



Speaking notes for

Louise Bradley

President & CEO

Mental Health Commission of Canada

at the Grand Opening of the

Bosman Hotel Community

Vancouver, British Columbia

August 23, 2010

Thank you, Jayne, and good morning everyone.

I want to thank all of you all for joining us this morning,

I particularly want to welcome the residents of the Bosman Hotel Community who have joined us for the opening of their new home. On top of the struggle and challenges you've faced, you've also carried the added burden of the stigma and discrimination that people with mental illness and addictions suffer. While this has not been an easy road for you, I hope that the Bosman proves to be a positive first step on a new and better road for you.

I also want to acknowledge the people of the neighbourhood and community surrounding the Bosman. Thank you very much for your strong support of this project.

Last November, I had the pleasure of hosting the official launch of *At Home/Chez Soi* here in Vancouver, and at the time the Bosman Hotel Community was still in the planning stages. It's great to see that the dream is now a tangible reality.

This is a landmark day –

- for Vancouver;**
- for the Mental Health Commission of Canada that has been tasked with the enormous and exciting challenge to be the catalyst for mental health transformation;**
- for all the people and organizations in Vancouver and across Canada working with the Commission on our *At Home / Chez Soi* initiative;**

- and, most importantly, it's a landmark day for our fellow citizens who are homeless and living with a mental illness.

The Bosman Hotel Community is a very important part of the Commission's *At Home / Chez Soi* initiative – the largest research project of its kind in the world studying mental illness and homelessness.

Here in Vancouver, we're focusing particularly on people who also have substance abuse and addiction issues; and over the next four years, we'll provide housing and support to 300 people.

Two hundred of them will receive housing of their choice throughout Vancouver; and 100 people will benefit from housing here at the Bosman.

Residents at the Bosman will also receive on-site health and social supports, including primary care, psychiatric programming, harm-reduction education, medication management, family-reconnect programs, and group programming such as yoga, art and music therapies, life-skills training and field trips.

So far we've recruited over 325 participants to the Vancouver *At Home / Chez Soi* study – and we've already learned some valuable lessons from them.

The issues these participants have been facing by living on the streets are alarmingly common, including unmet health needs, safety fears, and frequent crises.

Clearly, it's time for dramatic change to our system of care.

Interestingly, our researchers have also found that nearly three quarters of the Vancouver participants are hopeful about their future despite all the hardship and challenges they face in their daily lives.

By harnessing their hopefulness with the energy and enthusiasm of everyone working on *At Home / Chez Soi* in Vancouver, I'm also hopeful we'll make this project truly transformative for the participants.

In addition to Vancouver, the Mental Health Commission has four other important *At Home / Chez Soi* research projects under way across Canada – in Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Moncton.

Our ultimate goal for the whole initiative is to identify the best course of action to address the issues of mental illness and homelessness. I know we'll be learning a lot here at the Bosman and we'll be sharing that knowledge widely. We'll use the evidence we gather here and in the four other cities to guide Canadians on improvements to services and changes in policies.

Over 2,200 homeless mentally ill people will be participating in *At Home / Chez Soi*. Of those, more than 1,300 people will receive housing and supports, while the others will receive the usual services provided in their home city.

At Home / Chez Soi is based on Housing First, an innovative approach that focuses on giving homeless people, firstly, a place to live, and then giving them the other support and services they need to get their lives on track.

***At Home / Chez Soi* project teams in each of the five cities are adapting the Housing First approach to suit their centres; and each project is addressing a specific population of homeless people living with mental illness.**

Today's opening of the Bosman would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of hundreds of people who care very deeply about finding the best way to provide housing and services to homeless mentally ill people.

On behalf of the Mental Health Commission of Canada, I want to thank our group of exceptional partners who have been directly involved in making the Bosman Hotel Community a reality, including:

- **Portland Hotel Society;**
- **the Streethome Foundation;**
- **the City of Vancouver;**
- **BC Housing;**
- **the Vancouver Foundation;**
- **Prima Properties;**
- **the Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association;**
- **the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority;**
- **the BC Ministry of Housing and Social Development;**
- **the Vancouver Police Department;**

- the University of British Columbia; and
- Simon Fraser University

Together, we're giving our fellow citizens who are homeless and mentally ill new hope for treatment and recovery and new hope that one day they will be able to lead full and productive lives. And to the residents of the Bosman Hotel Community I wish to say – welcome to your new home!

Thank you.