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Written Submission for the Pre-Budget
Consultations in Advance of the 2024 Federal Budget

Dying With Dignity Canada

August 4, 2023

List of Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Honour a commitment made at the beginning of this Government's mandate in 2021 to develop a new, permanently funded Canada Mental Health Transfer, with an initial investment of \$4.5 billion over five years, to provide high-quality, accessible, and free mental health and substance use health services to people across Canada.

Recommendation 2: With the passage of the new Canada Disability Benefit (CDB), DWDC urges the Government, in its consultations and roll-out phase with the persons with a disability (PWD) community, the provincial governments, and the private insurance sector, to ensure that:

- The principle of '*nothing about us without us*' is respected so that the parameters, amounts, and regulations for the new CDB are co-designed in collaboration with the PWD community;
- That the new CDB is set at a level commensurate with the goal of meaningfully alleviating the poverty experienced by 23% of the 6.2 million PWD in Canada;
- That the new benefit be particularly attentive to the plight of persons with an intellectual disability, of which 73% of working age live in poverty;
- That the intended recipients of the CDB are protected from private insurance setoffs and clawbacks which would have the effect of reducing the benefit; and,
- When setting benefit levels, policymakers recognize the compounded intersectional disadvantages that many PWD confront resulting in disproportionate financial hardship.

Recommendation 3: As Vote Housing, a national, non-partisan, grassroots advocacy initiative has called for, we need a plan to address housing needs and end homelessness which includes the following four elements:

- Build and acquire a minimum of 300,000 units of deeply affordable non-market, co-op and non-profit housing;
- Invest in the construction and operation of a minimum of 50,000 units of supportive housing;
- Commit to the prevention and elimination of homelessness; and,
- Implement an urban, rural and northern Indigenous housing strategy containing both dedicated investments and an Indigenous-led governance structure.

Dying With Dignity Canada is the national human-rights charity committed to improving quality of dying, protecting end-of-life rights, and helping Canadians avoid unwanted suffering. We do this by ensuring access to quality end-of-life choice and care through advocacy, education, and support.

Dying With Dignity Canada (DWDC) seeks to educate Canadians about their end-of-life rights and advocates for a safe and compassionate medically assistance in dying (MAID) program for those who meet the eligibility criteria and choose an assisted death. MAID is a lawful end-of-life option for persons who are suffering grievously and who meet the rigorous criteria. Background conditions of poverty, food insecurity, lack of safe and affordable housing, lack of access to medical supports, services and interventions do not make a person eligible for MAID. There is in fact, no evidence that vulnerable individuals are disproportionately receiving MAID. On the contrary, studies repeatedly show that people from vulnerable demographics (low socio-economic status, institutionalized, widowed, and frail) are substantially less likely to receive MAID than the population average.

While it is true that social, economic, and material deprivation are correlated with increased morbidity and mortality – it is also the case that social deprivation does not drive MAID to any substantial degree¹. However, in order to alleviate economic hardship and financial insecurity, social isolation, and health dysfunction, governments must work actively to provide the background conditions of life that enable individuals to meet minimum standards of shelter, nutrition, health, economic participation, and social integration. To address these social ills and quality-of-life deficiencies in contemporary Canada, DWDC believes the Government of Canada should mobilize its budgetary and fiscal resources on three fronts:

1. Mental Health

We urge the government to honour the promises made in the Liberal election platform of 2021, in the subsequent Speech from the Throne, and in the last mandate letter of the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, to create and fund a new Canadian Mental Health Transfer to the provinces and territories and to community health providers. We need high-quality, free, and accessible mental

¹ 'Medical Assistance in Dying, Palliative Care, Safety and Structural Vulnerability', James Downar MD, Susan MacDonald MD and Sandy Buchman MD (authors) in Journal of Palliative Medicine, published online 03 July 2023 <https://doi.org/10.1089/jpm.2023.0210>.

health and substance use care at the community level in Canada to give people hope and the capacity to gain control of their lives. We support proposed outlays under the CMHT sufficient to bring the federal support for dedicated mental health services to \$2.5 billion per year by 2025-26.

