



ALLIANCE TO END
HOMELESSNESS
OTTAWA

Redefining Progress on Ending Homelessness

MUNICIPAL POLICY BRIEF



June 2019



www.endhomelessnessottawa.ca



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Introduction

The Alliance to End Homelessness is a member driven coalition of community service providers that work in partnership to inspire action, to generate knowledge and to inform a community-wide effort to achieve an end to homelessness in Ottawa. Alliance members share a common goal to prevent and reduce homelessness in our city, and ensure shelter stays are short, and transition people from homelessness to safe and affordable housing.

In 2018, over 7,937 individuals accessed a shelter in Ottawa, a 6.5% increase over 2017. Families continue to be a driver of the increase in shelter use, accounting for a 10.6% increase over 2017. Incredibly, shelter stays among single women over 50 continue to increase and rose by over 13% in 2018. The number of male youth shelter use increased by 6.8%, while the number of female youth decreased by 10.7% in 2018, while an increasing number of youth are accessing services in adult shelters due to the limited capacity in youth shelters.

These trends are troubling, as they should be. There is a need in our city to further support and house low-income families, newcomers, men, women fleeing violence, youth, Indigenous people and individuals with disabilities, addictions and mental health needs.

In 2014, the City of Ottawa adopted a 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan that committed to ending chronic homelessness by 2024. This is our opportunity to work together as an Alliance, alongside local partners and governments, to actively advance this long-term goal. People from all walks of life find themselves homeless for a variety of reasons. Homelessness is complex, and significantly preventing and reducing homelessness in our city will necessarily require a variety of approaches and solutions.

Increasing investments in homelessness prevention, with a focus on the necessary supports to keep individuals and families stably housed, is the needed next step to significantly shift the dial on homelessness in our city. Investments in prevention based approaches have proven to reduce the use of, and related municipal costs associated with social services, such as hospital stays, emergency, child protective, policing, corrections and justice services.[1]

If we are serious about meeting our commitment to bringing an end to chronic homelessness we cannot simply manage the problem. We must take a community-wide approach to revise local priorities based on community service gaps and needs. We need to constructively review the goals and achievements made to date at this mid-point of the City's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan. Additionally, we must establish priorities that align with affordable housing and homelessness funding and policy commitments at the provincial and federal levels.

Political leadership in Ottawa will be essential to reach this goal – leadership that encompasses a citywide vision prioritizing policy and funding at the municipal level towards a significant decrease in shelter use.

To this end, the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa submits a bold vision towards harnessing existing policies, tools and resources, while investing in prevention along with clear outcomes and targets to achieve our goals to:

- 1) Plan – Do – Measure – Adjust**
- 2) Invest in the Prevention of Homelessness and Long-Term Housing Stability**
- 3) Use Every Available Tool to Create More Affordable Housing**

[1] Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. The State of Homelessness in Canada. 2016. http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/SOHC16_final_20Oct2016.pdf

Despite ongoing investments, Ottawa's emergency shelter system is over capacity. It is not able to respond to emerging issues.

We need to undertake a critical systems analysis and adapt how we direct investments to significantly reduce the number of individual and families experiencing homelessness.

Political leadership in Ottawa will be essential to reach our goal.



A ROADMAP FOR CHANGE

The Roadmap for Change offers a **solutions oriented** framework to address the local issues impacting those at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.



ROADMAP



Increase funding and supports to prevent homelessness.



Build a variety of housing options affordable for households at different income levels.



Adopt healthy community planning in all neighbourhoods across Ottawa.



Co-design solutions with the community to support better systems-level planning and outcomes.

THE WAY FORWARD

We need to use all of our resources as a city to address homelessness prevention and housing affordability.

Understanding local priorities is the first step, along with clearly defining targets and outcomes. This includes working to:

- **DEFINE THE NEED**
- **PLAN FOR IT**
- **PRIORITIZE PREVENTION**
- **INNOVATE**

1) Plan – Do – Measure – Adjust

The City of Ottawa has adopted an ambitious 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan that commits to an integrated housing system, improved service planning and coordination, new affordable housing units, repair of the current social housing stock, and supports for shelter services, with the goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2024.

