

Review of HPI 2007-2009

Homelessness Partnering Initiative

« Everywhere that I visited in Canada, I met people who are homeless and living in inadequate and insecure housing conditions. On this mission I heard of hundreds of people who have died as a direct result of Canada's nation-wide housing crisis. Everything that I witnessed on this mission confirms the deep and devastating impact of this national crisis on the lives of women, youth, children, and men. »

Miloon Kothari, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to housing, excerpt from the preliminary report of the observation mission, October 2007.

The origins of the federal government's interventions in homelessness

In 1999, Ottawa announced the start of the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI), the cornerstone of which was the Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative (SCPI). This followed a denunciation by the United Nations (Council on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) and an important mobilization from community groups and equally from some municipalities, in the face of a worsening situation.

SCPI was addressed to homelessness groups (in 12 urban communities throughout Quebec) in order to improve the capacity of communities to respond to the needs of populations experiencing or at risk of homelessness by way of projects providing services, buildings and consultation. There were three phases of the SCPI Program. SCPI 1 (1999-2003), SCPI 2 (2003-2006) et SCPI 2006-2007. **In concrete terms, between 2001¹ et march 2007, there was almost \$130 Million that was invested in Quebec.** The equivalent of SCPI in the rural setting was the Rural Homelessness Fund.



On April 1st, 2007, after several campaigns and rallies (among them, in front of PM's office in Ottawa on October 26th, 2006) the Conservative government replaced the Liberals' NHI with the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) and SCPI with the Homelessness Partnering Initiative (HPI) without changing the orientation or the terms and conditions

One of the aspects of the program - which was also a key element of its success – was (and remains) the involvement of those in the field – both in the planning stage (by the creation of a Community Plan which describes needs and prioritizes the responses) and in the project selection stage (by the establishment of a committee of partners – Community Advisory Board).

The current program

For the whole of Canada, \$270 million was allocated to HPS which will soon expire, on March 31st 2009.

¹ Let's remember that SCPI 1 projects could only start in 2001.

HPI is addressed to designated communities (12 in Québec, the same urban centres as under SCPI) and to more distant communities. **HPI represents \$38 million for Québec over 2 years :**

- 47 projects approved in the more distant communities for a total of \$1 983 610
- 238 projects in designated communities for a total of \$36 174 204 (including 11 still being processed at the end of July 2008)

However, the requests made by groups exceeded the budgets available 3 times over in most of the communities. **The amounts allocated currently to the fight against homelessness are insufficient** to cover the overall needs of persons that are homeless or at risk of homelessness. We have estimated a **minimum of \$50 million per year** is required for Quebec's needs (for the 12 HPI designated communities).

In several communities, a painful exercise of budget-cutting has had to take place in projects previously funded that could not all be continued, a direct consequence of the insufficiency of the budget envelopes allocated in each region.²

HPI 2007-2009: two program periods

HPI 2007-2009 was in fact cut into two periods:

- ✓ the first period of 9 months being transition measures designed to continue the majority of projects already funded under SCPI. approximately 90% of the budgets were extended thanks to this bridge funding; however, a certain number of projects were turned down – generally by the community advisory boards³ - because they weren't considered to have a direct impact on persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, others saw a part of their budget cut.⁴
- ✓ the second period of 15 months was subject to a process of planning - call for proposals – evaluation – recommendation of projects. In this second phase, projects already funded could be continued (if they responded to the priorities established in the new plan and were submitted to the evaluation process). New projects were also put forward and could be approved when the evaluation was favorable to them and budgets were sufficient.

A diversity of responses to a complex problem

HPI is a generalist program, as was SCPI, which allows currently for the realization of a diversity of projects :

- ✓ **building** projects : increasing the number of emergency shelter beds available, construction of new housing units (transition or permanent), improving the quality and safety of facilities for service delivery, etc.

Just in Montreal alone nearly \$4,9 million was committed to the creation of 177 new

² It works like this : a community that received \$30 in SCPI 2, in actual fact received it not over 3 years but over 2 years (so \$15 per project year). In giving this community \$10 per year in subsequent years, they were obliged to cut the size of projects and to cut certain projects in favor of others. It was generally the local community advisory boards that had to choose where to cut. Different choices were made by each community, for example some chose to cut all project budgets by the same percentage, while others made uneven cuts. This took place between SCPI 2 and SCPI 2006-2007 and also between SCPI 2006-2007 and the HPI transition measures.

³Note however that there were exceptions, notably concerning the projects of Quebec city homelessness coalition (homelessness awareness event) and the Longueuil homelessness coalition (consultation) where groups were not involved in the decision to not continue the projects.

