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Chair: The Honourable Wayne Easter



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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.)): We will call the meeting to order.

Welcome, all, to meeting number 36 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance. We are meeting to study all aspects of COVID-19 spending, programs and related monetary policy.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of January 25. Therefore, members are attending in person in the room, or remotely, using the Zoom application. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. Just so you're aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee. We ask that people not take photos of the total screenshot, which some of you can probably see.

I want to welcome the witnesses today.

This is the first panel of two, but before I start, Pat Kelly, I have just a heads-up for you. We've had two blackouts in my office today, and it's always possible that another one will happen, so if the screen goes black, just take over—the chair is yours.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): All right.

The Chair: We will start with the witnesses. I'd ask the witnesses if each of you could try to hold your remarks to about five minutes or thereabouts.

We'll start with Mr. Vallée Dore with the Réseau Solidarité Itinérance du Québec.

[Translation]

Mr. Boromir Vallée Dore (Coordinator, Réseau SOLIDARITÉ Itinérance du Québec): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Réseau SOLIDARITÉ Itinérance du Québec, or RSIQ, team would like to express our gratitude to the members of the Standing Committee on Finance for this invitation. We welcome the consultative work you are doing to analyze the special measures that have been taken during this pandemic.

The RSIQ now includes 15 regional homelessness networks throughout Quebec. We are talking about 330 community homelessness organizations that offer services such as emergency housing, supervised consumption sites, street work resources, resources for women, day centres and organizations for troubled youth.

Founded in 1998, the RSIQ is a privileged interlocutor in Quebec. It is also the initiator of the National Policy to Fight Homelessness, which was adopted at the Quebec National Assembly in 2014. This policy is broken down into five priority areas of intervention. The first is housing, the second is health and social services, the third is income, the fourth is education as well as social and socio-professional integration, and the fifth is social cohabitation and issues related to court referral.

Many indicators are in the red right now and we anticipate that there will be an increase in homelessness-related needs in the coming years. It is imperative that our five axes be addressed. We also need to give more flexibility and capacity to community groups.

With respect to the emergency funding programs that were deployed during the COVID-19 crisis, we applaud the fact that the federal government quickly put in place substantial funding for Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy - COVID-19, which we also refer to as VCS COVID 3. This funding allowed our members to develop services to urgently address the needs of people experiencing homelessness. However, we have faced the following limitations. While the amounts are substantial, the funding provided through the Homelessness Strategy - COVID-19 does not provide community groups with the flexibility to respond to the challenges they face, such as labour shortages, worker burnout, increased distress among those being served, and so on. They must therefore redouble their efforts to continue to respond well to the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

Unfortunately, all of these constraints have made it very difficult to adequately address the needs of populations that are too often overlooked, such as women, LGBTQ2S people, youth, indigenous persons, and people who use drugs. We had to commit huge amounts of money very quickly. I give you as an example what we call VCS COVID 3, which was up to \$40 million for Quebec. We were asked to spend in three months, without offering us any flexibility, the amount of money we usually have for a year.

The guidance, in the case of these amounts, confirmed that the money could be committed from April 1 to June 30. Yet the groups did not receive the funds until January. History is repeating itself. We still don't know what will happen after July 1 in terms of the continuity of VCS COVID 3. As a result, groups have begun announcing service disruptions. Workers are now seeking employment. We need to at all costs announce these dates as soon as possible.

We report in our evaluation that the VCS COVID 3 dollars have not allowed agencies to act with sufficient flexibility to meet the challenges brought on by increased need while overcoming the barriers created by the health environment.

Considering that the negative effects of the pandemic will have alarming social repercussions for several years to come, it is necessary to move beyond the emergency and to look further ahead by working in a preventive mode and developing structuring measures for the future. Here are our four recommendations: 1) that the dates for the use of the \$289 million that constitute the VCS COVID 3 envelope be confirmed as soon as possible and that these funds be available as early as July 1; 2) that, in order to allow for more flexibility, the \$567 million that have been announced for the 2022-24 budget be allocated to the regular envelopes and not to the emergency envelopes; 3) that, as agreed to in the Canada-Quebec Reaching Home COVID 3 agreement, the funds be allocated respecting the comprehensive approach set out in the National Policy to Fight Homelessness, and the jurisdiction of the Quebec government; 4) that what was mentioned to us when the agreement was signed be respected and that accountability in the case of groups be lightened.

With respect to the rapid housing initiative, RHI, while our members reacted favourably to the announcement concerning the creation of this program, the application process is unfortunately problematic. Many groups were not able to apply for this project because the timelines were so short and the groups were dealing with the effects of the pandemic, which they had to manage.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1535)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll turn to the Canadian Association of Retired Persons.

Mr. VanGorder, welcome.

Mr. Bill VanGorder (Chief Operating Officer and Chief Policy Officer, Canadian Association of Retired Persons): Thank you very much.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear today. I am Bill VanGorder. I am the chief operating officer of CARP, also known as the Canadian Association of Retired Persons. We are Canada's largest advocacy organization for older adults.

We're a national, non-partisan, non-profit organization that advocates for financial security and improved health care for Canadians. We have 320,000 members across the country and 27 chapters, all playing an active role in the creation of policy and legislation that affects older Canadians.

With more than 80% of the COVID-19 deaths linked to institutional long-term care, and the 90% of older Canadians who live in their own homes all severely impacted by COVID, Canadians were shocked by the complete inability of the system to protect its older citizens during the pandemic.

We found that the historic issues that have undermined elder care for some time exploded during this period. Overcrowded wards, lack of staff training, chronic understaffing and lack of support for family caregivers all must be addressed. Canada lags behind other countries in funding long-term care and community and home care. In long-term care, for instance, we only spend 1.3% of the GDP, where countries like the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden spend over twice as much on their elder citizens.

We need federal government financial support that provides appropriate, clear and measurable standards to improve the quality of care for all of these vulnerable Canadians, along with the appropriate tools to take action should these outcomes not be achieved.

CARP believes that the federal Auditor General should establish a working group to establish consistent standards for reviewing services and expenditures on home care and long-term care and make the report on it an annual Auditor General's event. We'd also like to see a panel of older Canadians created to advise the government on policies and programs. Older Canadians want decisions made with them, not for them, and they strongly believe that their level of health care should not be determined by their postal code.

CARP notes that the federal government's budget presented this week includes some promises to assist older Canadians. The first is the beginning of a process to set, monitor and enforce appropriate long-term care standards. However, the \$3 billion over five years had only one goal in the first year, and that was to get the Canadian Standards Association and two other groups to create a policy document that could be examined as late as early 2022. Surely we would agree with the CARP members who are saying that the need now is urgent and older adults across the country want action now.

As a sidebar, by the way, we note that there has been talk about changing the Canada Health Act. That will take much too long. There's much too much involved in that. CARP believes that long-term care should be a separate agreement with the provinces. Our members will work with the federal government to urge our provincial governments to co-operate on that process.

The budget also proposed \$90 million over three years to produce the living well at home fund. That's wonderful to have that happen. Certainly those kinds of helps, like home repair and grass cutting and other assistance, are the sorts of things they need. However, the support must be accompanied by national standards to meet those critical needs, but also make sure there's enough funding for front-line home care, community care, respite care, expanding telehealth care solutions, eliminating sales taxes on family-funded services and an income tax rebate for family caregivers.

In the past, programs similar to the living well at home program, such as the new horizons grants, were provided as seed funding and then expected the local volunteer groups to fundraise or obtain other local grants to continue those programs beyond a year or so. This will not work with the living well at home program.

● (1540)

CARP urges you to assure that they will be funded for multiple years to assure that these services continue to be available to those older Canadians who require them.

We also must point out our severe disappointment and our members' disappointment that nothing has been offered in terms of help for family caregivers. Child care, yes, but what about those families who have to give similar care to older parents or family members, many of whom are in a sandwich generation where they have to give care to both?

Finally and honestly, CARP is sorry to report to you that older Canadians have a perception that the federal government has done very little to directly assist them during COVID. We're hearing from our members that they've seen money going to workers, businesses and institutions, but none for seniors.

In all fairness, of course, it can be pointed out that there have been programs that have been aimed at helping seniors, but in their view, all they have received was \$300 last June, another \$500 promised this August, and \$200 more maybe last June if they were really poor. To dispel this perception, quicker, more focused actions by the federal government are necessary to support older Canadians during these difficult times.

Thank you for the opportunity to bring CARP's concerns to you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Bill.

We'll turn to Ms. Kamateros with the Shield of Athena Family Services.

Ms. Melpa Kamateros (Executive Director, Shield of Athena Family Services): Good afternoon. Hello to all the members of the committee and guests. It is an honour for us to present to the committee today on the specific issues we deal with in violence against women.

I'd also like to say hi to Lise, with whom we've been working on several occasions.

I'm the executive director of the Shield of Athena Family Services. We have provided for the past 30 years a network of multilingual services for victims of conjugal violence. We have three points of service presently. We will be building a fourth transition home, a social housing unit for women, for after their stay at an emergency

shelter. We also have a fully developed community outreach department. Annually, we raise awareness to thousands of people on the issues of conjugal violence. This we do in many, many languages.

The global effects of the pandemic from last March—officially, I think it was March 11 when it was announced—until the present have impacted everyone and have disrupted the rhythm of life as we know it. I would like to say thank you to the Government of Canada for all they have done for victims of violence in terms of the COVID payments. We thank them and also our respective provinces very much.

What we've seen during this pandemic is that no one is immune. The most affected, however, are women, and by consequence their children. We think of women with their children as part of a package. The lockdowns and quarantines have affected women's capacity to go to work. They have affected their ability to provide. They have affected their ability to protect themselves and their children and, particularly in the field we work in, to keep themselves safe and out of danger.

In the case of violence against women, we're already dealing with a pandemic. The United Nations had labelled violence against women as a global pandemic way before the health pandemic of COVID began. It had already reached, before COVID, pandemic proportions. What are we speaking of? We're speaking of the lack of access to services, the lack of spaces in shelters, ineffective laws, not enough prevention programs, not enough awareness of the issue of conjugal violence and the minimization of the existence of conjugal violence. Those all existed prior to the global COVID pandemic. What happened when the pandemic hit was that for women victims, already limited in their scope of action, their situation became much more reinforced and much more dangerous due to their isolation with an abusive partner. This same isolation also made it more difficult for them to access information, to call organizations and to plan for an escape.

As well, there was an initial shock with the pandemic that resulted in people not calling. This elicited the various organizations that worked with victims to do outreach programs. I know that we were very heavily involved in outreach programs in many languages. We would tell people, particularly victims, "Look, this is COVID, but you can access the services." Information is knowledge, and knowledge is power.

There was also the fact that during COVID there were no procedures in place. There was an initial shock with the fact that we were within this pandemic. No procedures were in place. It was very difficult for women to access any services, to go to the police or to go to the hospital, particularly when they were very often living with their enemy.

For years shelters in Quebec have been clamouring that there hasn't been enough space to put women and children in. The emergency shelters have been working at rates of over 100%. In 2018 our shelter was working at a rate of 105%. This lack of space during that time became much more evident with the pandemic.

What does shelter living involve? Shelter living involves community living. It's a communal life, but how do you have community living within the context of a pandemic? It's impossible. Social distancing is impossible. Isolating women is impossible. Many of the shelters are small shelters. They do not have the space for that and they do not have the means. Where you could double up women and children before, you could not do that within the context of a global pandemic. Whatever was underlying in terms of problems with space and resources became even worse with this global pandemic.

● (1545)

Of course, for women of race, for women coming from immigrant communities, for women who presented with severe linguistic and other barriers, the situation of just attaining basic information, never mind accessing resources, became really horrendous because their isolation was even more pronounced.

Despite this situation, shelters and other organizations devised ways to help women get into limited resources. We recommend that more funds go towards expanding spaces for already existing shelters. There's a huge need there. There was a huge need there from before.

By far, however, access to second-step housing was even more difficult. I don't know if you've heard, but in Quebec, from the beginning of the pandemic, from May, we've had 15 murders. Another woman was killed over the past weekend. The purpose of second-step resources is to allow a very secure environment for women leaving emergency shelters. We all know that the violent episodes during the first year are huge at the point of the woman deciding to leave an abusive relationship. They're huge for her and huge for her children.

My question is, why were these resources so slow in coming? If we take our example at the Shield of Athena, it took us 10 years from day one until now to be building a second-step shelter. Procedures are long and arduous. Maybe they can be made lighter. Maybe they can respond more quickly to certain needs that are coming forth regarding violence against women.

In terms of these procedures, I realize that it does not solely have to do with the federal government. There are the provincial actors as well. Working with the Société d'habitation du Québec was horrendous. It took such a long time. There were bureaucratic messes, and so on. Therefore, we recommend just an overview towards seeing what it is that we can do in order to make the situation much better for the women and their children.