As we reach the mid-point of the Plan, the Alliance supports a constructive independent review and analysis of goals and achievements made to date. This should be paired with a reassessment of key priorities, and articulation of core targets consistent with the overarching priorities in the plan. The review process must also commit to engaging and consulting with a broad spectrum of stakeholders and community partners from across the housing and homelessness sector.

The review process would further benefit from a grassroots systems-level mapping that would bring valuable evidence based information to the homelessness and affordable housing sector in Ottawa.

The Alliance is leading such a Systems Mapping initiative in Ottawa in collaboration with homelessness, supportive and social housing agencies and community stakeholders. The goal is to better understand the gaps, bottlenecks and strengths in our city's homelessness system to better align services, increase efficiencies and coordinate a community-wide approach to improving funding, policy and program delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Alliance encourages the City to take a strong, action-oriented approach to dealing with housing and homelessness. We recommend the City:

- a) Conduct a comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment of need for emergency and temporary housing and full range of affordable housing in comparison with the current available and anticipated supply. Analysis across income levels and household types will identify gaps and inform decisions on where to target resources;
- b) Work with the Alliance and local social service agencies to develop a coordinated access system integrating all homelessness and housing services;
- c) Measure, benchmark and set targets addressing service impacts specifically on the pathways into and exits out of homelessness and recidivism on an on-going basis through the use of a By-Name List and homelessness data collection and information systems (ie. HIFIS);
- d) Develop flexible, responsive strategies that allow for local policies and priorities to be adapted to changing needs in the community;
- e) Allocate the resources necessary to effectively meet the targets assigned to the next five years of our 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan.



2) Invest in the Prevention of Homelessness and Long-Term Housing Stability

Although there has been progress in some areas of the City's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan, we continue to see increasing numbers of homeless families and individuals seeking shelter in Ottawa. Health concerns, increasing drug overdoses, family violence, the continued influx of newcomers and other structural and systemic causes of homelessness persist. A clear homelessness prevention and diversion strategy is needed in Ottawa that supports a range of needs in our community.

We have begun to see a shift in how communities across Canada are responding to homelessness. Evidence exists for investments being made in preventing and reducing levels of homelessness rather than in solely relying on emergency services as a 'crisis response'.^[2]

Engaging in a prevention based framework means focusing on policies and strategies that impact homelessness at a structural level, along with early targeted interventions to mitigate the risks of homelessness in the first place.

Building on research undertaken by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, the Alliance recommends an integrated systems approach to prevent the complex factors that produce and sustain homelessness to include:

- a) **Structural Prevention:** Promoting factors to eliminate the risks associated with homelessness such as poverty reduction, income security, cultural inclusion, safety, health and security of housing tenure.
- b) **Systems Prevention:** Addressing institutional and systems responses, such as around planning and supports for individuals transitioning from public systems (ie. hospitals, corrections, child protection).
- c) **Early Intervention:** Supports for families and individuals at risk of homelessness that allow for continued natural supports and connections in their home community.
- d) **Eviction Prevention:** Strategies designed to keep families and individuals at risk of eviction in their home, such as landlord/tenant legislation, rent control and housing allowances, emergency funds and crisis support.
- e) **Housing Stability:** Supports for people to exit homelessness in a timely manner, and remain housed.^[3]

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Alliance recommends the City increase investments in a prevention-based approach to ending homelessness and:

- a) Work actively to assist families and individuals to obtain and retain housing, using all available methods including housing search, counselling, emergency financial assistance, and landlord mediation;
- b) Provide targeted supports to those at risk of eviction and homelessness, including support for victims of domestic violence and those with mental health and addictions challenges;
- c) Work with local school boards to implement school-based homelessness prevention programs;
- d) Improve discharge planning and coordination with correctional facilities, hospitals and shelters to direct individuals to appropriate housing with the necessary supports;
- e) Use a coordinated systems-level lens, working with Ottawa social service agencies, to align program and service priorities to ensure effective funding, policy and program delivery and evaluation in developing a prevention-based homelessness approach;
- f) Engage all related city departments and levels of government, such as those responsible for health, emergency services, child protective services, policing, corrections, justice and social services.

Emergency shelters and response services will remain necessary to deal with crisis situations. However, local investments are still imperative to effectively deliver prevention-based approaches, including the necessary supports, to adequately house those who are at risk of homelessness to remain stably housed in the long-term.

[2] Stephen Gaetz and Erin Dej. A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention. Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. 2017. <http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COHPreventionFramework.pdf>

[3] Ibid.