⁴ See note 2.

housing units, including 89 permanent units aimed at persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.⁵

It needs to be mentioned also that several regions have favored human resource projects to the detriment of building projects, even when the need in these regions for those building projects, notably the construction of housing, is pressing. This difficult choice results once again from the insufficient funding envelope allocated to HPI.

- ✓ **Additional human resources** : Improving and increasing the capacity and quality of services offered to persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, etc.

The services are of several kinds : prevention to reduce the risk of deterioration in peoples' situations, or responding to crisis situations, favoring stabilization, the reintegration or integration of individuals, or to accompany them and defend their rights (social assistance, housing, justice, work, or other kind of advocacy to be needed) in order to improve their living conditions.

This diversity of services is necessary to respond to the diversity of life situations and problems experienced by people who are homeless or at risk, for example : addictions, mental illness, difficulties in entering the job market, lack of housing or inadequate housing, lack of income or insufficient income, etc.

These interventions happen in different places: on the street, in shelters, in soup kitchens, in day centers, in transition homes, in housing, etc.

In Quebec, approximately 300 equivalent-to-full-time positions are currently funded under HPI (including 19 in Sherbrooke, 20 in Gatineau, about 80 in Québec City).

In several communities, the total budget for HPI for 2007-2009 was committed to human resources (with a marginal amount for the other costs of intervention activities). For example: no building projects were funded for 2007-2009 in Sherbrooke, in Québec City, in Gatineau.

- ✓ **Awareness** activities and building solidarity on the question of homelessness, for example: *Nuit des sans abri* – the Night of the Homeless (an awareness event that happens annually in about twenty Québec cities).

To our knowledge, HPI 2007-2009 only contributed to fund the organization of the 2008 edition in Québec City.

- ✓ **Regional homelessness consultations** : the needs of individuals are better identified and better answered thanks to a better understanding of what's happening on the ground and greater collaboration between homelessness organizations and other players such as the public health system, the city, the police, etc.

To our knowledge, HPI 2007-2009 contributed funding to 2 homelessness consultations : *Table de concertation des sans-domicile fixe de Longueuil Rive-Sud* and *Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal*. (Longueuil and Montreal coalitions)

⁵ HPI has often served as additional funding for projects that also include contributions from the Government of Québec (nearly \$10 million notably in AccèsLogis which is a social housing program existing since 1999) and the City of Montréal (more than \$2.5 million).

Like its predecessor SCPI, **HPI is a program which has a major impact** in the communities where projects see the light of day, for it brings funds dedicated to homelessness. In several communities, **SCPI and HPI have had a structural effect:** creation of new resources, of new services but also reinforcement of the collaboration between the stakeholders, etc.

A difficult procedure to get projects set up

Even though HPI 2007-2009 had been announced in December 2006, the regions only received instructions for the community planning at the end of July 2007 in order to submit a new plan in September 2007. While this exercise could have been done well before, it was done late and hastily in the regions. Fortunately, on the advice of RSIQ, several regions had taken the initiative to commence the reflection on the needs and priorities before July 2007, which allowed them to reach a complete plan within the deadline. This time several regions neglected to lead a real consultation of homelessness groups, especially due to the lack of time.

The call for proposals was launched only in October 2007, less than 3 months before the end of the bridge funding; this deadline very nearly guaranteed that it would be impossible to start up new projects in January 2008. Even though the terms and conditions of HPI closely resembled those of SCPI, that the application forms for projects were similar, because the process was launched at the last minute, the proponents were prevented from preparing for this call for proposals.

The call for proposals lasted between 1 and 3 weeks depending on the community, to allow proponents to submit their projects⁶. The time given to prepare a proposal was insufficient, particularly for building projects, which are generally complex.

This short timeline had impacts later on : certain projects had to be turned down, because having been prepared too quickly, they were not sufficiently developed, others were subject to numerous requests for clarification and the proponents had to supply additional information at several subsequent steps of the evaluation of their project, which led to delays of several months.

The evaluation and the recommendation of projects consists of a series of steps at the local, regional and national level, with in between files going back and forth between the agency, the local office of Service Canada, the Québec regional office (Montréal) and the Homeless Partnering Secretariat (Gatineau). We believe this process is needlessly cumbersome. It draws in a large number of players and levels, which could be avoided, particularly for smaller projects or those that have already been recommended during previous phases of the program.

Aside from the costs associated with this process, it is the delays that it entails that are to be deplored. In most of the communities of Québec, the proponents have suffered delays in putting this program into action.