The other aspect of going into a second-step resource is, of course, to help the woman attain a situation of autonomy. Autonomy is really hard for women who are victims of conjugal violence. In addition to the financial dependency that we see in the conjugal violence cases, there's also the fear of where do they go to after. A lot of them are single mothers. A lot of them are scared. A lot of them don't speak the language. There are huge issues with attaining autonomy.

Taking that into consideration, we respectfully request that the committee take into consideration that one of the most important issues for victims is their right to some sort of financial indemniza-

tion, a recognition in the form of financial assistance for a limited time until they are back on their feet.

We are speaking in Quebec about some emergency funds that can be given to women so that they can expedite matters for themselves to leave abusive situations more quickly, but that's not the issue. That's part of the issue, and this comes from the lack of a global perspective on what we need for conjugal violence. One of the most important issues is that we have to recognize the severity of what conjugal violence is, that it's a social issue, and we have to recognize the status of what being a victim of this type of violence is.

We recommend and respectfully request that the committee take into consideration that a specific allocation, some sort of stipend, be given to victims of conjugal violence, be they single women or single mothers with their children, because all victims of conjugal violence need financial support.

I thank the committee very much for hearing us on this topic.

● (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Melpa.

We'll turn to Watershed Partners, with Mr. Ursell, who is a practice lead.

Mr. Ursell.

Mr. Charlie Ursell (Practice Lead, Watershed Partners): Hello. My name is Charlie Ursell. Thank you to the honourable members of the committee for inviting Watershed Partners to appear today.

As you can probably tell from my accent, I'm not originally from here. I'm an immigrant and I'm genuinely excited to take part in the parliamentary process in my adopted home.

I'm a professional facilitator and a process designer at Watershed Partners. What that means is that I help clients have collaborative, generative conversations with people who have a variety of perspectives so they can create solutions to the biggest problems that they face.

Thank you to the committee for sending this invitation and also for the clarification that you're interested in learning more about a project that we delivered related to wealth and the problem of housing inequity across generations. It truly is an honour to share our work with you today.

As a brief overview, Watershed Partners is a collaborative design firm that designs and facilitates engagement across a wide range of people with a wide range of perspectives. The purpose of our work is to enable participants in our sessions to freely create their own solutions to the problems that they face. I believe that people love what they design and people own what they create.

Watershed creates the conditions for good conversations. Then we step back and ensure that the participants in the sessions own the outcomes of their own work. Our participants bring the content and we bring the process. The majority of our work is with private sector clients who are seeking to collaboratively work with their customers, with their investors and also with local partners. Many of these clients are in Canada's resource sector. We've also worked in the agriculture sector, with indigenous peoples, with investor groups, with hospitals and health care providers, not-for-profit groups and others.

When you think of what we do, we're what happens when event planners and professional facilitators meet.

We have little or no content knowledge about the subject matter that our participants are engaging in. This way of working ensures we don't suffer from cognitive bias known as the curse of knowledge or the curse of expertise. We view our neutrality on the topics at hand as a way of maintaining the trust and the confidence of our stakeholders. It ensures that we as facilitators and as process designers have no preconceived notions or interests. This allows us to be trusted third parties and honest brokers when we are invited into the complex problems that our clients and their partners face.

Twice in our organization's six-year history we've worked on projects related to housing. Both of these times were with Generation Squeeze. On both occasions, our role was as neutral third party facilitators and process designers. We held no subject matter expertise in the topics of engagement.

The second project, which was anchored and centred on housing inequity, intended to generate a series of policy solutions to inter-generational barriers to home ownership. Access to affordable housing is an acute problem in Canada, as many of the honourable members here today know from their own experience in their ridings.

We were honoured to work with Generation Squeeze on this project. We were approached by Gen Squeeze in June 2019 to see if we would be willing and able to provide facilitation services for a project that would enable participants to have open-ended conversations in order to generate potential solutions to high house prices.

Our role was to create a good process to enable those generative conversations amongst participants with lived experiences. As the neutral third party facilitator, our role also included capturing those solutions and insights that the participants have generated and helping them critically challenge and prioritize their own solutions.

As an outcome, we anticipated that our work would help participants create their own road map to scalable and implementable solutions. We facilitated two sessions as part of this project.

At the conclusion of the second session, Watershed Partnership and Gen Squeeze agreed that Watershed would no longer be providing services or be involved in this project. We did so because we agreed that Watershed wasn't the right partner for this project based on our business model where we are content absent. As a relationship, our work was formally dissolved during the week of November 9, 2020.

If the committee has any questions respecting how we support collaborative generative conversations amongst people with lived experience as part of this project, I will be more than happy to provide our insights.

As we're not subject matter expertise, I will do my very best to answer your questions, but if we're unable, I recommend that content questions are probably better suited to Gen Squeeze and CMHC to answer.

● (1555)

Once again, I would like to thank you for your kind invitation. I'm really excited to be here today. I would love to share more about the work we do and answer any questions you have.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Ursell.

Before I go to our last witness, Women's Shelters Canada, the lineup for the first panel on questions will be Mr. Fast, Ms. Koutrakis, Mr. Ste-Marie and Mr. Julian.

We'll turn to Ms. Martin, executive director, Women's Shelters Canada.

Go ahead, Lise.

Ms. Lise Martin (Executive Director, Women's Shelters Canada): Thank you very much for this invitation.

My name is Lise Martin, and I am the executive director of Women's Shelters Canada.

I come to you today from the unceded territory of the Algonquin nation.

We are a national organization representing the 550-plus violence against women's shelters and transition houses across the country.

The pandemic has had devastating impacts on women experiencing abuse. In the context of stay-at-home orders, home is far from safe for a number of women and their children. With the introduction of the stay-at-home orders last spring, shelters, along with our provincial shelter associations, were quick to point out that, if home was not safe, you did not need to stay and that help was available. Throughout all phases of the ongoing pandemic, Canada's 550-plus shelters have remained open.

I will focus my intervention on the federal program to provide emergency COVID funding to gender-based violence organizations, more specifically, the funds provided to shelters and transition houses.

In total, \$100 million was provided. The first \$50 million was announced in late March 2020 while the second \$50 million was announced in late October.

In late March 2020, the department, Women and Gender Equality, reached out to us to discuss the possibility of having our organization distribute the funds earmarked to shelters. Although the distribution of funds is not part of our mission, we knew that we had the most accurate and up-to-date information on shelters. We knew that shelters needed funds ASAP. Finally, we knew that our small but mighty team could take this on.

We distributed \$20.5 million to shelters in the spring of 2020 and a further \$15.7 million in December. These funds were provided to 385 shelters. On average, each shelter received \$90,000 distributed over three transfers. The shelters very much appreciated these funds at this time of unprecedented crisis. The impacts on shelters were numerous. What Melpa has described has occurred in shelters across the country.

The federal emergency COVID funds were able to respond to a very real and immediate need. You will recall that the WHO declared the pandemic on March 11, 2020. Between April 13 and 24, we were able to provide initial funds into the bank accounts of most of Canada's shelters.

Women's Shelters Canada provided funds to all shelters with the exception of those funded by Indigenous Services Canada and those within the province of Quebec, where the distribution was made by the provincial government. We continue to be concerned about shelters in Quebec that had to wait much longer to receive these crucial emergency funds. In the first wave, Quebec shelters did not receive funds before mid-June. Whereas our final third round of disbursement was made in late December prior to the Christmas holidays, shelters in Quebec are only now beginning to receive their third installment.

The funding program was designed with a great deal of flexibility allowing it to respond to the very different needs across the country. In terms of the funds that were announced in late October, we were able to negotiate the deadline for funds to be spent. It is September 30, 2021, rather than the usual March 31.

Last fall we argued convincingly that the pandemic would not end on March 31, which clearly it has not. There were, however, a number of cases where bureaucratic rules superseded logic; namely, the fund did not allow for capital investment. For example, we received a request from a shelter in a remote area of Yukon that asked if funds could be put towards the purchase of a vehicle to transport women. There are huge transportation barriers in the north and in our rural and remote communities. The response was that such an expense could not be covered but that they could make use of taxis, and this would be covered. Well, there are no taxis in this community, and shelters often need to get women in the middle of the night and often at great distances.

A number of shelters reached out asking about building an additional bathroom, converting an office into a bathroom, for example. Unfortunately, all of these requests were turned down because of Treasury Board guidelines that did not adapt to these exceptional circumstances.

Let me now turn to what comes next. The pandemic has highlighted that gender-based violence increases in times of crisis and

how fragile our systems and services to respond were and are. This needs to change.

● (1600)

Gender-based violence levels won't go back down after the pandemic. More than ever, we need strong and well-funded services and prevention initiatives to deal with the now and to strengthen our response capabilities for future crises.

As organizations supporting shelters, we, as well as the shelters themselves, need stable and ongoing funding. In our 2019 "More than a Bed" report, 74% of violence against women shelters indicated that insufficient funding was a major challenge, and 64% did not receive a regular annual cost of living increase.

Within this context, it is extremely challenging to remunerate shelter workers' wages that reflect their levels of expertise. A recent study from our member in Alberta showed that the women's shelters' workforce earned less and worked longer hours than the average worker in an equivalent role in the province's non-profit and public sectors. As the pandemic has shown, a sector is only as strong as its people.

Earlier this week, we welcomed the federal budget, which included the first investments into Canada's national action plan on gender-based violence, a plan for which we have been advocating since 2013. It is definitely a major step forward. We have, however, clearly indicated that a fully national action plan will require billions, not millions. Gender-based violence is a systemic issue that requires systemic solutions.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

● (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Lise. Bureaucratic rules superseded logic. Do you think? I can't imagine that. It happens every day. It's one of my biggest complaints. Anyway, thank you for that.

We'll turn to questions. We'll go to six-minute rounds for the first group.

Mr. Fast, you're up.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Thank you. My questions are for Mr. Ursell.

I want to say thanks for coming to committee, notwithstanding the fact that the contract with CMHC, or your part of it, has been terminated. Just to confirm, that relationship was terminated on November 9, 2020.

Mr. Charlie Ursell: The relationship between us was with Generation Squeeze. It was during the week of November 9.

Hon. Ed Fast: Thank you for that clarification.

Why did you determine that this was not the right fit?

Mr. Charlie Ursell: There often reaches a point in a process where content is required. The point we reached in that process was where content expertise was required, and we did not have that. It's very important to me that we deliver value for money to all of our clients and that we operate with integrity. I believe that what we offered in terms of content-free process facilitation was not what was needed, and Generation Squeeze agreed with us.

Hon. Ed Fast: Content expertise was the only reason for terminating your relationship.

Mr. Charlie Ursell: Yes.

Hon. Ed Fast: Okay. You weren't concerned about any other matters relating to the project that caused you concerns and moved you to leave the relationship.

Mr. Charlie Ursell: We didn't have the content policy knowledge that was needed in order to advance the work. We were content agnostic, so we weren't the right fit.

Hon. Ed Fast: Thanks for that clarification.

Given that clarification, I would like to cede my time to Mr. Kelly.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Kelly, you're on.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Fast.

I'll go to CARP.

Your presentation was very thoughtful. There was a lot of information. Do you have any comments on the the effects of inflation on your members?

We had a report yesterday that inflation has poked through or is getting outside of the normal limit that the Bank of Canada endeavours to maintain, and some reports about how we define inflation and the particular basket of goods that's used. Your members, many on fixed incomes, are very vulnerable to inflation. Can you comment on its effects on your members?

Mr. Bill VanGorder: You're quite right. People on fixed incomes, seniors, no matter what their income is fixed at—and this is one of the areas that we're often very concerned about.... We often have governments tell us that they'll look after the low-income people. However, the low-income people, unfortunately, in this country are basically people under \$20,000 a year. Who can live on \$20,000 anyway? The more middle-income people who are still very low income.... If you're a senior or a family living on even \$30,000 or \$40,000 a year, a fixed income over a number of years, then the kind of inflation that we're seeing now is on basic commodities, basic things that they have to have every day. They are not choices. There's a real concern.

Financial concerns are always right at the top with older Canadians. We do surveys. When we talk in CARP about how 80% of our people believe such and such, we actually survey our people at least once a month on many topics. We're speaking, and we get literally thousands and thousands of responses, so it's a good accurate indication of how they feel. When we ask what the key concerns are that they have, certainly these days it's health that is number one for everybody. However, financial security is always in the top two. Health and financial security move back and forth.

Anything that makes them fear whether or not they will outlive their money is a huge concern the older seniors get.

• (1610)

Mr. Pat Kelly: Do you have any comment on the budget commitment that the government made on OAS? The part of it that I thought was somewhat curious was the timing of the one-time pay-

ment for OAS-eligible seniors. It was described as for seniors over 75, but it really was for seniors over 74, I guess, unless your birthday is in July.

Do you have a comment on that particular decision on those particular seniors, the older seniors only? What do you think is behind that particular age cut-off where some seniors get it and some don't?