3) Use Every Available Tool to Create More Affordable Housing

Ottawa's Official Plan identifies affordable housing as key to urban livability, and establishes annual targets for affordability in new development. However, **the priority assigned to affordable housing must be significantly strengthened** to achieve much more meaningful progress towards achieving these targets. It can also go further to define housing affordability and development targets across a range of income thresholds, and neighbourhoods, across Ottawa.

Housing affordability measures must be designed to target areas of the housing continuum not adequately provided for by the market to meet demand across a range of income thresholds for low to moderate income households.

Current programs such as Action Ottawa, the City's primary program for increasing the supply of low-income affordable housing, bases affordability on 80% of average market rent. This is not sufficiently deep to meet the needs of most families and individuals who find themselves homeless. At the same time, Action Ottawa can be enhanced through more innovative private-public partnerships to better leverage provincial and federal funding.

Councillors play an important leadership role in supporting clear priorities to ensure all neighbourhoods across Ottawa plan for and include a continuum of housing options and supportive services as a part of all new community development.

City leadership can further support the alignment of community planning goals across transit, planning and housing departments, providing the necessary integration to enable better City planning outcomes for all.

Aligning Ottawa's development goals with community planning priorities, as opposed to working on a project by project basis, will result in more accountable planning outcomes for all.

Alliance recommendations include reinvestment in ongoing program and funding streams, as well as in adopting planning and land use priorities as follows.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I – Reinvest in Ongoing Program & Funding Streams:

- a) Pursue federal and provincial funding for new development of mixed-income and mixed-use affordable rental housing for both private and non-profit developers;
- b) Work with the federal and provincial governments to ensure non-profit and co-operative housing providers can maintain and repair the current affordable housing stock;
- c) Allow for greater innovative use of the City's Action Ottawa program to better prioritize new affordable housing development and remove administrative barriers;
- d) Create and protect a dedicated annual capital investment envelope earmarked for new affordable housing development and operational requirements.

II – Adopt Planning & Land Use Priorities in Support of Affordable Housing Development:

- a) Expand the City of Ottawa's definition of affordable housing that meet the needs of low to moderate income households;
- b) Further coordinate efforts between city transit, planning, real estate and housing branches to align development goals;
- c) Make full use of provincial and municipal planning and Inclusionary Zoning policies and tools to define a city-wide strategy for the inclusion of affordable housing;
- d) Identify and make available to non-profit housing developers' contributions such as surplus municipal lands, rebates and tax exemptions;
- e) Fast-track planning approvals and remove other administrative barriers to affordable housing development;
- f) Develop and enforce a rental replacement by-law to ensure Ottawa's affordable housing stock is maintained;
- g) Prioritize mixed-income neighbourhood planning and the inclusion of affordable rental housing in all Transit Oriented Development (TOD) planning targets adjacent to transit hubs and Light Rail stations.

Guiding Principles

Housing First: For communities in Ottawa, the Housing First approach is an important evidence based model helping to move individuals who have experienced homelessness quickly into permanent housing. Housing First will only produce significant impacts if its foundation – the access to housing of choice and accompanying support mechanisms – can be guaranteed, irrespective of the economic context.

The Alliance recognizes that there is a portion of Ottawa’s long-term shelter users that may not be successfully housed independently through the Housing First model.[4] These individuals do well in a supportive housing environment, and it must be ensured they are not left out of the Housing First narrative. Housing First requires considerable capital investment in the appropriate affordable housing stock, along with income and other supports for renter households to fill the current affordability gap. The Alliance further recognizes ending chronic homelessness will require the collaborative efforts of health, social services, corrections and private market landlords, among others, along with provincial and federal governments for the program to be successful.

Service Equity: Ensuring that supports and services are equitably available to Ottawa residents living in urban and rural areas will be of critical importance as Ottawa continues to grow, including through the steady influx of newcomer families making Ottawa their home. Services must also be culturally appropriate and accessible to those living with physical or mental health and mobility issues to be fully inclusive, and must be rooted in a Human Rights approach.

