

For Immediate Release

## **Canada responds to years of pressure from community advocates by recognizing housing as a human right**

### **ACTO and the Right to Housing Coalition applaud recognition of right to housing in National Housing Strategy**

Toronto, ON – November 24, 2017 – For over seven years, the [Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario \(ACTO\)](#) and the [Right to Housing Coalition](#) - alongside housing advocates from across the country, including those with lived experience of homelessness - have pressed for a National Housing Strategy and the recognition in law of the right to housing. Those demands have finally been heard by the federal government in their announcement of a National Housing Strategy.

“The courts repeatedly blocked our efforts to have these rights recognized under existing laws. But the community organizing on the ground sent a loud message to the government that enough is enough,” says ACTO lawyer Tracy Heffernan, one of the legal counsel in the [historic Charter challenge](#). “The fight isn’t over just yet. Until new legislation is adopted by Parliament, we have to keep up the pressure to ensure that our government stays true to their promise of legally recognizing that housing is a human right.”

From 2010 to 2015, the Right to Housing Coalition worked tirelessly to have the voices of those impacted by the affordable housing crisis heard by the courts through the Charter case called *Tanudajaja vs. Canada*. 10,000 pages of evidence never heard by the court demonstrated:

- how [supportive housing can save lives](#);
- how housing unaffordability [impacts families and youth](#);
- the link between [homelessness, mental illness and addictions](#);
- how [criminalization of homelessness](#) creates real barriers;
- how the [Indigenous population is disproportionately impacted by homelessness](#);
- how inadequate housing impacts those with [intellectual disabilities](#) and [physical abilities](#); and
- how [women’s safety and access](#) to affordable housing is critical.

Five applicants bravely shared their life stories of struggling with inadequate housing and homelessness, while [many social justice organizations](#) intervened in the case to echo the call for the right to housing, backed up by a National Housing Strategy.

In 2015, ACTO, the Right to Housing Coalition and others went to Geneva to make the case before the United Nations’ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) that people were suffering from governments’ broken promises and to [push for the right to housing in Canada](#).

### **Details of the National Housing Strategy unclear**

While we celebrate the recognition of the right to housing and the creation of the first National Housing Strategy, we are also waiting for more details of how it will be implemented, to verify that it actually meets the needs of those living on lower incomes in Canada. The affordable housing crisis most adversely impacts hundreds of thousands of people living on lower incomes and fighting to keep a roof over their heads. These people cannot wait several years for the bulk of the money to be spent.

“Committing to a national strategy is an important step toward ending the affordable housing crisis, but a generation has gone by without meaningful spending and the time is now to invest in building communities,” says Kenneth Hale, the Director of Advocacy and Legal Services at ACTO. “We must continue to advocate for the rights of the most marginalized members of our society and work in partnership with people whose lives are being thrown off course by a lack of housing opportunities.”

## **About Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario**

The Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO) is a specialty community legal clinic, funded by Legal Aid Ontario, with a province-wide mandate. ACTO works for the advancement of human rights and social justice in housing for low-income Ontarians through legal advice and representation, law reform, community organizing, and education and training. The clinic also coordinates the Tenant Duty Counsel Program (TDCP) across Ontario, which provides legal information and assistance to self-represented tenants appearing at the Landlord and Tenant Board.

## **About the Right to Housing Coalition**

The Right to Housing (R2H) Coalition includes people from a variety of backgrounds and expertise, including people with lived experience of homelessness or of being inadequately housed, community organizations, advocacy groups and academics.

## **For more information including interviews with ACTO and Right to Housing Coalition representatives:**

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