accountable.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: —throughout the night and you refused to answer, all of you. You never accepted that Canadians have a right, a human right to housing.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Read your open and accountable government mandate letter, which says you are—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: You never accepted it.

Mr. Rick Perkins: —to be accountable to parliamentary committees and answer questions. Your job is not to ask me questions. You can answer them.

The Chair: Order, gentlemen. Mr. Perkins, this applies to you as well. I appreciate your frustration. I'm going to give the last 15 seconds to Minister Hussen to answer.

I would ask, Minister, that you try to avoid describing the Conservative opposition policy. I recognize that you have points to make on that, but we are here to hear from your department.

Thank you.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Oh, absolutely, but I'm also trying to answer the question.

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos, do you have a point of order?

Go ahead.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): It's very simple. Let's just simply allow time for answers. That's all.

The Chair: That's what I'm endeavouring to do, sir, so I appreciate it.

It's over to you, Minister.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I think I can figure out how to answer questions. I appreciate your help, but I don't need it. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Do you have a response?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: No, I made my response. Thank you.

The Chair: Very good.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have another point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos, this had better be a point of order—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It is my—

The Chair: —because the witness is not exactly responding to the answers.

Taking shots at the chair is not helping your situation.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I did respond. I just said I don't need your help.

The Chair: I try to run these meetings fairly, sir. Suggesting that when I give you time and you don't take the time, you don't have the time is, frankly, insulting to this committee.

Mr. Fragiskatos, what is your point of order?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It's my right to raise a point of order as I wish, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: It is, and I'm hearing you.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It's simply a call for decorum, and that is in your hands to officiate.

The Chair: Yes, it is.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I think that opposition members in particular today need a reminder on the need for decorum, not just the—

The Chair: I agree with you, and I would say that the same is true of the minister.

You have the floor on your side. Who is up next?

Ms. Bradford, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have some questions for CMHC.

The CMHC reported that as of March 31, 2022, over \$9 billion had been committed to the six initiatives examined by the OAG and that some \$4.5 billion had been spent, representing about 30% and 15% of planned expenditures, respectively.

Why is the actual spending such a small share of the planned spending, and how do you plan to correct that?

Ms. Nadine Leblanc: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

What we report in our “A place to call home” report is the amount that has been spent to date. The way we are reporting or accounting for these expenditures follows international accounting standards, which state that we need to recognize when the building has been completed and finished, and as we progress and advance the funds.

In multi-unit residential, even shelters, it takes five to eight years to complete a project. As you can see, we are five years into the national housing strategy. What you see on record is what has been spent, given the level of completion of projects.

• (1650)

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Thank you for that.

Exhibit 5.4 of the report shows that chronic homelessness was 11.3% higher in 2019-20 than the 2016 baseline, while the target is a 31% decrease by 2023-24 and a 50% decrease by 2027-28.

To have a chance of achieving this goal, chronic homelessness would need to fall by 38% between 2020 and 2024 and by 55% between 2020 and 2028. How does CMHC plan to reverse the trend and achieve these targets?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Thank you very much for the question.

When we look at the targets for homelessness, one main factor is working with our community entities across the country. We have 60 community entities, plus a number of community entities in Quebec, and we are working with the territories. They are implementing something we call “coordinated access”, which is a transformational change in the way they serve the homeless people in their communities. It is about no wrong door and for them to make a difference. We've seen, for example, in Dufferin, a 50% reduction since they've put coordinated access in place. It is about coming together as a community and aligning programs and services to be able to serve that homeless-serving sector, which wasn't happening before.

When this particular audit began, this program was in the initial creation of the transformation within the homeless-serving sector and communities across the country. Then COVID hit, so that was a drastic change for them to saving lives and protecting people. Now communities are coming back to being able to implement coordinated access.

You'll see in the report that at the time we had only nine communities that had coordinated access. Now we have 43 communities. The last 17 are on track and we're working with them, as well as the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, to have them be able to implement coordinated access. We know, as we look at international best practices, that this is a best practice that makes a difference in communities.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Thank you.

This may be a somewhat related question. According to the OAG's recommendation 5.74, the CMHC and Infrastructure Canada should “engage with central agencies to clarify accountability for the achievement of the National Housing Strategy targets to eliminate gaps”. In response to that recommendation, CMHC was to clarify and define federal accountability for the national housing strategy's target to reduce chronic homelessness by 50% by 2027-28.

Was the organization responsible for the achievement of the target identified?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Again, when this particular audit was done, the transition from CMHC coming in and working with Infrastructure Canada...and the homelessness policy and programs had just moved into Infrastructure Canada. That has been clarified. Under the minister's direction, Infrastructure Canada is responsible for homelessness policy and the program Reaching Home.

However, as the minister already outlined, that can't be done without partnerships. We know that to actually make a difference in homelessness, the partnership we have with CMHC, the partnership we have with provinces and territories.... We have seen a number of provinces and territories recently issue homelessness strategies that are very much aligned and working with us to make a difference. We've recently created a working group with all provinces and territories in support of housing and homelessness, again to align and make a difference.