At the time of this writing (February 2009), some projects that were submitted in October 2007 (16 months earlier) haven't yet started.

Some of our members have let us know that the collaboration between Service Canada and the Health and Social Services Agency⁷, and between these institutions and the

⁶ For example, **Gatineau agencies received their proponents' kits on October 18, 2007 and had to submit their project proposals before October 25; those in Montréal received their kits on October 11 and had to submit before November 2.**

⁷ Health and Social Services Agencies represent Quebec government authorities at the local level.

proponent groups, have been a key element in the success in putting HPI into action: the process (however long) was found to be made easier when those in charge of the files were on good terms in the region, helpful to the proponents and sensitive to the needs of homeless people in the area. We've also been made aware of the difficulties in other regions due to the fact that the agents did not know or understand the reality of the people with whom homeless organizations worked on a daily basis, and that necessarily impacts the nature and development of projects meant for them. This situation had impacts in some regions where the staff responsible for files or the agents changed several times in recent years, whether at the offices of Service Canada or the Health and Social Services Agency.

Serious delays were also noted at the project signature stage; it is necessary to note however that the federal minister giving signing authority for projects of less than \$100,000 to the deputy minister resulted in a speeding up of this step.

A result reporting that has increased the workload

The result reporting was changed between SCPI and HPI. The objective being to not only measure what was done (e.g.: number of persons accommodated) but also the concrete impacts of projects (e.g.: measure of residential stability): as mentioned in a Service Canada document « *we have learned that the central administration's position concerning results measurement has evolved and that certain details are necessary* ». The result of these changes was **a significant increase in the workload** to meet the result reporting requirements that the proponents must meet.

Given that HPI 2007-2009 had been cut into two periods (one of nine months for the transition measures and the other of 15 months), the result reporting was seen as complicated.

In the first place, « a description of project results to be provided » was distributed to proponents in June 2007 although they were receiving funding since April 1st, in order to « inform them of the type of data that must be collected *throughout the length* of the project ». It concerned a temporary document that caused many misunderstandings on the part of the proponents.

Following this, the proponents received a national form on the results « which had to be completed for the period starting at the beginning of the project (variable according to the proponent) until March 31, 2008. This form was truly not easy for the proponents and added considerably to project administration, for which the groups had not even been funded.

Further, **this form for results reporting is poorly adapted to intervention projects.**

The choice of categories and the types of interventions do not fit the realities in the field (for example, in many cases the people contacted fall into several categories). Another problem, the form isn't always realistic: in the expected results, when it talks about youth, the questions asked are based on the results for families.

One wonders about the procedure around the telephone validation interview. The people who were supposed to be interviewed were to be available immediately, at the moment of the call, to participate in the interview, which is obviously not always possible. As well, the rhythm of the questions did not allow for reflection on the answers given, and could result in errors. Finally, when the question didn't fit the situation of the proponent being questioned, they were invited to supply an approximate estimate, which allows one to doubt the rigueur of the exercise and the reliability of the data on which Service Canada will make its determination of the future of the HPI program.

The form doesn't allow for showing off the advantages of the work with the homeless population. As well, the groups think that **there is a real risk of producing a poor portrait of homelessness from the data compiled from these forms**, the more so because the compilation undertaken by the offices of Service Canada will not be easy considering the diversity of services and the proponents providing them.

Another problematic element of the result reporting: this is not done according to the fiscal years of the organizations, but according to the project duration, for example over 15 months, which is more complicated for the proponents.

The HPI evaluation processes

On top of the result reporting by each proponent which is going to serve to constitute a global portrait, which as we see above strongly risks being inexact, an evaluation of the HPI program is being conducted across Canada by a firm of consultants. This while the evaluation of SCPI 2 hasn't even been published. It is therefore reasonable to question the pertinence of this new evaluation and the fact that decisions on the future of the program depend upon it.

HPI 2009-2014: perspectives and stakes

Several times through the year of 2008, representatives of the federal government declared: *"Our government is supporting many Canadians with housing needs and is fulfilling its commitment to help those seeking to break free of the cycle of homelessness and poverty. We are proud to support community efforts that help find local solutions to local issues."*⁸

Consequently, **they made the commitment to renew HPI for 5 years**. This resulted from a Cabinet meeting at the beginning of September 2008, even though it was only revealed during the course of the federal election campaign on September 18th. We point out that the Liberal Party of Canada, the New Democratic Party as well as the Bloc Québécois had all declared themselves in favor of a continuation of federal homelessness funding for 5 years.