Mr. Bill VanGorder: I'm certainly not in a position to comment on why it could happen. I can certainly tell you what seniors' reactions are. I can tell you that there are a number of people—my friends—who are very jealous of me because I'll actually get it and they won't, and we're not that far apart. What's magic about age 75 is a huge question. The amount, \$500, as I said in my presentation, I know that the government.... I talk regularly with the Minister of Seniors. We have some good one-on-one conversations. I know what she's thinking and what her department is trying to do. However, the perception of older Canadians, especially now those under 75, is that they've had very little help. Everybody else is getting money and they're not.

You all know and I know that that's not totally true. There has been money that has gone through the United Way and others to get to them, but they haven't seen any of that money and, frankly, it hasn't been promoted very well, so they don't even know where it's been spent.

Mr. Pat Kelly: All right.

The Chair: We will have to end it here.

We'll go to Ms. Koutrakis, followed by Mr. Ste-Marie.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to all our presenters this afternoon. Thank you for your very thoughtful comments and presentations. My two questions will be for Ms. Kamateros and Ms. Martin.

I want to touch on the additional affordable housing in the budget that was tabled earlier this week by the first female finance minister, our good colleague Chrystia Freeland. The budget proposes to provide an additional \$2.5 billion over seven years, starting in 2021-22, to the CMHC. Within that amount, \$1.5 billion is for the rapid housing initiative, which is going to start this year to address the urgent needs for vulnerable Canadians.

Ms. Kamateros, you mentioned in your presentation that earlier this year you received federal funding through this rapid housing initiative to develop 17 affordable housing units for vulnerable women. These are in my riding of Vimy. Can you provide the committee with additional detail on how this funding will be used and on the impact it will have on women facing conjugal violence in Laval? I know that you touched on it a little bit, but if you could expand on that, I'd greatly appreciate it.

Ms. Melpa Kamateros: The second-step resource is for women who want to transition to a more autonomous level of existence without violence after their stay at an emergency shelter. In Quebec these resources were sorely lacking. It took us a long time to mount the funding for our resource.

I do respect the Canadian government. We didn't go through CMHC. We went through the Société d'habitation du Québec. The funds were very slow in coming, I have to say. That has nothing to do with anything other than the way the system is set up. I'm wondering how it can be made more efficient so these resources can open quicker.

In our case, we're going to have 17 apartments, which is probably going to be the biggest one in Quebec. We're going to provide the integrated services as well. We're going to have a community kitchen and it's going to be fabulous. It's not going to serve only the Shield of Athena; it's going to also handle women coming from all areas of Quebec, particularly the three shelters that have not had any second-step housing in that area for at least 30 years.

I've been around for close to 30 years and there has been no development of second-step housing in Laval until recently. With the new federal funds, a lot of emergency shelters that I know personally are going to add second-step resources quicker. For that, we're very thankful.

• (1615)

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Maybe the provincial government program is how you wound up having the funds, but I know that you did receive funding directly through that program from the feds through the rapid housing initiative. If I'm not mistaken, it was something like \$1.6 million to help with this second-step housing.

You mentioned in your testimony that you would like to see some immediate financial support for women fleeing conjugal violence. As part of the funds we presented in this budget, \$315.4 million, starting this year, 2021-22, have been geared over seven years through the Canada housing benefit to increase direct financial assistance for low-income women and children fleeing violence to help with their rent payments.

Is this going to address some of what you mentioned in your presentation?

Ms. Melpa Kamateros: It will help.

At this point in time, the movements—the women's rights movement and the shelter movement—are on their hands and knees everywhere in Canada. It's not only in Quebec. Everything helps. As I mentioned before, they're even thinking of making an emergency fund where women can leave. If they don't have taxi money or hotel money, they will have this through the provision of the emergency fund.

Sometimes, although the intentions are really wonderful, the delays are horrific. It's more that than anything else that has to be looked at. How can we get funds rapidly to women who are in need of them?

I think that women victims of conjugal violence need a stipend, an allowance and recognition that they are women victims of conjugal violence. That should commence when they come into a shelter and it should finish when they have received their autonomy. If you go across the board, most of the representatives of the shelters will say the same thing. Everything counts.

The Chair: We are about out of time, but did you want in, Lise? I kind of thought you did.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Yes, please, I'd like to hear Lise.

Mr. Chair, if you will allow me, I know it might be over the time, but I know that Minister Monsef announced that an agreement had been reached to distribute \$36.3 million in funding to women's shelters, sexual assault centres and other organizations that address gender-based violence. I was wondering if Ms. Martin could update the committee on how this funding was used and what kind of impact it had.

The Chair: Okay, Lise, you can do both. Be fairly quick, though.

Ms. Lise Martin: I believe I explained the transfers in my presentation. Yes, all of those transfers were done. There was a lot of flexibility allowed, so it was really up to the shelters to decide on their priorities.

For many of them, it was around human resources, bringing in extra staffing, the fact that staff had to stay home. There was all of the craziness, if you want, at the beginning of the pandemic. Then there were also a lot of resources that went to finding alternative accommodation, because, as Melpa explained, at the beginning of the pandemic, basically if a shelter could accommodate 10 families, it was reduced to five—pretty much by 50%. You had to find alternative accommodations. A lot of that was in the empty hotel or motel spaces, but those had to be paid for. Then there were PPE resources.

That's how these funds were used. The shelters do have until September 30 to spend those funds.

In terms of the housing piece, it's obviously a welcomed announcement. I actually asked Minister Monsef on Monday to give me a contact at CMHC, because the issue has been partly the slowness of the funds going out and also the transparency. It's really hard to track the money, so as a national organization that's a priority for us.

One of the challenges for the shelters—and many emergency shelters such as Melpa's are opening second-stage shelters—is that you have to generally put up 40% of the total cost, and that's a big amount for shelters, especially in this environment.

Also, shelters are not builders, so there's a big learning curve. There's a 25% commitment in the housing strategy for funds for women, and we feel very strongly that it's very important those targets be met and surpassed, I would say.

• (1620)

The Chair: We will have to move on, Lise. I'm sorry.

Next is Mr. Ste-Marie, followed by Mr. Julian.

Gabriel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hello, everyone.

I would have liked to put my questions to the representative of the Réseau solidarité itinérance du Québec, but he seems to no longer be with us.

Mr. Clerk, can you confirm that the witness is no longer here? Is he having any technical difficulties? Is he going to come back?

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): He's here, I see him.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, he is here at the bottom of my screen, Gabriel.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Good.

[English]

The Chair: Can you hear us, Mr. Vallée Dore?

[Translation]

Mr. Boromir Vallée Dore: Yes; I apologize.

Something blew up, so I had no power. I'm now using the battery in my laptop.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I see.

Good afternoon, Mr. Vallée Dore. I'm going to hurry up and ask you my questions before your battery runs out.

Do you believe that the latest federal budget, which was presented on Monday, will adequately reduce and prevent homelessness in Quebec in the context of the pandemic?

Mr. Boromir Vallée Dore: Thank you for your question, Mr. Ste-Marie.

First of all, with respect to the \$299 million announced for 2021-2022, I would remind you that this money will be available through the emergency envelope to support the VCS COVID 3 program and there is not a lot of flexibility in that regard. We are still waiting to hear when we will be able to use this money. Confirmation is slow in coming.

So, we were pleasantly surprised by the \$567 million announcement. This is close to what we had asked for to adequately address the needs of people experiencing homelessness in Quebec. However, there is uncertainty about how this money will flow to community organizations.

Will this be through the emergency envelopes for the VCS COVID 3 program, or through the regular envelopes?

We are under the impression that the government is offering us premium unleaded gasoline, but telling us to put it in a diesel engine, i.e. they are offering us funding through the emergency envelopes for the VCS COVID 3 program. So we are not making any progress at all.

So, we're hoping that the government will confirm that we're going to be able to use these monies in the same way that we can use the regular Reaching Home envelopes. This will give us a lot more flexibility to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness. We look forward to that announcement.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: All right. We'll try to verify that on our end as well.

On the other hand, you presented the five pillars of the National Policy to Fight Homelessness. You said that some indicators were in the red.

Can you tell us about those indicators?

Mr. Boromir Vallée Dore: Several people have spoken today about the troubling situation of people in vulnerable situations, including women. We see the same thing with people experiencing homelessness.

We look at the current situation from the angle of Quebec's National Policy to Fight Homelessness. Housing is the first axis. It is central to both the prevention of homelessness and the reduction of homelessness. It is alarming to note that the housing vacancy rate is currently below the equilibrium threshold of 3% in all of Quebec's metropolitan regions.

The second focus of the policy is health. People experiencing homelessness are at increased risk for infections and diseases. When they have COVID-19, they are 20 times more likely to be hospitalized, 10 times more likely to be admitted to intensive care, and even 5 times more likely to die. Moreover, when these individuals go to seek care, they face barriers to access and are denied care.

Income is the third axis of the policy. This indicator is also in the red. There is currently a record increase in the cost of the grocery basket of 4%. In 2020, there was an increase in demand at food banks of between 30% and 50%. There is also an expected increase in the number of households spending more than 50% of their income on food.

The fourth axis of the policy is education, social insertion and socio-professional insertion. Despite a rebound in employment, conditions remain inferior to those that existed before the pandemic. According to what we have observed, it is mainly young people and women who have paid the price of the pandemic in terms of employment.

The last axis is social cohabitation and issues related to judicialization. Judicialization issues are certainly present in Quebec, as our members report to us. According to a study conducted in Montreal, eight times more tickets were issued to people experiencing homelessness between 1994 and 2018.

The indicators are indeed in the red.

● (1625)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: That is worrying.

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: This is your last question, Gabriel, and you have a minute.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I miscalculated my speaking time.

Mr. VanGorder, do you believe that Ottawa should increase the old age security pension back to its original level, which was a percentage of the average industrial wage?

[English]

Mr. Bill VanGorder: A simple answer is yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: That's a clear answer.

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. We can leave it at that and you'll have another crack at it in a little bit, Mr. Ste-Marie.

Mr. Julian and Mr. Fast, I have you on as next.

Give me a signal if there are others.

Mr. Julian, you have six minutes.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all of our witnesses for coming forward during this pandemic to testify. We hope that you and your families and loved ones are staying safe and healthy during this pandemic.

I'd like to start with two questions for Ms. Kamateros and Ms. Martin.

Thank you for your work in providing supports for women who are escaping violence.

Prior to the pandemic it was estimated in Canada—and this is a deplorable fact—that over 400 women escaping violence had nowhere to go in Canada because of the negligence of the previous government and of the current government. As my first question, I would like know where you see that figure today. How many women are still not able to find resources when they need it when they're escaping family violence?

My second question is related to how we can get to there, where every woman has a place to go to when they're escaping violence. We saw at the beginning of the pandemic \$750 billion going in liquidity supports to Canada's big banks. Many people have proposed a wealth tax—it wasn't in the budget—that would provide \$10 billion annually in supports, for example, so that we can eliminate gender-based violence in this country.

How much do you think it would cost to actually put in place a network and supports so that every woman has a place to go to if they are escaping gender-based violence, escaping family violence?

Ms. Lise Martin: If I understood correctly, you said that 400 women didn't have a place to go.

Mr. Peter Julian: Prior to the pandemic, yes, on any given night.

Ms. Lise Martin: That is very low, actually. The number is much higher than that, and it definitely hasn't changed. On any given day there are hundreds and hundreds of women who need to be turned away from shelters. They've been at capacity for, I'd say, at least a decade.

This was one of the reasons we advocated for the national housing strategy. The reason the shelters have to turn women away is that they have nowhere to go. It's very important that once a woman is in a shelter they be able to ensure her safety, but there is no safe and affordable housing available. That's the crux of the issue.

Again, as I said, gender-based violence is a systemic issue that requires a systemic solution. Housing is definitely part of it. Proper wages is another.

I think that with the national housing strategy the intentions are there; it's just that there have been many challenges in the rollout. I guess we're going to buckle down to try to find out a bit more about that.

I often say that in this work you have to be naive and optimistic. Part of our optimism is hooked on the national action plan. I said we will need billions, not millions. We have millions in this budget. We need billions. We have to be clear about that.

Part of that is to have housing infrastructure, but also many other systems, in place that will make it much easier for women to flee violence and to have also good prevention programs and intervention programs.

• (1630)

Ms. Melpa Kamateros: I want to add that for all of this issue, it's not only a question of extra housing, not only a question of better laws, not only a question of more awareness. If this situation of conjugal violence is left unchecked, it provokes what we call ripple effects. We can all remember the Nova Scotia situation, in which the underlying reasons for the shootout were that there was conjugal violence. What I would like to see is a more holistic, global perspective on conjugal violence that gives it the status that is required.

