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March 20, 2015

The Honourable Michelle Stilwell  
Minister of Social Development and Social Innovation

Dear Ms. Stilwell,

We wish to thank your Ministry for responding to the letter we wrote in August of 2013 regarding raising the income assistance rates in British Columbia. BCASW appreciates that the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation is working on plans to better meet the needs of Persons With Disabilities (PWD). However, we remain deeply concerned about British Columbians on income assistance who struggle with chronic illness and persistent barriers to employment and who do not meet the current criteria for PWD designation. The majority of these individuals, and therefore families, do not have adequate housing.

You no doubt are familiar with the At Home study completed by Simon Fraser University in which they compared the cost of housing 500 homeless Vancouverites to the cost of having them continue living on the street. The study found that the costs of housing 500 people versus the cost of not housing them were similar, however, the reduction in presentations to an emergency room was significant. Emergency room presentations were reduced from 4.8 visits to 3.8 visits in one year for those who were housed compared to an increase of 7 emergency visits per year for those who were still living on the street (Somers et al, [www.trialsjournal.com](http://www.trialsjournal.com)).

In our earlier letter we provided sources that confirm reducing poverty improves health outcomes. The long term evidence is irrefutable. The results of the At Home study clearly show that investments in housing pay off in reduced use of health care and other critical (and costly) services. All family members will benefit as will their local communities and the entire province. We urge you to consider the extensive positive impact that increasing income assistance rates will have on the cycle of homelessness and illness and on our communities as a whole. Secure, affordable housing, coupled with income assistance benefits that can provide adequate healthy food for all recipients, must be your Ministry's primary focus.

We would be pleased to meet with you to have an in-depth discussion regarding these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Crawford".

Michael Crawford, RSW

President, BC Association of Social Workers

cc The Honourable Terry Lake, Minister of Health