

**IMPACTS OF BED BUGS
ON SOCIAL COHESION & COMMERCE:
PROPOSAL FOR A NATIONAL
BED BUG CONTROL PROGRAM**

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Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit ideas. I'm writing to you from a grassroots level, as a person with a disability living in Toronto, on an issue that often flies beneath the radar of government, and is concealed by the private sector, but which can have serious consequences for Canadian communities: *bedbug infestation*.

As you may know, the spread of bedbug infestations in our major cities has reached epidemic proportions. Social housing, community centres, libraries, and charitable organizations that work with vulnerable persons, have been particularly hard hit. The 2016 Federal Budget recognizes these institutions as important contributors to our social identity, with its historic commitment to invest \$60 billion in new infrastructure over the next decade, which highlighted improving funding of projects for seniors, First Nations, and the disabled.

SUMMARY

The spread of bedbug infestation in Canadian communities continues to have substantial social and economic consequences.¹

We have reached the point where regional interventions are being exhausted and a national strategy is needed, on both organizational and economic levels. Two primary issues:

1. Lack of a national bedbug strategy spreads distrust and damages social cohesion, negatively impacting the economic environment for everybody (with the exception of a few industries such as pest control). Seniors, First Nations, and disabled communities are hindered in their ability to contribute economically by unstable and sometimes harmful housing conditions, social distrust, and lack of adequate community supports. Improving living conditions and community involvement for these groups will enable them to increase their economic contribution, as well as create a better overall economic environment.
2. Without a national bedbug strategy, this government's historic investment in infrastructure may not realize its full potential. Leaving individual communities to deal with bedbug control on a piecemeal basis, is inefficient and ineffective, as infestations are easily spread. Large social housing programs are particularly vulnerable to persistent bedbug infestation. Such programs, despite their considerable expense, fail to achieve their objectives when bedbug infestations become chronic, rendering such projects unlivable for the very groups they are created to benefit.²

1 Mireille Silcoff, "Bed bugs are everywhere, yet still we must leave the house", *National Post*, Feb 26, 2016, <<http://news.nationalpost.com/life/mireille-silcoff-bed-bugs-are-everywhere-yet-still-we-must-leave-the-house>>

2 Hugh Adami, "Public Citizen: 'How bad does it have to get?', frustrated bed bug victim asks government", *Ottawa Citizen*, July 15, 2015, <<http://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/public-citizen-how-bad-does-it-have-to-get-frustrated-bed-bug-victim-asks-government>>

THE PROPOSAL

I am therefore proposing that 0.05% of the 2016-2026 federal infrastructure spend (0.05% of \$60 billion is \$30 million over 10 years) be invested to develop and maintain a national bedbug strategy. Additionally, I'm proposing a program making federal matching funds available to provinces that invest in this area, as needed. The proposed strategy would be based on the 20-point guideline developed at the 2010 Bedbug Summit held in Queen's Park, organized by MPP Michael Colle, which included:³

- *A national overview in tracking the infestation of Bed Bugs across the country.*
- *Establishment of an expert panel of scientists from both within government and outside of government, to advise and support government scientists and public health experts who are engaged in Bed Bug infestation control, containment, and combat. This panel needs to ensure there is a national and international intervention and best practices regime established for ongoing state of the art remedies.*⁴
- *There needs to be an effort to eliminate delays and confusion in the approval of safe chemicals to fight Bed Bug infestation. A full scale Integrated Pest Management System needs to be developed and shared with all professional pest management stakeholders.*
- *Possible new building practices should be examined (especially for multi-resident homes), that would help in preventing future infestations. These practices should also be applied to building renovations, so that any renovations would be completed in a manner that would help prevent Bed Bug infestations from spreading (i.e. possible use of diatomaceous earth).*

HISTORY OF THE ISSUE

Bedbugs re-emerged in the Canadian consciousness in the 2000s after a nearly 50-year hiatus, since bedbugs were largely eradicated in the post-war period with the introduction of DDT. After an initial spate of coverage and some short-term government programs a few years ago, there seems to be little government tracking of the issue, beyond websites with general information.