We all know that to make a real impact on people's lives, it is done at a local level, with all orders of government, the homeless-serving sector and civil society working together.

The Chair: Thank you. I'm afraid that is the time.

I have a request. I'm looking for unanimous consent to give Mr. Morrice two and a half minutes to question the minister. He'll be our last questioner.

Is that acceptable?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: It is if he brought donuts.

The Chair: I hear no dissension.

Mr. Morrice, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the committee for that.

I want to start by sharing this, which I've shared with the minister before: In my community, homelessness has not gone up by 12%; it's gone up by 300%. Our last point-in-time count, in 2015, had just over 300 people. In 2021, that same point-in-time count led to over 1,000 people. I wonder if I could ask for a document to be tabled from officials with this 12% figure. Could that be tabled for the committee? Thank you.

Second, I want to follow up on a question I asked of the minister on Monday night with respect to definitions. The definition of "affordability" is very important. In fact, one of the recommendations from the Auditor General—5.62 on page 33—is this: "Take the necessary steps to align the definitions of affordability for all initiatives so that they are consistent." Recognizing that, for the co-investment fund, for example, the definition being used is not 30% of income; it's 80% of market rent. Only 30% of the units have to be 80% of market rent.

Can the minister commit, or have actions already been taken—the report came out back in November—to align the definitions, as the Auditor General called for? Ideally, that definition will be the 30% income definition and not this 80% of market rent.

• (1655)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Before I turn it to the officials.... Different programs have different levels of affordability attached to them because they target different people. Look at, for example, the rental construction financing initiative. That's the program that talks about 80% of market rent, whereas the co-investment fund is explicitly talking about 30% or less of household income.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Thank you.

If that's the case, Minister, do you disagree with the recommendation from the Auditor General?

Ms. Nadine Leblanc: We have one definition of "affordability" under the national housing strategy. It is 30% of household income spent on housing. When it comes to the affordability requirement in our specific program, that is a function of, as the minister stated, whom we're supporting, as well as the way the program has been constructed between contributions and loans. Our deepest program is the rapid housing initiative. That is 100% contribution, and the requirement of affordability is based on 30% of income.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Minister, at a time when homelessness is tripling and the Auditor General is saying to use one consistent definition, would you not agree it would be best to ensure that all funds go to the lowest-income people, who need those funds the most?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The question suggests that we then, for example, shouldn't purposely build rentals for police officers, paramedics or teachers.

People are being increasingly priced out of the rental markets in the cities they work in. We need to have a national housing strategy that, yes, focuses a lot on the most vulnerable, but we also need more rental supply. Part of the RCFI is about doing that: building more rental supply, but also putting some affordability there—not as deep as, for example, the rapid housing initiative.

You need to have a national housing strategy that meets the needs of Canadians on different parts of the housing spectrum. It's difficult to say that people who work in our cities and who are being priced out of the rental market don't also need help with rentals. That's what we're trying to do.

The Chair: Mr. Morrice, I'm afraid that is the time.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Mr. Chair, may I ask the minister to table a document related to this question?

The Chair: If you want to ask about a document being tabled, I will allow that, but not an additional question.

Go ahead.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Thank you for your generosity.

Could I have a list of any projects that have been funded through the national co-investment fund that did not meet the definition of requiring 80% over the next 20 years? Thirty per cent of units need to be 80% of market rent. This is about a list of projects funded that do not meet that definition over the coming 20 years.

Ms. Nadine Leblanc: We will provide that.

The short answer is that it's part of the design of the program. It is a requirement.

[Translation]

The Chair: Very good. Thank you very much.

[English]

Before I excuse the witness, Mr. Desjarlais, you have a point of order.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Chair, as mentioned by the member across the way, we oftentimes forget the requirement for decorum, and I believe that requirement also applies to the witnesses who come to present to us. Although I appreciate the answers of the honourable minister, I do believe his conduct in relation to his challenging of you, the chair of this committee, is unacceptable.

Mr. Chair, I believe that the committee would agree to assist you in your request for an apology.

The Chair: This is not something I really want to get into for too long.

Minister, I've done everything I can to ensure that the proceedings run smoothly. I did find your comments directed to me somewhat disrespectful, and when you disrespect the chair, you're disrespecting the committee. Is this something you would care to address?

• (1700)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I didn't intend to disrespect you. I was trying to say that I was finished with my answer. It was not directed towards you, and if it came across like that, I do apologize.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

You're all excused. I appreciate your time.

I will say as well, Minister, that, as some of the government members said, it is uncommon for this committee to hear from ministers, so we do appreciate your coming before us today to answer our questions. We appreciate it.

With that, I'll bid you adieu and thank you very much. We'll see you in the House at some point.

I will suspend for a few minutes so we can go in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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