If you look at the shelter system, it's younger and younger women who are being admitted. The biggest age group all over Canada is young women from their twenties to their forties. Why is this the case? It means that young men are perpetrating the violence, so it boils down not only to a question of more space and more rooms, but of more money being put into the issue of conjugal violence as a whole.

Ms. Lise Martin: May I add a comment?

The Chair: Yes, but do so very quickly.

Ms. Lise Martin: It requires better collaboration, too, between the federal government and the provinces—

Ms. Melpa Kamateros: Totally.

Ms. Lise Martin: —because often the federal level will fund the infrastructure, but then you have to run the thing, and that's up to the provinces.

Mr. Peter Julian: May I ask whether you have any figures? The 400 women having nowhere to go came from newspaper articles just prior to the pandemic. If you have any more up-to-date figures, I think they would be very helpful.

Ms. Melpa Kamateros: I have a figure right offhand. A large group of shelters in Quebec did a study, and they figure that every year it's 10,000 women who are being turned away. If we look at our shelter, every week the minimum number of women we refuse is about five. Over a year, that's 260 women in one shelter. It's vast.

As I said before, it came to light more with the pandemic, because we could really see the shortage of space at that point in time.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much. I think those are figures we will all need to reflect upon.

The Chair: If you can send us anything in writing on this, Melpa, it would be helpful.

Turning to the five-minute round, we go first to Mr. Fast and then to Mr. Fragiskatos.

Ed.

Hon. Ed Fast: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, just for clarification, are these rounds going a little longer? Is our time a little longer than what we designated?

The Chair: No. Annie's round went over a little more. The rest were pretty well on time. I have them down here as six minutes, pretty near eight minutes, five and a half minutes and six minutes.

Hon. Ed Fast: All right.

Mr. VanGorder, you mentioned in your opening remarks that there was really nothing for seniors from the government during the COVID pandemic. Could you expand on that or did I misunderstand you?

Mr. Bill VanGorder: I said the perception was that there was very little done. The perception of most older adults was there was \$300 given to them last June, and \$200 more if they were particularly poor, with now another \$500 announced for some of them for this year. Otherwise, they've seen large sums going to support other sectors of the community. They don't perceive that the money has gone to help them.

I also said that this perception is not completely true. We know that the government put \$1.4 million through United Way and other supports. Those monies have been invisible to most seniors.

• (1635)

Hon. Ed Fast: Thank you.

On the OAS, did I hear you say that many of your members are not happy at all about the fact that they've been excluded from the increased OAS benefit?

Mr. Bill VanGorder: They are happy that the OAS benefit was increased, or will be increased, but they don't think it's enough and they don't think it's soon enough. The 10% for seniors when they turn 75 and then indexed to inflation was what had been promised, but they also wanted increases to the Canada pension plan, especially the survivors benefit, which is very low. Much of this is directed—

Hon. Ed Fast: My time is short, and I have one more question for you.

Have you polled your members on whether or not they would support a home equity tax?

Mr. Bill VanGorder: No, we have not.

Hon. Ed Fast: Is that something you might do?

Mr. Bill VanGorder: We might, yes.

Hon. Ed Fast: All right.

Mr. Ursell, during your time that you were [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] with CMHC, did you get any sense that either CMHC or Generation Squeeze had a preconceived notion of what the outcome of this study on intergenerational equity should be?

Mr. Charlie Ursell: If we had, we wouldn't have gotten involved in the project, because it violates how we operate as process facilitators and neutral facilitators. For us, creating an open space for generative conversation is what we do. That was the nature of our engagement in both the problem space and the solution space.

Hon. Ed Fast: Yes. You were a partner with Generation Squeeze, which is committed to reforming taxation as it relates to personal residences. Did that cause you any concern?

Mr. Charlie Ursell: From my lens, Generation Squeeze was a client of ours. We were playing a content neutral role in facilitating. That's the role we played successfully for two sessions.

I can't really speak to Generation Squeeze's specific policies. I'm not an employee of theirs. I think that's a question for them.

Hon. Ed Fast: I'm still puzzled why the relationship would have been severed. I'm just a little bit confused. Has anybody replaced you as facilitators since November?

Mr. Charlie Ursell: I'm afraid I don't know. I believe Generation Squeeze will be coming in later today. I think that's a question for them. I don't actually know.

Hon. Ed Fast: We will be asking them that question.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: What's your point of order?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I'm not sure what this line of questioning has to do with our topic of COVID-19 spending, programs and related monetary policy.

The Chair: Well, it could be stretching it somewhat—

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

The Chair: —but the topic is pretty broad. I'm not going to rule it out of order.

Go ahead on your point of order, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, we had this discussion at the last committee meeting. Members are free to expand beyond COVID. This line of questioning is completely relevant. It's not one that I would take, but it's completely relevant for another member.

Hon. Ed Fast: I have a point of order.

The Chair: That's fine.

What's your point of order, Ed?

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Chair, I just want to note that right in the deck that Generation Squeeze provided, in which Watershed was a partner, it says, “A place to call home or an investment vehicle directed Solutions Labs’ COVID-19 pivot.” This is about COVID-19.

The Chair: Okay. We’re not cancelling your question anyway.

Before we got into this discussion, Ed, you had about 30 seconds left. Do you want to take it or pass it on?

Hon. Ed Fast: I’ll pass it on.

The Chair: We’ll go to Mr. Fragiskatos and then Mr. Ste-Marie.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

Mr. VanGorder, I’ll begin with you, sir.

Thank you for the work that the association does. We have an outstanding CARP chapter where I am, down here in London, Ontario. It serves London and Middlesex and it’s been great to get to know that organization and its leadership. I know that they’ve been wonderful advocates for seniors in our area.

I want to ask you to expand on your comments on long-term care. You spoke about obviously the tragedy in long-term care and the need to do better. The budget that was just unveiled devotes very significant funding of \$3 billion over five years to helping establish national standards in long-term care, of course in partnership with provinces, since it’s their area of responsibility.

I wonder if you could speak about the need to establish long-term care standards.

• (1640)

Mr. Bill VanGorder: Yes, certainly. CARP has been advocating for appropriate national standards in long-term care on the basis that your postal code should not determine the level of care you get. CARP has been very strong on this issue.

We are pleased to see the intention that seems to be indicated by the large amount of money that has been proposed. However, in the first year and reporting sometime in early 2022, the basis of a public discussion paper will come out to many of our CARP members. If you’re 80 years old and concerned about going into a long-term care home, something that you can see is going to take years and years to develop is not very comforting. We need action now. That’s what seniors are saying.

We’ve known for 20 years that these problems existed. CARP has been talking about them for over 15 years. We need action now. Large money, with the only action out of it being to appoint three organizations to develop standards to be reported next year, is not carrying much weight with seniors.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Sir, I hope the government continues to engage and listen.

You said that you’re in regular contact with the minister responsible for seniors, Minister Schulte, and I can tell you that no government, obviously, has moved in this direction before. I think there’s a lot of promise in terms of the way ahead, but we do need action and we need it quickly, because what happened over the past few months is completely inexcusable.

Mr. Bill VanGorder: If I might say this just quickly, we know that the stumbling block is working with the provinces, and we are prepared to work with our members in the provinces to support the getting together of the federal and the provincial governments to solve this problem. Seniors are tired of being the ping-pong ball in the middle of this issue.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Please push the provinces. I think advocacy on that will be very important, and certainly I know that they have a federal partner to work with in this government.

Before I go to Ms. Martin, I will say, Mr. VanGorder, that I know you’ve raised some concerns about OAS. I’m very glad to see that constituents of mine who are 75 and older will be getting that 10% boost, which is a campaign commitment we focused on and obviously are carrying out. What we will not do as a government, clearly, is to do what my Conservative friends had suggested only a few years ago, and I fear would do again, which is to raise the age of eligibility for OAS to 67. That is not something Canadians wanted. We reversed that, and we remain focused on the needs of seniors.

Ms. Martin, I wonder if you could speak about one of the.... Not “one of”: I think it’s fair to say that it’s the central piece of the budget that was just unveiled a few days ago, and that is the national early learning and child care program. How might that help the women in need you work with at your organization and who the shelters across the country, quite frankly, work with and serve?

Ms. Lise Martin: There’s no doubt that a national child care program will benefit women across the board in this country. I think specifically about the women we work with, the women who are in shelters. This is an example of where flexibility will be required. Often a woman who goes to a shelter will not necessarily go to the shelter down the street. In Montreal, a woman is generally placed in a shelter beyond her immediate neighbourhood. We would need flexibility because for a woman to lose her child care privileges, that is, her spot in a subsidized child care environment, would be very devastating and could be one of the reasons she might not seek services but would hold on and put up with the abuse.

I think it’s a good program, but all these things need to be put through the gender-based violence lens.

• (1645)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We will have to move on.

We’ll go to about two minutes each for Mr. Ste-Marie and Mr. Julian. Then I still have Mr. Fast and Ms. Dzerowicz on my list. If there is a change there, let me know. It will be about four minutes each.

Mr. Ste-Marie.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Vallée Dore, you told us that the fact that the \$567 million is available through the COVID-19 emergency envelopes leads to a lack of flexibility.

Can you illustrate this with concrete examples?

Mr. Boromir Vallée Dore: You have to put yourself in the shoes of people experiencing homelessness. Up until now, the timelines were very tight. We were telling these people that we could help them for three months, but after that we weren't sure what we could do for them. So, on the one hand, we put them in an even more fragile state. We can't give them the opportunity to settle down, for example, because we don't know ourselves what to expect. So we're also creating very tight timelines.

On the other hand, the envelopes, in their current form, do not allow us to intervene on the five axes of Quebec's homelessness policy. They are very specific about what can and cannot be done. Unfortunately, when these amounts are offered through emergency envelopes, it does not allow us to have a holistic approach. So it's important to offer these monies through regular envelopes, so that we can provide real support to people who are on the street right now.

Maybe this has already been resolved, but we don't know, since we don't have any information about it.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: This demonstrates the importance of flexibility to meet the needs targeted by the overall policy and make people more secure.

Are there other measures you would have liked to see in the budget to address homelessness?

If it weren't for this imbroglio, would that be enough, in your opinion?

Mr. Boromir Vallée Dore: What's important to us is that reaching home respects the autonomy of community groups to do their own community planning. This is something that was won in the agreement. We think it's important that that be respected.

So, in terms of the amounts, they meet the current needs. On that side, there's no problem. I don't know if we would have wanted to see anything else. Our requests were mostly for an enhancement, for the \$290 million to be announced as soon as possible, and for the overall approach to be respected.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: All right.

So, we need to address the indicators in the red—

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Sorry, Gabriel, but you're out of time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Julian, you have a couple of minutes, and then we'll go to Mr. Fast.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I have two questions for Mr. VanGorder.

Mr. VanGorder, thank you very much for the incredible work of CARP activists across the country, including in British Columbia. We have a lot of time for the research you do. The folks in CARP are incredibly dedicated and offer lots for the public policy that would improve the quality of life of Canada's seniors.

First, during this pandemic we've seen for-profit long-term care homes—I'm thinking of companies like Extencicare, Chartwell, Sienna Living—receive millions of dollars in supports from the federal government. At the same time, they paid \$172 million in shareholder dividends. In their facilities so far, tragically, 761 residents and workers have died of COVID. Of course in the long-term care sector there is massive concern about federal funding going for dividends and executive bonuses rather than being applied to provide a good standard of care to residents. Is that a matter of concern for folks in CARP?

Second, the increase in the OAS that is proclaimed in the budget only affects seniors over 75. Seniors from 65 to 75 are often living in poverty. Does the organization not feel that it's important for increases in the OAS to provide supports to all seniors?

Mr. Bill VanGorder: Thank you for both questions.

On the first one, CARP believes strongly that there are problems in long-term care in all sectors. That's why we're so concerned about having immediate, enforceable, monitored and followed through on standards for all long-term care.

Our experience and our belief is that it's not a case of for-profit and not-for-profit. I happen to live in Nova Scotia where our biggest problem with long-term care, as Mr. Fraser knows, was in a not-for-profit facility.

It has to do with lack of proper funding, proper support and proper standards that people will have. Whether they are for-profit or not-for-profit, much of that is very murky. In many parts of the country the not-for-profit ones owned by municipalities and governments are older and in worse shape than the newer for-profit ones.

We look at long-term care as an issue for all sectors and not just one of them. We think it would be very unfortunate if the same standards weren't applied to everybody, whether it's for profit or not for profit.

On your second question—

● (1650)

The Chair: Bill, could you please respond very quickly? We're running out of time.

Mr. Bill VanGorder: The second question is related to the difference between getting the OAS at 75 or 65. Yes, our members think that's a real problem. They don't know why anybody would consider that being fair when we know that the younger generation of seniors, the younger generation that's just becoming of seniors age, are the ones who often were not as well set financially in their own savings as their elders.

The Chair: We will have to move on.