How much worse can it get? In the 1880s in Britain it was estimated that over 75% of homes were infested with bedbugs. One in three European homes had bedbug infestations in the 1930s and 1940s.⁵ While the current environment is challenging, the postwar period has already proven that with sustained concerted effort, the bedbug problem can be virtually eliminated.

A PERSPECTIVE FROM ONTARIO

I learned from firsthand experience a few years ago that bedbug infestation means months of insomnia, throwing out a considerable portion of possessions, treatment of living quarters with carcinogenic chemicals, and inability to search for new housing or work, without risking spreading the infestation. These social consequences of bedbug infestation - not being able to host, travel, or visit anyone without

3 The complete Bedbug Summit recommendations are available at <<http://www.woodgreen.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=2qQsi9hZoRk%3D&tabid=213>>

4 One interesting development is a new bedbug treatment technology being developed at Simon Fraser University: "Bed bug control closer with Scotts Canada sponsorship", Feb. 24, 2016, <<https://www.sfu.ca/sfunews/stories/2016/bed-bug-control-closer-with-scotts-canada-sponsorship.html>>

5 Leslie McDonald, Rima Zavys, *Bedbugs are Back: Are We Ready?*, Woodgreen Community Services, 2009, p. 1, <http://www.woodgreen.org/Portals/0/PDFs/WG_BBresearchReport-web.pdf>

risking spreading the infestation - are potentially much worse than the parasitism of the bedbugs themselves. They threaten a person's livelihood and integrity.

Further, the effects on social cohesion and commerce are significant. While I was an avid library user for my entire life prior to the bedbug epidemic, after I experienced an infestation myself I stopped using the library entirely, since books are a favorite place for bedbugs to hide and lay eggs.⁶ Bedbugs also made me reluctant to use public transit,⁷ go to theaters, or buy used items. When you see how minute the bedbug eggs and nymphs are, combined with the fact that they can live for over a year without feeding, you realize they can be anywhere, in virtually anything.

After the Ontario Bed Bug Summit, the provincial and municipal governments did become involved, notably with a \$5 million dollar investment by the Province in bedbug education and control. But this was short-term funding that was not renewed.

ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Even a cursory internet search reveals that the bedbug problem across Canada is persistent and growing. While the primary impact is in major cities,⁸ smaller communities are also effected.⁹

Since the bedbugs know no borders, large-scale collective action is needed, to bring transparency and comprehensive oversight to a problem which causes atomization and distrust.¹⁰ Since no landlord will knowingly rent to someone coming from a bedbug-infested building, transitional housing is needed while infested units are treated. At present vulnerable persons can be afraid to report bedbug infestations, since it can mean losing access to other social supports. Likewise, landlords are often remiss to report infestations, since no-one will rent from them. Ontario MPP Mike Colle - who had organized the Bed Bug Summit in 2010 - also proposed legislation requiring landlords to advise prospective tenants if the building has had any infestations in the past five years, but it was not adopted.¹¹ The probable reason is the great number of landlords that would find themselves without tenants if the truth were known. But is the severity of a problem a reason to keep covering it up? Surely, in the long run such an approach will only worsen the problem until it becomes impossible to avoid, or until it is overshadowed by some great sociopolitical catastrophe, as happened in the previous two centuries.

6 The Canadian Press, "Bedbug infestation closes southwestern Ontario libraries", *Toronto Star*, June 14, 2016, <<https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2016/06/14/bedbug-infestation-closes-southwestern-ontario-libraries.html>>

7 City News, "Seen a bed bug crawling around on the TTC? You're not alone", March 8, 2016, <<http://www.citynews.ca/2016/03/08/seen-a-bed-bug-crawling-around-on-the-ttc-youre-not-alone/>>

8 Michael Mui, "Reports of bedbugs double in Vancouver", *24 Hours Vancouver*, July 23, 2013, <<http://vancouver.24hrs.ca/2013/07/18/reports-of-bedbugs-double-in-vancouver>>
Amanda Ferguson, "New survey suggests bed bugs flourishing in Toronto highrises", *City News*, Oct. 14, 2015, <<http://www.citynews.ca/2015/10/14/new-survey-suggests-bed-bugs-flourishing-in-toronto-high-rises/>>

Kelly Greig, "Bed bugs an 'epidemic' in Montreal, says housing group", *Global News*, July 4, 2016, <<http://globalnews.ca/news/2801976/bed-bugs-an-epidemic-in-montreal-says-housing-group/?sf30235641=1>>