2. Canada Disability Benefit

Dying With Dignity Canada was pleased to see the Canada Disability Benefit receive Royal Assent on June 22, 2023.

DWDC would like to see all levels of government and the private insurance industry recognizing that intersectional disadvantage works to the detriment of many PWD in this country, frequently leaving them in impossible situations facing incremental costs they cannot meet. This is particularly the case for women, 2SLGBTQAI+ people, racialized people, and Indigenous peoples. As the Canadian Disability Policy Alliance has noted, PWD often have additional costs associated with their disability that can account for an estimated 30 to 48 per cent of their disposable incomes. Hence, it is estimated that nearly a million working age PWD live in poverty, and those with more severe disabilities are in even more dire situations of financial insecurity and precarity. This is compounded by a health bureaucracy that is not always responsive to their unique health needs, or easy to navigate. Despite income support programs and rent-controlled apartments, many PWD are barely getting by. We recognize these systemic obstacles, coupled with an ongoing legacy of discrimination and prejudice from some members of the non-PWD community, makes their daily lives a struggle. Governments have a fiduciary duty to the PWD community to help them maximize their individual potentials and to aid them to successfully take part in the labour and housing markets. We urge the Federal government to ensure that the new CDB delivers the help people need to lead full lives and that we build a truly inclusive society where all abilities and persons are valued and welcomed equally.

3. Housing and Homelessness

DWDC believes that the federal government, having recognized housing as a fundamental human right in 2019, has an obligation to ensure that every person across the country has access to safe, adequate, and affordable housing that meets their needs. We know that this is not currently the case.

As the Canadian Housing & Renewal Association has pointed out, ‘every day in Canada, 1.7 million households live in a home that is either unaffordable, overcrowded and/or needs major repairs, while 35,000 Canadians experience homelessness on any given night.’ Many young people have been effectively priced out of the housing market and have resigned themselves to never owning a home.

We know that the lack of stable, affordable housing options is linked to various psycho-social stressors that can undermine well-being. Once again, we note the disproportionate impacts of the housing crisis on the most vulnerable, including, as the National Right to Housing Network has pointed out, ‘Indigenous peoples and disadvantaged communities such as racialized, 2SLGBTQAI+, low-income, and new migrant households, people with disabilities, rural and remote communities, and particularly women and gender-diverse people within all these groups.’ We commend the Federal Government for its appointment this summer of a Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities and urge it, at the same time, to significantly bolster its National Housing Strategy.

We need to urgently **build and acquire a minimum of 300,000 units of deeply affordable non-market, co-op and non-profit housing**. Non-market housing is permanently affordable, community owned and provides security of tenure. Increasing the stock of housing and share of non-market housing puts the emphasis back on shelter as a human right and off housing as a vehicle for financial gain.

The National Housing Strategy should **invest in the construction of a minimum of 50,000 units of supportive housing**. We need to create supportive housing options where we couple affordable housing with wrap-around social support services (regular in-home visits of social workers and community health nurses) for formerly homeless or high-risk residents. This is a proven intervention for people with complex needs.

We need a national effort **to prevent and eliminate homelessness**. Homelessness is estimated to cost the Canadian economy about \$7 billion a year to manage. As the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness has pointed out, ‘this includes the provision of emergency shelters and community supports, but also accounts for the increased costs of emergency services (including fire, police and EMS), health care, the criminal justice system etc.’ The Federal Government should support those growing numbers

of communities across Canada that are finding innovative, unique, and compassionate ways to combat homelessness.

Finally, we need **an Indigenous-led urban, rural, and northern housing strategy to address the housing needs of Indigenous peoples**. Indigenous peoples disproportionately live in housing that is unaffordable, overcrowded, not culturally appropriate, and/or needs major repairs. Indigenous people are also more likely to experience homelessness (1 in 15 versus 1 in 128 for the general population). We need a national effort to address Indigenous housing needs as one major and concrete step towards Reconciliation. Solutions should be governed and led by Indigenous peoples themselves.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute our thoughts on how the very real social malaise confronting our country should be addressed by prioritizing federal investments in the important areas noted above, but without compromising the lawful and humane end-of-life rights of all Canadians, compassionately enacted by legislators in 2016 and 2021.