At the beginning of January 2009, some pieces of information have eventually been revealed concerning the continuation of federal homelessness funding past March 31, 2009.

Administrative extension for HPI 2007-2009 projects

For several current projects, it would be difficult to be completed by March 31, 2009. Therefore, an administrative extension of ONE YEAR has been announced. This means that, without new money, the proponents would have one year more to spend the money that has already been allocated to them during the 2007-2009 phases. This will be very helpful especially in the Montreal and Laval areas where several building projects encounter delays which results from a confluence of different factors:

- the call for proposals took place barely a year ago;
 - the recommendations followed slowly this winter;
 - the projects often require other financing;
 - problems with permits and zoning are frequent;
 - finding contractors at the desired moment is difficult;
- Etc.

⁸ Excerpt of press release from Human resources and social development Canada.

2 additional years' extension for "direct services"

Considering the large number of intervention and consultation projects currently funded under HPI, stopping funding on March 31, 2009 would have had dramatic repercussions on persons experiencing or at risk of homelessness who receive these services. Consequently, **the federal government wants to provide extension funding for these projects and put it in place quickly** in order to maintain the teams in place to conserve the links between them and people regularly using these organizations' services.

However, projects should be "direct and continue services to homeless people and those at risk of homelessness", which lead us to fear about some refusals regarding: consultation projects, or even administrative staff in grass-roots agencies. Call for proposals ended on February 6th in most of Quebec communities, so we have to wait for the analysis period to see the eventual problems.

This extension will be 2 years (until March 31st, 2011), and the federal government did not yet revealed its orientation for the program after 2011.

New projects where budget make it possible

Where after the first call for proposals (for 2 years' extension) there would be some money left, new projects could be submitted. I would be around March 15th and under the same orientations than HPI 2007-2009 (e.g.: capital funding or human resources).

Unfortunately, in many communities, there would be no money for new developments, the local budget being 100% allocated of the current projects' extension.

An insufficient budget

The announcement made in September last proposes renewing HPS with a budget identical to the one we currently have (that being \$135 million per year for all of HPS for the whole of Canada). We already know though that the needs on the ground will still be immense.

There are additional needs :

- ✓ In current projects which we wish to extend, it must be possible to better fund the expenses related to the activities, the supplies and certain buildings. In the past, some expenses had been cut because of insufficient budgets. We also must be able to ensure the indexing of staff salaries and other expenses.
- ✓ Other existing projects have not yet benefitted from federal funding. Their precarity makes funding necessary to their survival. For example, in Sherbrooke, a voluntary trustee service called "*Tout compte fait*", operated by a soup kitchen called *Chaudronnée de l'Estrie*, and which was set up 2 years ago to respond to the needs of program users of several Sherbrooke organizations.
- ✓ Numerous projects could be initiated, as initiatives emerge regularly from the reflection of the community partners, in line with the priorities established in their Community Plan. For example. in Sherbrooke, the partner organizations wish to develop a daily paid work program (as it already exists in Montréal).

It is necessary this time that in all the regions, we can count on a portion of the budget allocated for development as well as the budget required to consolidate projects underway. In order to fully cover the needs of those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, a minimum of \$50 million per year is needed for Québec instead of the actual \$18 million (for the 12 communities currently designated under HPI).

Community	Annual budget (based on 2007-2009 numbers)	Minimum needs estimation
Outaouais	\$ 791 661	\$ 2, 2 million
Québec city	\$ 2 343 286	\$ 6,5 million
Chaudière-Appalaches	\$ 407 428	\$ 1,1 million
Centre du Québec	\$ 358 465	\$ 1 million
Mauricie	\$ 602 406	\$ 1,6 million
Cantons de l'Est	\$ 756 465	\$ 2,1 million
Saguenay / Lac St-Jean	\$ 591 907	\$ 1,6 million
Montérégie	\$ 1 974 414	\$ 5,4 million
Laval	\$ 973 842	\$ 2,7 million
Lanaudière	\$ 544 517	\$ 1,5 million
Laurentides	\$ 861 507	\$ 2,4 million
Montréal	\$ 7 867 704	\$ 21,7 million
<i>Total for the Province of Québec</i>	<i>\$18 million</i>	<i>\$50 million</i>

It is to be hoped that the budget announced in September can be increased to respond to the needs. The distribution between HPS programs could also be changed to increase the amount allocated for HPI. **Unfortunately, the Flaherty budget revealed on January 27st, 2009 did not announce any increase.**