Increase Funding Capacity: Key to ending homelessness is a commitment to increased funding for affordable, social and supportive housing, for emergency shelters and for related supports and services. This may be accomplished through property tax increases, assessment growth or realignment of municipal budgets. A small 1% increase in the property tax base, for example, would generate an additional \$14 million in revenue, costing only \$35 per year for the average homeowner. Increased spending could be dedicated to all of Community and Social Services with a dedicated portion spent on addressing core housing needs, or a budget increase could be directed specifically towards housing.

Responsive Planning: Finally, by moving to align housing and homelessness planning cycles with City Budgets and terms of Council that are flexible, and reviewed yearly, we can begin to address the evolving and emerging needs in our city by means of a responsive, ‘living’ community approach.

Alliance Guiding Principles:

1) **Support a Housing First approach offering access to housing of choice and accompanying supports, recognizing that a significant number of individuals do well in a supportive housing environment.**

2) **Ensure supports and services are: a) equitably available to those living in urban and rural areas; b) culturally appropriate; c) accessible; and d) are rooted in a Human Rights based approach.**

3) **Leverage increased spending on housing and homelessness through a possible 1% increase in property taxes or other means.**

4) **Align housing and homelessness planning cycles with City Budgets and terms of Council that are flexible and reviewed yearly.**

[4] Mental Health Commission of Canada. National Final Report: Cross-Site At Home/Chex Soi Project. 2014. Pg. 19. https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/mhcc_at_home_report_national_cross-site_eng_2_0.pdf

Conclusion

Housing is more than just a roof over one's head. Appropriate and affordable housing makes our city and community a welcoming place to live, work and start a business. It is also important to retaining workers and attracting newcomers to enrich our neighborhoods and drive economic growth.

In a city, such as Ottawa, one of the wealthiest cities in all of Canada, there is no need for homelessness and housing insecurity to be continuing and growing at the current rates. Investments are critical to addressing the ongoing needs. Affordable housing is an important investment in our city, in our communities, and in the people of Ottawa – both economically and socially.

We can make a difference in our city to create a more prosperous, inclusive Ottawa – where everyone has an appropriate and affordable home. This would indeed be an amazing social legacy that Council and all citizens would be proud to champion.

Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa

ALLIANCE MEMBERSHIP: Action-Logement/Action-Housing | Bruce House | Canadian Mental Health Association, Ottawa Branch | Carlington Community Health Centre | Catholic Immigration Centre | Centre 454 | Centre 507 Drop-In | Centre des services communautaires/Vanier Community Service Centre | Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services, University of Ottawa | Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corporation | Centretown Community Health Centre | City of Ottawa, Housing Services Branch | Community Legal Services Ottawa Centre | Cooperative Housing Association Eastern Ontario | Cornerstone Housing for Women/LePilier | Daybreak Non-Profit Housing | Elizabeth Fry Society of Ottawa | Gloucester Housing Corporation | Housing Help | John Howard Society of Ottawa | LiveWorkPlay | Lowertown Community Resource Centre | Minwaashin Lodge/Oshki Kizis Healing Lodge | Montfort Renaissance | Multifaith Housing Initiative | Nepean Housing Corporation | Operation Come Home | Options Bytown Non-Profit Housing Corporation | Ottawa Community Housing Corporation | Ottawa Inner City Health Inc. | Ottawa Inner City Ministries | Ottawa Pastoral Counselling Centre | Ottawa Salus Corporation | PAL Ottawa | Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health | Centre Royal Ottawa Health Care Group | Sandy Hill Community Health Centre | Shepherds of Good Hope | Somerset West Community Health Centre | South-East Ottawa Community Health Centre | St. Joe's Women's Centre | St. Luke's Table | The Ottawa Mission | The Salvation Army Ottawa Booth Centre | The Well/La Source | Tungasuvvingat Inuit | Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health | Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre | Wigwamen Incorporated | YMCA-YWCA, National Capital Region | Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa | Thank you as well to our many individual members!

OUR PARTNERS: Broadening the Base | Cooperative Housing Association Eastern Ontario | Healthy Transit Coalition | Making Voices Count | Ottawa Social Housing Network | Ottawa Supportive Housing Network | Refugee613 | Ottawa Social Housing Registry | Ottawa ACORN | Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation | Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association | A Way Home Canada | Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness | Canadian Housing and Renewal Association | Canadian Observatory on Homelessness | Canada Without Poverty

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Special thanks to the Alliance Board of Directors and Policy Committee, and the support of Alliance members.

Policy Brief available at: endhomelessnessottawa.ca

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