Who's up from the Conservative side?

Ed, if you can, please keep it to four minutes.

Hon. Ed Fast: I'm ceding my time to Mr. Vis.

The Chair: Mr. Vis, you're on. Welcome to the finance committee.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Easter. I'm very happy to be here today.

Ms. Martin, you mentioned in your remarks that bureaucratic rules supersede logic. I know Mr. Easter found that pretty funny as well. You also mentioned the challenges that not-for-profits have with accessing government funds through the national housing strategy.

Would I be correct to assume that you're referring to the major funding envelope, the co-investment fund?

Ms. Lise Martin: Yes.

Mr. Brad Vis: Okay.

In 30 seconds or so, or actually maybe you can just respond yes or no to this: Do you think it's fair that organizations have to wait over a year to receive any type of feedback from CMHC regarding their applications?

Ms. Lise Martin: No. There are definitely bottlenecks in the system. That's what we're trying to get a better grasp of.

Mr. Brad Vis: Did your organization receive any funds under the rapid housing initiative?

Ms. Lise Martin: We're not a shelter. We would not apply. We're an umbrella organization that brings together—

Mr. Brad Vis: That's right. Exactly.

Did any of the organizations you represent receive funds through the rapid housing initiative?

Ms. Lise Martin: I would think so, but there are 550 shelters across the country, so I don't know. I can't give you a definite answer.

I know the 40% has been a stumbling block, the need to contribute 40% if you're starting from scratch in terms of buying the land and building. That has been a definite challenge.

Mr. Brad Vis: My understanding and my experience working on this file has been that there are many private sector partners that would want to work with some of the not-for-profits that you support.

What would you recommend the Government of Canada do better to allow for private equity or for-profit corporations to assist shelters that serve at-risk women, and make amendments to the na-

tional housing strategy and the funding envelope such as the co-investment fund to see that accomplished?

Ms. Lise Martin: I guess I would turn that around. I would say, what can the government do to facilitate so that we can build? We know the needs that need to be built.

Rather than bringing in the private sector as the saviour here, we—

Mr. Brad Vis: That's not what I was referencing. It was about partnering. I want to facilitate partnerships.

Ms. Lise Martin: Okay. That's something that needs to be looked at. You want to make sure that it's an equitable partnership. I guess that's part of our concern, that certain private sector or different builders will go in and they don't necessarily have the background knowledge.

There is potential, for sure, and it's worth looking into, but some parameters need to be set to that.

• (1655)

The Chair: It will have to be the last question, Brad.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you.

You also touched on the reaching home initiative. I come from a riding that's part suburban. I border Ed Fast's riding in Abbotsford, but I also go up into some of the most remote areas of southern British Columbia. My experience during the COVID-19 pandemic is that a lot of those remote and rural communities didn't see the same types of supports on a per capita basis that people in urban areas did. What can we do better to support at-risk women in rural communities?

Ms. Lise Martin: Transportation is a huge issue in the rural areas, and the shelters, for sure, are few and far between in rural areas. Did you say you're from B.C.?

Mr. Brad Vis: Yes.

Ms. Lise Martin: B.C. is unique in the sense that they have a whole system of safe homes that serve women in the rural and remote areas of the province, and those safe homes were covered by the federal COVID funds.

Mr. Brad Vis: Yes, they were.

Ms. Lise Martin: I think transportation is another important part. As Melpa said earlier as well, it's not just looking at one thing. For rural and remote shelters and women living in these areas, transportation is key.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you.

I made that—

The Chair: Thank you both.

Sorry, Brad.

Ms. Dzerowicz, you'll be down to about three minutes now, so you get the final say.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank everyone for their excellent questions.

My first question is for you, Mr. VanGorder.

Thanks for your presentation today. The amazing seniors in my riding of Davenport are working with me on a vaccine hesitancy campaign to try to ensure that they are encouraging people to get vaccinated.

Our Minister of Immigration recently announced a new pathway to permanent residency for 90,000 temporary workers. Many of them, to my understanding, may be personal care workers. How important is this program? This program would make temporary workers permanent residents. How important would this program be to your members?

Mr. Bill VanGorder: Well, of course, the lack of appropriate numbers of staff and qualified staff in all facilities and in home care and community care situations is very important to us. One of the problems that our members are seeing is that with the attention being put on having more workers in long-term care facilities, the home care availability that people have has been much reduced.

Although we're very concerned about long-term care, only 5% to 7% of our seniors are in long-term care. The other 90% to 95% are in home care, community care. That's why, actually, CARP's number one advocacy point for this year isn't our continued concern with long-term care, but our real concern that the long-term solution is better care in the home and in their own communities for people—

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I'm sorry to cut you off, but I have so little time. It does lead to my next question—

The Chair: And it's you're last one.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Oh, my goodness.

Our Canada recovery caregiving benefit gave out over \$2 billion and helped hundreds of thousands of Canadians. How helpful was it to your members to have this caregiving benefit, emergency support, provided?

Mr. Bill VanGorder: Certainly it's helpful and welcome, but more is needed. It's not enough.

Once again, this government is dealing with an issue that we've been talking about in the province for 20 years. Now they've come home to roost and we need to make up for those 20 years. The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago; the second best time is today. We need action today, not next year, not five years from now, but today.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you.

Do I have one more question?

The Chair: No, you don't. I'm sorry. We're not quite out of time for the panel, but—

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: No problem.

Thank you.

The Chair: —we're going to get broken up in the next panel by a vote. We're always short on time it seems around here.

On behalf of the committee, I do want to very sincerely thank all the witnesses for connecting up. I'm glad your battery lasted, Mr. Vallée Dore.

With that, thank you to the witnesses for their presentations and answering our questions.

We will suspend for a couple of minutes to go to our next panel.

- (1655) _____ (Pause) _____
- (1705)

The Chair: I will reconvene the meeting.

Welcome to the second panel of meeting number 36 of the Standing Committee on Finance.

We are meeting on COVID-19 spending, programs and related monetary policy.

Witnesses, we are going to be disrupted by a vote. We will come back. The bells will ring at 5:45 and the vote should be at 6:15 Ottawa time. If we have authority from the committee, we can probably keep meeting until about 10 minutes before the vote, but we'll see when the time comes.

We'll start with the first witnesses.

Welcome to the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, Mr. Brunnen, vice-president, oil sands, fiscal and economic policy. You have been before the committee before. A strong welcome to you, Ben. Go ahead.

Mr. Ben Brunnen (Vice-President, Oil Sands, Fiscal and Economic Policy, Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers): Good afternoon, Mr. Chairperson and members of the committee. Thank you for having me here today.

I am vice-president of oil sands, fiscal and economic policy with the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers. We represent the upstream oil and gas industry.

COVID-19 significantly impacted our sector. Reduced energy demand led oil and gas companies to reduce capital spending by \$10.8 billion, or 31%, last year. Oil and gas job losses are estimated at approximately 135,000 in 2020.

Three specific federal programs provided support to industry in 2020. First is the Canada emergency wage subsidy. StatsCan estimates the program paid out a total of \$69 billion to date for all industries. We estimate that our industry received \$694 million, or 1%, from the program in total. Our members accessed the program during the first six months, from March to August, and largely stopped accessing it after that.

This program was critical to the upstream industry at a time of crisis, was likely responsible for the preservation of thousands of jobs and was well designed so that when the crisis had passed from an acute perspective, it would no longer provide support to our sector.

Second is the orphaned and inactive oil and gas wells program, which provided \$1.72 billion in federal funding to the western provinces. This program has been critical in terms of its ability to provide upstream oil and gas and service companies with additional revenue during the crisis, which preserved jobs while supporting investment in closure and reclamation obligations.

To date, the multi-year program is approximately 50% allocated and has leveraged roughly \$600 million in industry funds. It is estimated that the program has created approximately 2,000 jobs across three western provinces.

Third, Export Development Canada and Business Development Canada provided liquidity to companies through the BCAP programs.

Through its direct lend program, EDC joined bank syndicates for reserve-based borrowing companies on an equal basis. Limitations included prohibitions on dividends, debt repayment, share buy-backs and executive compensation increases. Companies were also required to report climate disclosures consistent with the guidance of the TCFD.

EDC also provided bonding support for companies to free up cash flow under its existing programs. The BDC provided short-term subordinate loans to companies with fixed repayment terms to assist with access to credit.

All in, the BCAP programs provided \$1 billion in liquidity support to between 10 to 15 companies, based on market-aligned lending terms. These programs proved to be critical for companies that found themselves in acute distress due to sudden and significant liquidity constraints arising from the pandemic.

CAPP and its members are appreciative of the federal government for its support of industry during this challenging time.

With the worst of the pandemic likely behind us, now is the time to think about measures to advance the economic recovery. In our 2021 forecast, we anticipated that a 14% increase in upstream investment would occur. This year's forecast represents the stabilizing of industry investment and the beginning of a longer-term recovery.

With global oil and gas demand expected to increase under IEA forecasts, combined with an increased focus on GHG emissions reduction, government can work with industry to position Canada as the supplier of choice and lead a strong economic recovery for Canadians.

The federal government has adopted an approach to drive objectives through strategic and targeted subsidies for all industries, aiming to decrease GHG footprints and improve environmental performance through national interest in industrial policy. Key measures in the 2021 federal budget that could be instrumental relate to clean-tech investment and sustainable finance.

Regarding clean tech, the proposed investment tax credit for carbon capture, utilization and storage is a welcome commitment. The design of this credit will need to reflect the economic realities of implementing CCUS on a commercial scale, particularly when it comes to achieving the government's stated goal of reducing emissions by at least 15 megatonnes of CO₂ annually, up from four megatonnes currently.

The government indicated that consultation would be forthcoming, and we look forward to the opportunity to contribute.

Second, the incremental \$5 billion added to the net zero accelerator fund has the potential to stimulate material investment in other GHG-reducing technologies, such as methane, facility efficiency and electrification. We believe there is potential for material emissions reduction, depending on the availability and design of the program.

On the issue of sustainable finance, the government committed to increase climate-related disclosures and to publish a green bond framework, issuing its first green bond worth \$5 billion. The issue is a top priority for CAPP, particularly in the areas of emissions reduction, indigenous engagement, diversity, air, land and water use and process and personal safety. CAPP is supportive of Canada creating its own sustainable finance green bond framework that accommodates oil and natural gas in the economy.

We also support a global sustainability reporting standard that is universally recognized and builds on existing frameworks, such as what the IFRS has proposed sustainability standards for.

• (1710)

Finally, we encourage the government to prioritize the need for better comparability of international ESG data. Significant independently verified data exists in Canada but does not in many other jurisdictions. As a result, our industry is perceived to have poorer performance than our peers, largely due to the incompleteness of their data.

Thank you for the opportunity to present today. I look forward to the discussion.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Brunnen. It's always a pleasure to have you before the committee.

We're now going to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and Michel Tremblay, senior vice-president.

The floor is yours.

Mr. Michel Tremblay (Senior Vice-President, Policy and Innovation, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to acknowledge that I'm joining you from Ottawa on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabeg people.

[Translation]

I'm pleased to speak to you on behalf of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

As Canada's national housing agency, we are guided by an ambitious goal: to ensure that by 2030, everyone in Canada has a place to call home they can afford and that meets their needs.

This goal has never been more relevant. Housing affordability is a top concern for Canadians—and it has only been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

[English]

At CMHC, our work to improve affordability is driven largely by the national housing strategy, a 10-year, \$70-billion-plus plan to give more Canadians a place to call home.

Most national housing strategy programs focus on those Canadians who are most vulnerable. The strategy also focuses on addressing the biggest challenge to affordability, which is the lack of housing supply. As such, it includes large-scale programs to encourage projects that build new rental homes and renovate existing ones.

The national housing strategy also includes significant funding for housing innovation and research. We recognize that we cannot achieve our aspiration simply by doing things the way they have always been done. Innovative, new ideas and approaches are needed.

One way we are looking for new ideas is through our solutions labs, a \$30-million, 10-year program approved by Parliament as part of the national housing strategy that examines persistent, complex housing issues. solutions labs brings together diverse stakeholders, including experts in the field, housing providers, developers and people with lived expertise to quickly develop potential solutions to some of the most difficult challenges facing our housing system today. These project teams are supported by expert consultants, who help design and implement labs that provide a safe space for diverse perspectives to come together, for assumptions to be questioned and for new ideas to emerge and be tested.

It's within this context that CMHC worked with Generation Squeeze and other stakeholders to establish a Solutions Lab to examine issues relating to housing, wealth and inequality and how to improve housing affordability for Canadians. As of December 31, CMHC had provided funding to a total of 47 solutions labs. I would like to share some examples with you today.

One of the most advanced labs is examining how we can help increase access to suitable housing for Canadians who are released from the federal prison system after completing their sentences. These individuals are often released with no identification, no money and no supports in place. You can imagine the challenges they face in finding a place to live, especially with a criminal record. This lab is also exploring opportunities for ex-prisoners to find jobs in the housing construction industry, including possibly helping to build tiny homes they might one day occupy themselves.

