

St. Andrew's-Wesley Homelessness and Mental Illness Action Group

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Canada's Homeless Shelters and Prisons are New Psychiatric Asylums

Vancouver, B.C. (May 9, 2007) St. Andrew's-Wesley's Homelessness and Mental Illness Action Group heard loudly that people with a mental illness have been forgotten and neglected by all levels of government. Last night at the End Homelessness Now forum at St Andrews-Wesley United Church, over 500 citizens heard Mike Harcourt, former mayor of Vancouver and former premier of B.C., state "even with the minimal efforts recently announced by government the PIVOT Legal Society projects that by 2010 there will be 3,177 people homeless in Vancouver – double the amount currently in shelters or sleeping outside."

Former Senator Michael Kirby, now the Commissioner for the recently announced Mental Health Commission of Canada has called for the building by government of 57,000 units of supported housing for people with a mental illness in his report entitled *Out of the Shadows at Last*. In that report it is identified that between 1980 and 2000, the number of affordable housing units created by the Government of Canada dropped from 24,000 to 940. Instead of putting psychiatric patients in hospitals like BC's Riverview Hospital, people with serious mental illnesses are being placed in prison, shelters and sleeping outside. Prisons and shelters are the new asylums.

At the Forum, Dr. Rev Ruth Wright, Executive Director of First United Church in the Downtown Eastside spoke of the some 6,000 people who live in rooming hotels that are usually 10' by 10' and cost \$400 each month. Ruth stated, "*I do not believe that a 10 foot by 10 foot room with no kitchen facility or toilet except down the hall, is legitimately called "a home" in Canada.*"

"*Our society allows no other group of ill people to end up destitute,*" said Dr. Nancy Hall, former BC Mental Health Advocate. "*People must write, fax, e-mail and phone elected representatives and demand immediate action to build supportive housing.*"

Rafe Mair, Hall of Fame Broadcaster and former Social Credit cabinet minister, stated "*Unless citizens let elected officials know there will be a political cost to leaving people homeless they won't get off their asses and do something substantial enough to solve the problem.*"

For more information go to www.endhomelessnessnow.ca or contact:

Forum Moderator

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