One year later: Mental Health Commission of Canada's Mental Health and Homelessness Project in Winnipeg provides homes and support to many

WINNIPEG, Dec. 1 /CNW/ - One year after the launch of At Home / Chez Soi, the Mental Health Commission of Canada's homelessness initiative, 78 homeless Winnipegers living with a mental illness now have a place to call home. At Home/Chez Soi is an innovative national research project taking place in five Canadian cities. Its goal is to find the best approaches to help some of the most vulnerable people in the country.

"We are seeing participants who are reconnecting, reuniting and growing as they receive housing and community supports," said Marcia Thomson, Winnipeg Site Coordinator. "It's gratifying to witness people moving forward with relationships and using support services, which are critical elements on the road to recovery," she said.

There are currently over 285 participants in the Winnipeg project, of which 78 have new homes and access to a range of health and social supports to assist them toward independent living. Supports include primary care, psychiatric programming, sweats, cultural teachings, barbeques, movies, sporting events and other life-skills training. The Winnipeg project includes a "Housing Plus" component which involves supporting participants and landlords with things like furniture provision and moving services. The remaining participants are part of the control group, and receive the traditional supports available in and around the city.

Dr. Jayne Barker, At Home/Chez Soi Project Executive Lead, and the MHCC's Vice President of Research Initiatives said: "This is an exciting milestone. We've already learned some valuable lessons. As a result of this project, we will be able to provide evidence to help facilitate a dramatic change to our system of care."

The Winnipeg project is part of the MHCC’s national At Home/ Chez Soi initiative - the largest research project of its kind in the world studying mental illness and homelessness. In Winnipeg, At Home / Chez Soi is also focusing on Aboriginal people. Over 70 percent of the homeless population in Winnipeg is Aboriginal. Over the remaining three years of the project, a total of 300 homeless people living with a mental illness in and around the city will receive housing and supports.

The Winnipeg project also has a unique Aboriginal Cultural Lens Committee to help ensure programs and services provided by At Home / Chez Soi consider important cultural elements. The Local Advisory Committee and the Lived Experience Circle Committee also provide unique Aboriginal support to the project. All committees are guided by a set of principles and honour the Seven Teachings of the Medicine Wheel, which are: Respect, Truth, Love, Wisdom, Knowledge, Courage, and Humility.
Strong Manitoba partners

The Winnipeg At Home/Chez Soi project is built on partnerships and has received tremendous support from local and provincial governments, and from the Winnipeg community. From donations of sporting and cultural event tickets to the funding training programs, partners have greatly increased the range of services and supports offered to participants.

At Home/Chez Soi: Largest research project of its kind in the world

At Home/Chez Soi is a ground-breaking national research project in five cities - Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Moncton - to find the best way to provide housing and services to people who are living with mental illness and homelessness. Using a ‘Housing First’ approach, the research project focuses on first providing people who are homeless with a place to live, and then the other assistance and services they require. The goal is to see if this approach is better than traditional care.

A total of 2,285 people who are homeless and living with a mental illness will participate in the study. Of these, 1,325 participants in the research project will be given a place to live and offered a range of health and social support services over the course of the research initiative. These supports include help with maintaining a home, undertaking routine tasks like shopping or getting to a doctor's appointment or securing opportunities for education, volunteering and employment. The rest of the participants will receive the services that are traditionally available to them in their cities. The two research groups will be compared to see which approach works best.

The research will help make Canada a world leader in providing better services to people living with homelessness and mental illness. Each test site is focusing on a specific target population within the overall study group.

The knowledge gained will be shared with other organizations and policy makers in Canada and around the world in the hopes of fostering new action plans or modifying existing ones to address these societal issues. Other countries are already interested in learning about the project outcomes.

For more information on the At Home/Chez Soi project, please visit http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/Pages/homelessness.aspx (English) or http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/Francais/Pages/Litinerance.aspx (French)

The Mental Health Commission of Canada is a non-profit organization created to focus national attention on mental health issues and to work to improve the health and social outcomes of people living with mental illness. In February 2008, the federal government allocated $110 million to the MHCC to find ways to help the growing number of people who are homeless and have a mental illness. For more, visit www.mentalhealthcommission.ca.

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