Another lab is creating a road map to remove barriers to shelters and other services for women and transgender people who have been victims of violence. The ideas and materials generated by this lab will help to develop adaptable housing and supports for these vulnerable groups.

We are also funding a Solutions Lab entitled "Housing through an autism lens: A pathway from crisis." Supports for people on the autism spectrum typically end when the individual reaches age 18,

so access to affordable housing is a major issue for autistic adults. Barriers can include everything from knowing what to look for in a suitable house to understanding leases and how to share space with others. The end product of this lab will hopefully be an integrated set of flexible housing-related supports, services and bricks and mortar solutions that will be broadly adopted so that autistic adults have better experiences with housing.

These are just a few examples of the close to four dozen solutions labs that have been supported by the national housing strategy. Each is unique, and each is doing groundbreaking work that will lead to better housing outcomes for Canadians.

Mr. Chair, thank you for the opportunity to speak about this unique approach to solving complex housing challenges across the country.

I'd be happy to take questions from the committee.

Thank you.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Tremblay.

We will turn to the Conseil national des chômeurs et chômeuses, Mr. Céré, spokesperson.

Mr. Céré.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Céré (Spokesperson, Conseil national des chômeurs et chômeuses): Ladies and gentlemen members of Parliament, thank you very much for your invitation.

You have received my notes, but I had to make some adjustments to my testimony as a result of Monday's budget.

We all know that since March 2020 the pandemic has shaken the labour world and the economy, forcing, in 2020 alone, nearly nine million people into unemployment. This number should never be forgotten. Almost nine million people received the Canada emergency response benefit in 2020. Last year, 45% of the workforce lost their jobs at some point. The world of work and the economy was hit with a shock almost unheard of in recent history, other than the 1929 crash and subsequent Great Depression.

There are two key lessons from last year: first, the crisis has exposed the flaws in the employment insurance program, which should have immediately played the role expected of it and helped people who lost their jobs. Instead, employment insurance collapsed and had to be quickly replaced by emergency programs, such as the Canada emergency response benefit and the Canada emergency wage subsidy.

With the CERB ending at the end of September 2020, the employment insurance program was put back on track. People had time to think. Flexible measures were created that were ingenious and welcome. Other income support programs were put in place, administered by the agency—

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Céré, hold on if you could for a minute. I really hate to interrupt, but the bells are ringing.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Céré: I understand.

[English]

The Chair: We need support from the committee to continue to about 10 minutes before the vote. Are we okay with that? Are there any complaints?

Mr. Clerk, sometimes the vote counts down faster, so just really watch it. None of us wants to miss this vote. It's a confidence vote.

Okay, Mr. Céré, we have the authority to go ahead, so the floor is yours.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Céré: Beginning in September 2020, the government introduced programs to replace the Canada emergency response benefit, known as CERB, including the Canada recovery benefit, or CRB. Administered by the Canada Revenue Agency, the CRB provides income support to those who are not eligible for employment insurance, or EI, meaning, self-employed workers.

The second thing we have learned is this. Last year's collapse of the EI program—a serious situation—is mostly due to the numerous cutbacks made in the 1990s, specifically from 1990 to 1996, under two different governments. The past 25 to 30 years have been spent under something of a leaden blanket. All that time, the government had the EI program in a straitjacket, if you will, to keep the program from doing its job. We saw what happened last year.

Without the emergency measures put in place in the spring of 2020—CERB, the Canada emergency student benefit, the flexible EI regime, the CRB, and the Canada emergency wage subsidy, or CEWS—we would have seen misery in our towns and villages, as our grandparents saw in the 1930s. The support measures have helped people not only pay the bills and keep their heads above water, but also inject a considerable amount of money into the local economy. The government has been there to help people and avoid what could have been even worse.

To our knowledge, this is the first time in the country's history that a government has responded so strongly to support its population in the face of such a serious crisis. The government introduced streamlined programs, while covering sectors previously overlooked by the EI program. It is, in a way, a true social Marshall Plan that the government has put in place since last year.

Some elements have yet to be fixed. First, the administrative delays for EI are still very long. Second, the Canada Revenue Agency and Service Canada work in silos. The poor communication between the two agencies is resulting in longer wait times and mistakes.

In addition, a March 2021 study by the International Monetary Fund, or IMF, suggested avoiding a premature withdrawal of support programs, while underscoring that the lessons learned from the crisis provide an excellent opportunity to review the EI system, including its role as an economic stabilizer. I don't say this kind of thing often, but the IMF is right. Until the crisis is over and as long as EI is not reformed, support programs to help self-employed workers must continue. The measures in Monday's budget appear to move in that direction, but the changes to EI need to go beyond temporary fixes.

The government has had time to make up its mind. When it comes to EI, no stone has been left unturned, every problem has been identified and all the solutions have been on the table for 25 years. Now is the time to permanently reform the system.

A crisis like the one we are experiencing can become the necessary trigger to rethink the importance of our social safety net. It happened in the past, during the dirty thirties and after the Second World War. This crisis should lead us to rebuild the foundation of the EI program, with two objectives: expanded coverage for self-employed workers, with better access for seasonal and precarious workers, indigenous communities and part-time workers; and improved protection.

Something else we must reflect on is the environmental transition and the need for determined actions. This COVID-19 pandemic may just be a big rehearsal before the next crisis, the climate crisis. We have huge challenges ahead of us and we must be up to the task.

We believe that this government has demonstrated its capacity to initiate such a shift and that it can do so by reaching out to constructive opposition and civil society.

Thank you.

• (1720)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Céré. I'm sorry for the interruption.

We'll turn now to the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association, and we have Ian MacPherson, executive director.

Ian, the floor is yours.

Mr. Ian MacPherson (Executive Director, Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association): My name is Ian MacPherson. I am the executive director of the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association.

We appreciate the invitation to present and will be speaking to the support programs that have been put in place for harvesters and the impacts of these programs during the past year.

We would first like to acknowledge the ongoing and heroic efforts of our front-line workers across Canada and all those who are working toward assisting our industries in a return to a more normal situation.

I would like to acknowledge the many companies and individuals who were negatively impacted and continue to be impacted by the pandemic.

Our sector was in a very unique situation in that the seasonal start-up was scheduled at a time when most industries in Canada were scaling back or shutting down.

The PEIFA represents over 1,260 captains who are core licence-holders on Prince Edward Island. Most fleets employ two additional crew members for day-to-day operations.

For the close to 4,000-plus harvesters and crew who were preparing to start a spring fishing season, quite simply March 2020 was full of uncertainty. On Prince Edward Island, our harvesting sector is intrinsically tied to the processing sector primarily on the island and in New Brunswick. As air travel between many countries was at a standstill, sufficient staffing at the production plants was also a challenge.

On the harvesting side, questions such as would there be a season, and if so, how long, what are the protocols for safety, and would they be able to meet their financial obligations were front and centre on everyone's mind. A two-week delay to the start of an eight-week spring fishing season added to this anxiety.

Another primary concern was the availability of traditional worldwide markets from both a transportation and market demand perspective. As the world was on an uncharted path, market outlooks were uncertain and unpredictable. To address these uncertainties, a number of harvesting sector organizations developed contingency plans for various scenarios. In the case of the PEIFA, this included ongoing dialogue with our board, committee members, other harvester organizations, provincial ministers, MLAs, processors, buyers, federal members of Parliament and federal fisheries minister Bernadette Jordan. The focus of these numerous calls was to organize a spring fishing season and ensure that support programs could be developed to address any economic shortfalls.

On P.E.I., winter and ice conditions restrict us to the spring and fall seasons for our major lobster fisheries. The federal government had a number of programs in place to address more traditional businesses, but the fishing industry has some unique aspects that did not make these programs workable. To address these gaps, the PEIFA and other fishing organizations listed and detailed programs that could assist fishers in vulnerable areas. In addition, the provincial government also worked closely with industry to provide additional programs that could address gaps the federal programs did not cover. After much discussion and hard work, a suite of programs was launched that did assist most of the harvesters. In a number of cases the program parameters did need modifications to be more effective, and we appreciate that our concerns were listened to.

It is important to note that some programs contained a clawback or qualification provision if harvester revenues were stronger than anticipated. The programs that assisted with crew wages, CEWS, and the fish harvester benefit and grant program were heavily subscribed. Based on the feedback I received, the Canada emergency business account, CEBA, did not receive the degree of uptake it could have due to business number and expense thresholds. The program was modified several times, and the program did have the net equivalent benefit of the fish harvester benefit program. However, access to more operating funds would have been a significant help to some fleets.

It is important to note that most if not all first-year captains were not able to take part in most or all of these programs due to program qualification criteria. The PEIFA and other organizations lobbied for changes and offered up ways to establish a previous year's income, but without success.

Although the outlook for 2021 is more positive, we are still not free of the COVID-19 virus. The Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association suggests these programs be made available again in 2021 with some suggested changes to once again support a major food sector in Canada.

• (1725)

Last year brought some immense challenges but also provided an opportunity for industry and government to work together towards a common goal.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present. I would welcome any questions at the appropriate time.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ian.

Turning to Réseau FADOQ, we have Ms. Gisèle Tassé-Goodman, president, and Mr. Danis Prud'homme, director general.

The floor is yours.

[Translation]

Ms. Gisèle Tassé-Goodman (President, Provincial Secretariat, Réseau FADOQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, my name is Gisèle Tassé-Goodman and I am the president of the Réseau FADOQ. With me today is Danis Prud'homme, our chief executive. I would like to thank the members of the committee for inviting us.

The Réseau FADOQ is an association for people 50-plus and has over 550,000 members. All of our political outreach is aimed at improving seniors' quality of life. As we have all seen, seniors were the first victims of COVID-19. A number of programs and expenditures were undertaken to support seniors during the pandemic.

The federal government is fond of pointing out that it provided nearly \$1,500 in additional support to low-income senior couples. First, a payment was made in April through the GST credit, but was provided to all Canadians. Second, payments came in the form of one-time top-ups to old age security, or OAS, and the guaranteed income supplement, or GIS. As far as implementing those measures is concerned, the payments were slow in coming.

In fact, Canada's seniors had to wait until July 2020 before receiving financial support through the OAS pension and GIS. If the government had kept its 2019 promise and increased OAS payments by 10% in March 2020, senior couples would have received more than \$1,500, just through the OAS.

Nonetheless, the Réseau FADOQ applauds the Prime Minister for keeping his 2019 budget commitment. Our association did, however, recommend that the 10% OAS pension increase apply to everyone eligible for the pension, so as not to create two classes of seniors. The federal government's ad-hoc payments to the provinces and territories in support of health care were also welcome, but the government would have done well to specifically address the enhanced indexing of the Canada health transfer in the recent budget.

While funding was earmarked for long-term care and palliative care, it will no doubt be tied to conditions. We are eager to see how and when the funding will be allocated in Quebec.

Our organization was pleased to see that support was provided to community organizations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Réseau FADOQ appreciates the new horizons for seniors program, which provides direct support to various organizations, and welcomes the additional investment to expand the program.

Similarly, the Réseau FADOQ was happy with the \$90 million earmarked in the recent budget to directly support community groups that provide home services. Another way the government has helped seniors during the pandemic is to temporarily extend GIS and allowance payments for eligible seniors whose income information had not yet been received at the time of the budget.

The Réseau FADOQ supports a grace period for GIS recipients who do not file their income tax returns on time, and that grace period should always be in effect. In our 2019 election pamphlet, our organization recommended a period of up to three months. In the same pamphlet, we recommended extending a deceased person's OAS payments to their surviving spouse for three months. Currently, the payment can be received only for the month in which the death occurs, and any payments received after that must be repaid. Such a measure would give grieving seniors time to reorganize their finances.

Lastly, the Réseau FADOQ applauds the pandemic support measure to reduce the required minimum withdrawal from registered retirement income funds, RRIFs. Our organization appreciates the measure but called for a further reduction, if not suspension, of the mandatory withdrawal requirement for 2020.

Many seniors rely on RRIFs to support their retirement goals, which the pandemic has upended. Even though their plans have been put on hold, some seniors were forced to withdraw their hard-earned savings, which they had spent their entire careers building.

Thank you to the committee members for this opportunity.

Mr. Prud'homme would be happy to answer your questions.

Thank you.

● (1730)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Tassé-Goodman.

We'll turn to our last witnesses, and then we'll have to go do a vote.

Dr. Kershaw with Generation Squeeze, the floor is yours.

Dr. Paul Kershaw (Founder, Generation Squeeze): Thank you very much.

I have been requested today to speak about a solutions lab I lead in partnership with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation called Wealth and the Problem of Housing Inequity across Generations in Canada. I do so as a UBC professor and founder of Generation Squeeze, a university community collaboration.