9 Andrea Ross, "'This house is not for living,' say Syrian refugees living in Edmonton", *Metro News*, Sept. 29, 2015, <<http://www.metronews.ca/news/edmonton/2015/09/29/syrian-family-trapped-by-pests.html>>

Rick Garrick, "Bedbug growing concern across north", *Wawatay News*, Dec. 1, 2015, <<http://www.wawataynews.ca/wwt/home/bedbugs-growing-concern-across-north>>

10 Some comparative work has been done between four major Canadian cities (Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Vancouver) regarding bedbug treatment standards and tracking: Mona Shum, Elizabeth Comack, Taz Stuart, Reg Ayre, Stéphane Perron, Shelley A. Beaudet, TomKosatsky, "Bed Bugs and Public Health: New Approaches for an Old Scourge", *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, Nov/Dec. 2012, <<http://journal.cpha.ca/index.php/cjph/article/view/3426>>

11 The "Renters' Right to Know Act" <http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills_detail.do?locale=en&BillID=2389>

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Bedbugs also adversely impact tourism and private enterprise. As can be seen from the bedbugregistry.com website, some Canadian cities are developing a bad reputation for bedbugs. Landlords and hoteliers frequently bear the burden of expensive and unsuccessful ongoing bedbug treatment programs. Hotel bedbug treatments and lawsuits can easily run into the tens of thousands of dollars.¹²

Many other types of businesses are also effected. Infestations are being encountered in virtually every kind of environment, including day-care centers, stores, office buildings, and nursing homes.¹³

In regard to the 2016 Federal Budget's allocation of \$2.3 billion for social housing, it is worth considering that the large multi-dwelling units usual in the development of social housing, are particularly susceptible to severe bedbug infestations. In Toronto, for instance, a large percentage of social housing buildings have been dealing with ongoing bedbug infestations for years. Imagine waiting for many years for affordable housing, only to find the new housing has a bedbug infestation; and further, to find there is no way to properly address the infestation, because the whole building has it.

As currently built, these developments make it difficult or impossible to isolate individual units, so the bedbugs simply move from one unit to the next as individual units are treated. The overall structure is often too large to treat the entire building simultaneously, so the infestations persist. As the 2016 Federal Budget commits to large-scale development of new social housing over the next decade, I'm therefore concerned that the new housing takes this problem into consideration from the design stage forward, so that these new developments are not rendered immediately unlivable by new bedbug infestations. As mentioned in the Bed Bug Summit recommendations, there should be ways to create better seals and greater isolation between individual units of large-scale multi-dwelling developments, so that containing and eliminating new infestations will be much easier. This might compliment the new energy efficiency measures.

Many of the other measures outlined in the recommendations of the 2010 Queen's Park Bed Bug Summit could compliment commitments already made in the 2016 Budget. From the references above, it is evident that the bedbug epidemic has the potential to significantly impact many other priorities identified in the Budget, and the proposed plan could augment the effectiveness of the substantial allocations for the Canada Health Infoway,¹⁴ the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund, the \$150 million for Regional Development Agencies for renovation and expansion of community infrastructure for the sesquicentennial, the funding for Destination Canada and tourism promotion, and the \$3.4 billion public transit investment.

Thank you for your consideration.¹⁵

12 Kerry Miller, "The Cost of Bedbugs", *Bloomberg News*, Nov. 8, 2007, <<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2007-11-08/the-cost-of-bedbugsbusinessweek-business-news-stock-market-and-financial-advice>>

13 Michael F. Potter, Jim Fredericks, Missy Henriksen, *2015 NPMA/University of Kentucky Bed Bug Survey: Executive Summary*, <<http://www.pestworld.org/news-hub/pest-articles/2015-bugs-without-borders-executive-summary/>>

14 While bedbugs are at present primarily considered a pest, they could also become a serious threat to physical as well as mental health. See Lowe CF, Romney MG, "Bedbugs as vectors for drug-resistant bacteria", *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, June 2011, Center for Disease Control <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/17/6/10-1978_article>

15 All links checked Aug. 4, 2016. This is an abridged version, please contact me for the complete version with many more references.