The special rapporteur of the UN on the right to housing declared in 2007 « *Canada is one of the richest countries in the world, which makes the prevalence of this crisis all the more striking . [...] Homelessness is one of the most visible and the most serious signs of a lack of respect of the right to adequate housing. It is even more shocking to see the number of homeless people in such a developed and wealthy country as Canada. »*

Ottawa has the means to continue its efforts on homelessness as the budgetary surpluses of recent years have shown: from 1997-1998 to 2006-2007, Ottawa has built up a total of \$95 billion in surpluses for an annual average of \$9,5 billion.⁹, the most considerable in the OECD. It is only by the granting of considerable tax cuts that the federal government has recently found itself in the situation of no longer having a surplus. It is a shame that Ottawa gives new tax cuts instead of additional investments that could help all Canadians to face their economic difficulties. **Minister Flaherty announced \$20 billion tax cuts and tax credits** to middle class and high class households; this has not been proved to give any incentive for the economy and it reduces the federal capacity to help those at need.

The current process with contribution of Québec and of the communities

The first 2 years' period of HPI (2009-2011) will be under an extension of the current Canada / Québec agreement. This is unique in Canada; it allows an important involvement of Health and Social Services Agencies (which are already involved in homelessness funding through provincial programs).

Regarding HPI 2009-2011, local committees (formed with the participation of homelessness agencies) will be formed shortly and be involved in the calls for proposals (for 2 years' extension and for new projects). Since the beginning of the program, this was a guarantee of its success since it was the stakeholders on the ground who themselves

⁹ Department of Finance of Canada, *financial reference tables*, September 2007, Table 1, Budget operations.

established the needs in the field by the development of a regional community plan and make the projects selection.

The regional homelessness committees have been able to play a committed role in establishing the priorities of the community plan, and thus give direction to the local committees evaluating the proposals. This involvement must continue, in that way the needs of people being served will be front and centre. **To encourage the work of these regional committees, it would of course be useful if they could receive HPI funding,** as they have been recognized in federal and provincial orientations as crucial.

In order to avoid a lack of services for current projects and to start up new projects as early as 2009, there is a short time calendar including:

- Planning: the regional plans developed for the first phase of HPI will probably only need a simple updating as they were only done recently, in fall 2007.
- Those who need it would have to submit for 1 year administrative extension.
- Call for proposals for 2 years' extension of current human resources projects (currently done and for which proponents had 2 weeks)
- Where permitted by budget, a second call for proposals for new projects / or in some cases, some proponents could be targeted (proponents already received their information and forms kit).
- Different steps for analysis, recommendation and selection of projects, that we recommend to be lightened in order to speed up the process.

What perspectives for HPI after 2011?

Regarding HPI after 2011, there is a big question mark on what orientations would be as well as funding process. The budget that has been announced until 2014 would stay on homelessness investments for the period 2011-2014. But we have no indication of what it would be used for.

It is a pity that the 5 years' budget has been divided on 2 periods because a 5 years phase would have facilitated the planning and the delivery of projects. Besides, the length and the continuity of the interventions (sometimes over many years) cannot be ignored in order to have positive and lasting impacts on people (especially since the process of exclusion that led them to homelessness can extend over several years).

These are the stakes that should be examined closely while a new homelessness federal program would be designed:

- 1) **Budget must be increased:** Quebec agencies require an annual minimum of \$50 million to answer the needs (3 times the current budget)
- 2) **Keep the generalist orientation in order to respond to a variety of needs and allow :**
 - to ensure the continuity of interventions with individuals
 - to consolidate the work teams and better equip them to intervene
 - to develop new projects and respond to emerging needs
 - to improve the installations and equipment of organizations receiving individuals
 - to meet the increasing demand by improving the capacity of organizations to respond to it.
 - to support homelessness consultations, at the regional and provincial level.

It is important to remember that the needs to be addressed are those of a great variety of individuals (in terms of age, gender, ethnic origin, etc.) that deal with a multitude of problems.. The HPI program should maintain this « multi-client » and « multi-problem »

approach. **Homelessness cannot be reduced to just a housing problem; and an assortment of solutions, not just housing, must be proposed to the individuals concerned.**

- 3) **Preserve** the particular delivery model for HPI in Québec where there exists an agreement between the governments of Canada and Québec that ensures an **involvement of the Regional Health and Social Services Agencies.**
- 4) **The community aspect of the program is equally something to preserve** in the steps of planning, analysis, recommendation and following of the projects.
- 5) **Lighten the administrative workload** due to numerous steps in analysis and recommendation of the projects. We believe this can be made without taking off any responsibility. We believe that this could help reducing delays.

Review made thanks to the contribution of Quebec homelessness agencies and coalitions

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