Our lab is an exciting one because it's searching for solutions to Canada's housing affordability challenges caused by the fact that we have a growing, even skyrocketing, gap between local earnings and average home prices. That wider gap between home prices and earnings creates wealth inequalities, especially between owners and renters, and also between generations that bought homes decades ago and those who are starting out in the housing market today. In addition, the gap imposes dramatic unaffordability barriers, especially for younger generations of renters and aspiring owners, newcomers of any age and seniors who are renters. Within those groups the barriers can be particularly great for indigenous residents and Canadians of colour.

Given all of that, the growing gap between home prices and earnings turns out to be a major impediment to the CMHC's ambitious goal that all Canadians can afford a home that meets their needs by 2030. At Generation Squeeze, we think that goal is so important that we've embraced it as our own, and we encourage all in Canada to do the same. In pursuit of the goal, we aim to disrupt a root cause of the growing gap between home prices and earnings.

Our lab starts with the recognition that if a pandemic-induced recession does not deflate home prices, then we can no longer ignore the probability that our housing system is actually structured, even if unintentionally, to grow housing values out of reach for local earnings. Indeed, our lab is hypothesizing that many everyday Canadians, myself included, are entangled or incentivized by public policies to bank on profits from home ownership to secure our financial future and gain wealth. By being thus entangled and responding to such policy incentives, we reinforce feedback loops in the housing system that further fuel home prices and wealth inequalities.

My personal story is emblematic of this hypothesis. BC Assessment reported that my home increased by \$300,000 in the year before the lab started, and that single-year increase is way more than I earn as a hard-working professor. It gave me a lot of opportunity to leverage the additional housing equity for home improvements and even other investments in the stock market, which I have taken advantage of with the support of the remarkably low interest rates available amid the pandemic. I clearly benefit from rising home prices, but that rising home price is a double-edged sword.

What's been great for my personal finances is hurting some of my other family members who, as renters, struggle to afford an apartment with enough bedrooms for their kids. It's hurting my younger colleagues, who are just as smart as me and just as hard-working as me but who now cannot afford to live where I do. It's hurting my community and country because evidence shows that wealth inequalities and pervasive unaffordability barriers make our economy less efficient while compromising our population's health.

By putting everyday Canadians at the centre of our lab, we know our lab's focus is provocative and potentially uncomfortable. Too often I have participated in housing dialogues where we hear Canadians say that unaffordability is simply the result of others, people over there, like a foreign investor, a money launderer, a speculator, a NIMBY, a developer, a landlord or a realtor. Yes, all of those actors do play a part in Canada's housing unaffordability saga, but our policy-makers have increasingly focused on those other actors as low-hanging fruit. There exist now foreign buyers taxes, speculation taxes, empty homes taxes, new measures to address money laundering, new efforts to address NIMBYism, new rent control policies, new expectations for developers, new regulations for realtors and a lot of efforts aimed at building more housing. Unfortunately—

• (1735)

The Chair: Dr. Kershaw, I really hate to interrupt. We are down to nine minutes before the vote, so we are going to have to break out. I'll give you two minutes when we come back to sum up.

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Chair, this was just getting interesting.

The Chair: I know.

Mr. Brad Vis: This is so good we have to keep going.

Mr. Pat Kelly: I don't think anybody needs time to get to the chamber, unless I'm mistaken. I'm looking on the call, and I think all of us are—

The Chair: Are we okay?

Hon. Ed Fast: Absolutely.

Mr. Peter Julian: Sorry, Mr. Chair. It is extremely interesting, but the reality is that if the app doesn't work for any one of us, we're actually going to have to log on. That's the problem.

The Chair: That's the concern, and it is a confidence vote.

Dr. Kershaw, as Ed Fast said, the punchline is going to come, and what a great way to stop, just before we question....

Dr. Paul Kershaw: Righto.

The Chair: We'll suspend until after the vote. That should take about 20 minutes.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): See you soon.

The Chair: Thank you, folks.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1735)

(Pause)

• (1805)

The Chair: We shall reconvene.

We'll go to Dr. Kershaw to wrap up his presentation. Then we'll go to a fairly strict series of questions, starting with Mr. Fast and then Ms. Dzerowicz. We'll cut them back to four minutes to get more people in.

Go ahead, Dr. Kershaw.

Dr. Paul Kershaw: Thank you very much.

I was in the midst of giving an energized Zoom experience, talking about how government efforts to pick the low-hanging fruit on housing affordability had proven to have limited lasting influence to dampen down home prices or close the frightening gap between home values and what locals are earning in our cities.

That's why the lab you've asked us to come to talk about is aiming to dig deeper, to move beyond the low-hanging fruit to focus on a more disturbing root cause of the problem: the reality that many everyday Canadians, myself included, are entangled in perpetuating our unsustainable, unaffordable housing system because public policies incline us to organize our wealth strategy in ways that count on home prices rising faster than earnings.

We've organized the lab in this way because we observe that the current national housing strategy, as important as it is, suffers a major omission: Never once does this strategy mention the word "wealth". By failing to acknowledge wealth, the strategy risks overlooking that a primary reason our country is struggling to restore housing affordability is that few Canadians think rising home prices are uniformly bad. It's quite the opposite. Many regular folks benefit.

It's the good and the bad of rising home prices, then, that are the focus of our lab, along with the competing interests or tensions they create. Our lab has aimed to service those tensions and to service in particular the policy drivers that give rise to them, because those policy drivers hold unique potential to redesign the Canadian housing system in search of win-wins wherever possible, or a better balance of competing interests when win-wins are not in reach.

I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Kershaw.

What we'll do is go to four minutes for Mr. Fast, Ms. Koutrakis, Mr. Ste-Marie and Mr. Julian, and to three minutes in the second round for Mr. Fast and Mr. Fragiskatos. Then, I'm sorry, we're going to be out of time.

Mr. Fast.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: I think it's Julie, not me.

The Chair: I'm sorry. It is Ms. Dzerowicz in our stream. I looked at the wrong list.

Go ahead, Ed.

Hon. Ed Fast: Thank you.

Dr. Kershaw, thank you for your presentation. I understand you've had chats with my colleague Brad Vis, who is also on this Zoom call.

Generation Squeeze—you're the founder of that organization. This lab is focused on effectively one issue, which is the tax component of intergenerational inequity relating to housing. Is that correct?

Dr. Paul Kershaw: No, that's not accurate. As I just described, we're looking at a range of policy issues that entangle everyday households, mine included, in counting on home prices rising faster than earnings. We actually are focusing on three areas directed by our participants: monetary and lending policy, tax policy issues and something called a protective policy issue.

Hon. Ed Fast: I'm looking at the executive summary of the project charter. The first paragraph says, "One key source of this in-

tergenerational inequality is tax policy that privileges home ownership, and shelters housing wealth, especially in principal residences...." It's the only key source that is mentioned in the executive summary. That's why I'm a little bit puzzled that you would say that a whole bunch of other things are being discussed. I've read through the charter, and it seems to be focused primarily on that issue.

Dr. Paul Kershaw: I'm so pleased that you are focused on it. These are important issues and I welcome that. If you look at the text, it's clearly talking about public finance, of which tax policy is one, and that's a very broad category.

I think what you're wanting to get from me is some sort of—par-don the phrase—"I gotcha" moment. So, let me say—

Hon. Ed Fast: No, no. Dr. Kershaw—

Dr. Paul Kershaw: —I have never had any conversation with any MP, any minister or any senior bureaucrat who has ever asked me to come to consult on the design of a specific tax policy with regard to housing.

Hon. Ed Fast: That's fair.

Dr. Paul Kershaw: If I can just make sure that's on the record, then I'm delighted to chat more intellectually about—

Hon. Ed Fast: This is not about "gotcha". This is about trying to get to the bottom of the study, which is, I think, very important to Canadians. Obviously CMHC saw it as being important.

You have been quoted in the National Observer as suggesting that you want Canada's tax systems shifted to take more account of property value and other wealth. Is that correct?

• (1810)

Dr. Paul Kershaw: When you're talking about my own research work, yes, I do.

Hon. Ed Fast: Yes.

Dr. Paul Kershaw: The evidence does give good reason for us to think about trying to cut taxes for middle and lower earners, which will create efficiencies, and compensate by asking folks like me who are now the 9% of Canadians who have homes worth more than \$1 million to contribute slightly more based on our housing wealth. This is part of a conversation about a tax shift.

Yes. That's my research area.

Hon. Ed Fast: We are talking about a home equity tax of some sort. Is that right?

Dr. Paul Kershaw: In this particular moment, you and I are talking about the possibility of reducing taxes on earnings and trying to find revenue elsewhere. The focus of the lab is much broader than that. That's why we're looking at things related to monetary policy, lending policy, a broad category of tax policies, including Brad's observation about whether we could exempt the first \$100,000 or so of earnings for people as a way to try to support a younger demographic. It's a broad range of things.

Hon. Ed Fast: Dr. Kershaw, Generation Squeeze became one of the partners in this lab. Another partner was Watershed.

Watershed is no longer a facilitator. Is that correct?

Dr. Paul Kershaw: That's a great question.

When I was working to think through how we would facilitate engagement with people through the solutions lab approach that CMHC has on tap, I wanted to pick up on a working relationship that we'd had with Watershed Partners in the past. I approached Charlie, who I think you had on earlier today, as a colleague who could help with the facilitation.

That's correct.

Hon. Ed Fast: Is there a reason that in November that relationship was terminated?

Dr. Paul Kershaw: Yes. That's also a great question.

One of the strengths of Watershed is to bring a really process-oriented approach to guiding co-construction of ideas. They led us through the first two sessions of our lab, which went well, but then as the participants were pushing us to look at more detailed policy areas, it became clear that we needed more content expertise to be shaping the conversations, so we—

Hon. Ed Fast: Thank you. That's helpful.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ed, I gave you a little more time because I felt that you were on a good line of questioning.

Ms. Dzerowicz and then Mr. Ste-Marie.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair; and thanks to all the presenters.

My first questions are for CMHC.

Mr. Tremblay, does the CMHC have any role when it comes to the formulation of tax policy?

Mr. Michel Tremblay: Mr. Chair, we do not. From time to time we provide advice to the Minister of Finance through the Department of Finance, but the Minister of Finance has the ultimate responsibility for tax policies.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you. I just wanted to make sure that was clear. It has come up a number of times and it did come up last time when Mr. Siddall was before us, so I appreciate your clarity on that.

We're talking a lot about buying homes. As you know, the federal government introduced the first-time home buyer incentive to help qualified first-time home buyers be better able to afford buying a home. Can you talk about how critical this program is in helping

young and new Canadians access the housing market? That's the first question.

Second, we know that COVID has made everything more expensive. It feels as if it's even tougher than ever before for young people or first-time home buyers to actually get into the housing market. Can you talk about some other measures we should be thinking about in order to make things more affordable for those who are trying to get into the market?

Mr. Michel Tremblay: Mr. Chair, the first-time home buyer incentive was introduced to make sure that when first-time home buyers got into the market, they could do so within good risk parameters but also with a lower monthly payment. It's aimed at that.

With respect to other measures, that would be advice that we would give to the Minister of Finance as well. It's not necessarily something we would share here. I'll leave it at that.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: It's no problem. I don't want to push you on that, so thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Kershaw.

Thank you so much for your presentation. I agree with whoever suggested that we should have you back, just because I think we might have many questions for you.

Our budget 2021 has put in a significant amount of money to support our youth. We want to make sure that, due to COVID, they don't become the lost generation. I wonder whether you can talk a bit about how the investments proposed in our budget 2021 can stop young Canadians from becoming a lost generation.

• (1815)

Dr. Paul Kershaw: First, I think you deserve a great deal of credit for putting in place the child care funding that is actually, for the first time in my professional career, really meaningful at the federal level. Fifty years after the recommendation from the Royal Commission on the Status of Women to have a real national child care system, I think that is going to be game changing.

I do think, though, that previous budgets have been stronger on the housing issue. In the material I've shared already today, we really do need the government to say....

In the past, Canadians might have wanted two things from housing: an affordable place to call home and a good return on investment. However, we can't have both of these things any longer, because when something is a good return on investment, it leaves behind local earnings.

At this stage, if we want the national housing strategy to truly succeed, we need the government to come out and actually say it's going to hone its public policies going forward to try to ensure home prices don't continue to rise. That's a top goal.

The Chair: This is your last question, Julie.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thanks very much.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities would say to us that one issue is it seems like everyone has different levers at different levels of government. The federal government has certain things it could do and the province has certain things it could do. For us to really deal with this housing issue, we need to bring the two levels together—maybe all three levels—to actually put all the tools on the table for us to really get at some solutions.

Dr. Paul Kershaw: I think that's true, although I do see solid efforts of governments working together. Municipalities can do zoning issues. That's really critical. Then senior levels of government need to come in and think about how they're shaping both the injection of new supply—we need more co-ops in particular and green, purpose-built rentals—and also how we have modified the demand.

As I mentioned, we have done the low-hanging fruit. Now is the time that we need to tackle some of the more challenging cultural issues. When you measure your GDP, you take pride in the fact that our housing system is growing GDP, but what it's really doing is growing the major cost of living out of reach for what locals earn. That does make people like me wealthier, but it's crushing the housing dreams of those who follow in my footsteps.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, all.

We'll go to Mr. Ste-Marie.

You have four minutes, Gabriel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening. Thank you to the witnesses for their presentations. I want to apologize for your having to sit through a meeting that was interrupted by a vote.

Since I don't have much time, I will direct my first question to Mr. Prud'homme, from the Réseau FADOQ, and the next one to Mr. Céré, from the National Council of Unemployed Workers.

I want to bring your attention to an article that was written the day before yesterday by business reporter Gérald Fillion. In it, he talks about the support measures for seniors included in the budget, mentioning the \$500 payment that will be made to seniors 75-plus in August—presumably, an election will be called shortly thereafter—as well as the 10% increase in the OAS pension that will not come into effect until 2022.

Here is a snippet of what Mr. Fillion says, loosely translated:

Two questions come to mind. First, why not make the 10% increase to old age security effective this year? Second, why do the measures apply only to those 75 and over? Why not seniors 65 and over?

I would like to hear what you have to say about that, Mr. Prud'homme.

Mr. Danis Prud'homme (Director General, Provincial Secretariat, Réseau FADOQ): Thank you for your question.

You raise an interesting point. As our president mentioned in her opening statement, the increase should have happened in March 2020 because the additional OAS income would have brought people a lot of relief.

First of all, age is being used in a discriminatory way. Consequently, the measure discriminates on the basis of age, not income. The measures are supposed to help people with lower incomes, but people with incomes up to \$70,000-plus can draw on old age security, so the increase will also apply to people who don't need it.

Second, if the government is going to increase OAS, the measure should apply to all those eligible for OAS, in other words, those 65 and over, not on a discriminatory basis, as is currently the case. The argument is that seniors 75 and over need more money and more care, and we don't dispute that. However, those between the ages of 65 and 74 are also very much in need financially. The GIS provides financial support to the poorest seniors, not those with a \$70,000 income who don't need the help.

The money needs to go to the right place to really help those who need it. Since there isn't a lot of money to go around, the government should focus on those who need it.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

Mr. Céré, thank you for your opening statement. We will have an opportunity later to discuss the importance of overhauling EI so that it covers seasonal, vulnerable and self-employed workers.

I know the budget only just came out, so you haven't had long to review it and analyze the contents, but do you have any thoughts on the measures to extend the EI special benefits and the CRB?

What struck you in the budget?

• (1820)

Mr. Pierre Céré: You brought up two aspects. The CRB is basically for those who are not eligible for EI, in other words, self-employed workers, who make up 15% of the workforce—three million people in Canada.

Those who have been out of work since the beginning of the pandemic are counting on that support. Initially, the CRB was available for 26 weeks, but the period was extended to 38 weeks and now 50 weeks, the same as EI. The program is slated to end in September, with nothing more in the offing.

The government says it wants to look into broadening EI coverage to self-employed workers, but there is still no such coverage. That leaves self-employed workers facing a lot of insecurity, with September fast approaching.

As far as the EI measures go, the government had time to study the program, which collapsed last year for all to see. The government had time to rethink the system; it introduced more flexible EI measures back in September. Not only were the measures certainly welcome, but they were also quite smart. The benefit period was extended up to 50 weeks in that case as well. The support is ending in September.

The government has held extensive consultations, really extensive. The minister has a mandate to conduct an in-depth review of the program and modernize it for the 21st century. Monday, when we read over the budget for the first time, we misjudged, because we were expecting the government to make permanent changes, for example, to the eligibility criteria. We quickly came to the realization that it had not, that the measures were still temporary. I think everyone is fed up with temporary measures, pilot projects and the patchwork approach.

The EI program was broken in the 1990s, and that's why it did not do what it was supposed to last year. It's time to reform the program. As I said earlier, no stone has been left unturned; all the solutions have been thought of and costed. It's time to make permanent changes to the EI system.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thanks, both of you.

We're turning to Mr. Julian, who will be followed by Mr. Fast, and we will close with Mr. Fraser.

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thanks so much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all our witnesses. We deeply appreciate that you're here today.

I'm going to go very quickly.

I'll start with you, Mr. Tremblay.

How much in the past year has CMHC provided in liquidity supports for Canada's big banks? They've received over \$40 billion in profits so far. Also, how much over the past year has CMHC devoted to the actual construction of new affordable housing?

Mr. Michel Tremblay: Mr. Chair, in terms of how much liquidity we've provided, I'll have to get the information on that to the committee. I don't have it handy.

In terms of how much we've provided for affordable housing, as of December 31, 2020, within the national housing strategy program since the launch, I don't have it annually, but we've committed more than \$12 billion for housing.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much.

OSFI tells us that CMHC gave \$150 billion in liquidity supports for Canada's big banks, so the ratio is basically 14 times more for supporting the bank profits rather than providing affordable housing.

Thank you for that.

Dr. Kershaw, very quickly, is part of your laboratory looking into issues such as a wealth tax, which other countries have put into place?

Also, you did make reference to co-operative housing. The former Liberal government gutted the national housing program. How important is it to have that right to housing and the construction of non-profit and co-operative housing solutions?

Dr. Paul Kershaw: There are two parts to that question. I'll take the second part first.

It's absolutely essential for us now to be thinking about investing in particular in green energy-efficient co-ops. As this big gap between home prices and earnings grows, we need to be thinking that more and more people are going to be relying on alternative tenures like co-ops.

In terms of the taxation of wealth, I think it's a broader conversation. Your party has been focusing a lot on taxing the uber-wealthy: those with \$20 million in assets. I think if we want to help our housing affordability, we would include housing wealth income much lower than that. I think we should be thinking about it. Only 9% of Canadian homeowners live in homes that are worth more than \$1 million. It might be a threshold that's worthy of some discussion.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Prud'homme, all over the country, we have seen horrific things happening in long-term care. How worried is the Réseau FADOQ by the sector's breakdown, lack of funding and low standards?

● (1825)

Mr. Danis Prud'homme: Thank you for your question.

The Réseau FADOQ has actually been very concerned about the issue since the 1990s, when we started to see drastic changes happening in the sector and resources being stretched.

I would say two things could happen.

It's a fact that most people right now need home care, so it's time to walk the talk, as they say. The needs are clearly known, but the budget fails to address them. A first step is needed to get things back on track.

As far as health transfers go, I will quickly say that population aging should absolutely be taken into account. Consider this: those 65 and over make up 17% of Canada's population—23% of Quebec's population. The government absolutely has to increase transfers on the basis of the aging population in the provinces and territories in order to improve long-term care.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

I have one last question for Mr. Céré.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Peter—

Mr. Peter Julian: No, I still have 20 seconds, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Very quickly—

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Céré, how in favour are you of a guaranteed basic income?

Mr. Pierre Céré: It depends on what you mean by guaranteed basic income. There are many schools of thought.

Is a guaranteed basic income an alternative to all of the support and income replacement measures?

By those measures, I mean every form of income replacement, from occupational illness coverage and wage loss insurance to car insurance. Is the idea to replace all of those things?

If so, it would have to be laid out, but good luck with the constitutional negotiations with the provinces.

If the purpose is to ensure a living wage for everyone, it's a welcome initiative. Provided the EI system undergoes a broad and in-depth review, I think it would be a good starting point. It could be a good place to start, in terms of making sure those who lose their jobs, at the very least, have a basic level of income.

[*English*]

The Chair: We're going to have to cut you there, Mr. Céré.

We have Mr. Fast for about two and a half minutes, followed by Mr. Fraser for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, Ed.

Hon. Ed Fast: Dr. Kershaw, you are in favour of taxing housing wealth. Is that correct?

I think, in an answer to Mr. Julian's question, you said that there needs to be a move more towards taxing housing wealth.

Dr. Paul Kershaw: Well, we already do that in this country. For sure we already tax property.

I would suggest that it would make more sense to us to shift to taxing high-value properties more so we cut taxes to earnings for low- and middle-income earners.

Hon. Ed Fast: Can you tell me how Generation Squeeze and CMHC came together on this? Who provided the impetus for this study?

Dr. Paul Kershaw: That's a great question.

I could read to you the email I wrote when applying to the solutions labs. This was my applying to CMHC.

Hon. Ed Fast: Okay.

Dr. Paul Kershaw: One of the people who had been most eloquent talking about generational equity, housing and wealth had been Evan Siddall. As I was looking for partners to develop the solutions labs, I reached out to Evan and asked if he would be interested in partnering, and also, given that I was applying to CMHC for funding, if he could do that with me given that there might be conflict of interest.

Hon. Ed Fast: What's the status of the study now?

Dr. Paul Kershaw: We're coming down to the end of the road.

We'll be giving our report towards the end of June, just before the summer break. It's been extended because of the COVID situation. We had to do more of it online, and that required a pause.

We have three working groups creating policy prototypes related to monetary policy, tax policy and protecting people should the—

quote, unquote—"bubble" ever burst, those who might be most vulnerable in that situation.

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Tremblay suggested that CMHC had no role in formulating tax policy, yet CMHC entered into a partnership with you to work on something that focuses on the tax elements of intergenerational inequity. I'm having trouble squaring that, because you've just suggested that Mr. Siddall was a natural partner because he shared your approaches to the issue of intergenerational wealth, especially the issue on tax.

I hope I haven't misquoted you.

Dr. Paul Kershaw: I would pause you there. I think that your characterization there isn't accurately repeating what I said.

Hon. Ed Fast: Okay, fine.

Dr. Paul Kershaw: I would say that Mr. Siddall was very strong at talking about housing wealth and intergenerational tensions, and he had this lovely speech about how he wakes up thinking how he would ask his mom to help him solve the housing crisis. That's very in keeping with Gen Squeeze language and framing, so that orientation is something that we crossed paths on and made CMHC a good partner.

• (1830)

Hon. Ed Fast: That's very helpful—

The Chair: We're going to have to end it there, Ed. I'm really sorry about that.

Mr. Fraser, you have time for about two questions, and then we have to close.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): First, maybe let me add some clarity to this.

I just point out that CMHC, in the discussion that preceded my questions, it's not just their opinions they don't offer [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] but by law they don't offer advice on tax policy to the government.

I'll point out just for the record that the minister is absolutely clear that the government is not considering a home equity tax in any way, shape or form. Any suggestion to the contrary is entirely false.

[*Translation*]

I have a quick question for Mr. Céré.

Let's say the government had not introduced the emergency measures to support workers and businesses, such as CERB and CEWS. What would the impact on the economy have been?

Mr. Pierre Céré: The economy would have completely collapsed. A lot of people would have gone broke. A lot of people would not have been able to cover their basic necessities, paying their rent, mortgage and so on.

The help provided by the government was enormous. I did some quick math. Since September, the government has spent \$200 billion on CEWS, CERB, the CRB and the EI measures. That is \$200 billion in direct support that people received.

That money goes right back into the local economy. That \$200 billion is a colossal amount of money. It's more than a decade's worth of EI payments delivered in a single year directly to Canadians. That speaks to the scale of the crisis we've just been through.

Without that help, a whole lot of bank and credit union managers would have been lamenting their customers' inability to make their mortgage payments. People would not have been able to afford groceries. The government provided direct assistance to people. The support was welcome. Off the top of my head, I think—

[*English*]

The Chair: This will be your last question, Sean.

Mr. Sean Fraser: My friend and colleague Elizabeth May has been left out of this meeting. I would be happy to give her a question before we wrap up.

The Chair: Okay, Elizabeth, we need a fairly quick one.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I'm so excited. I have a quick one for Dr. Kershaw.

I'm very interested in the tax announced in the budget, the non-resident, non-Canadian vacant house tax.

I would like your take on that.

Dr. Paul Kershaw: It's a valuable tool. It's one minor tool in the tool box. Will it be sufficient? No. Do we need to go considerably further to address some of the broader root causes? Absolutely yes.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Perhaps I could squeeze in another quick one.

What do you think the effect of Airbnbs are on affordable housing?

Dr. Paul Kershaw: We absolutely need to regulate short-term rentals so that we keep our housing supply available for locals as opposed to visitors.

The Chair: Okay, we're going to have to end it there, before somebody tries to sneak in another one.

In any event, I am really sorry to have to rush the end of this meeting, but we're already into another committee's time. I apologize to those who didn't get any questions. It was a very interesting discussion.

Witnesses, thank you to all of you. Your presentations, even if you didn't get a question, are on the record and will be considered in our study.

With that, thank you all very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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