

ALLIANCE TO END  
**HOMELESSNESS**  
OTTAWA

# Redefining Progress on Ending Homelessness

PROVINCIAL POLICY BRIEF



June 2018



[www.endhomelessnessottawa.ca](http://www.endhomelessnessottawa.ca)



@ATEH\_OTT | #WeCanEndIt

# 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 the past year, over 7,530 individuals accessed a shelter in Ottawa, a 5% increase over 2016. Although there was a decrease in the length of stay in the homeless men's sector, families now account for over half of all bed nights used in Ottawa's shelters, a 12.4% increase over 2016. Incredibly, shelter stays among women over 60 increased by over 30% in 2016. Ottawa also saw a 15% rise in the average number of nights youth slept in shelters.

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

This is our opportunity to work together as an Alliance, alongside local partners and governments, to actively advance the long-term goal of ending homelessness. People from all walks of life find themselves homeless for a variety of reasons. Homelessness is complex, and significantly reducing and ending homelessness in our province 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 ending homelessness in Ontario. Investments in prevention approaches have proven to reduce the use and costs associated with provincial social services such as hospital stays, emergency services, child protective, policing, corrections and justice services.[1]

Political leadership in Ontario is essential to reach this goal – leadership, encompassing a province wide vision working across government ministries that prioritizes policy and funding towards a significant decrease in shelter use across Ontario. We applaud the Ontario government's commitments made to date on housing, homelessness, and poverty reduction, and look forward to working with you towards ongoing successes.

Towards this end the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa submits a bold vision to harness existing policies, tools and resources, while investing in prevention-based outcomes, rooted in a human rights approach, and defined by clear timelines and targets to:

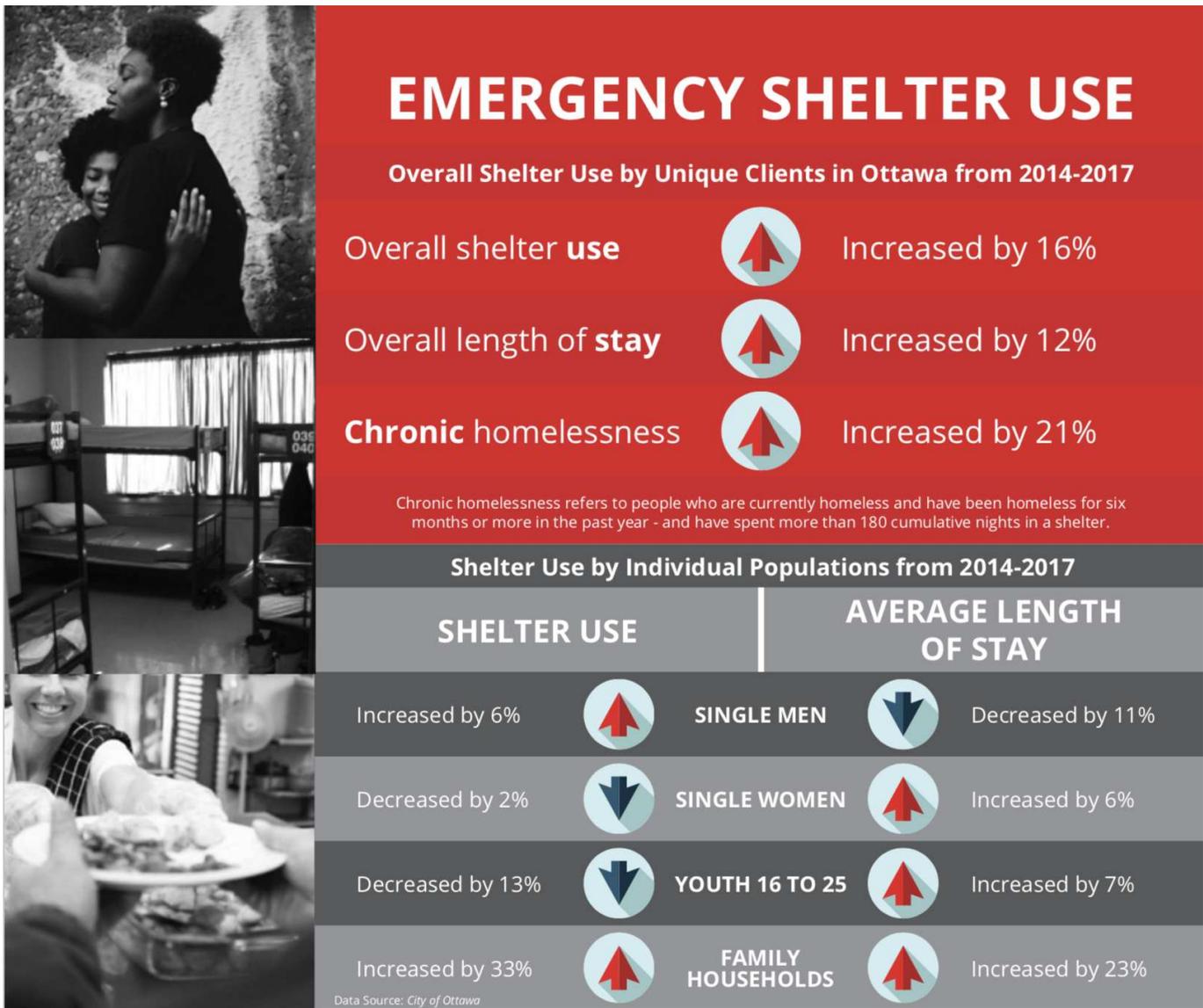
- 1) Prioritize and Invest in the Development of Ontario's Affordable Housing Stock**
- 2) Increase Income Levels for Ontarians Living in Poverty**
- 3) Support Local Efforts to Prevent and End Homelessness**

[1] Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. The State of Homelessness in Canada. 2016. [http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/SOHC16\\_final\\_20Oct2016.pdf](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.



## 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) Prioritize and Invest in the Development of Ontario's Affordable Housing Stock

Affordable housing is critical for the creation of healthy, economically vibrant, safe and livable communities. Non-profit housing is an important component of the housing continuum and has been built over many years by means of public financing and investment. However, as Operating Agreements with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation come to an end, housing providers are facing difficult decisions around affordability, aging infrastructure and maintenance needs. This has been compounded by the limited resources available over the past decade for the development of new affordable housing.

Across Ontario, it is estimated that the non-profit housing sector is facing \$2.6 billion in outstanding capital repair needs. Without continued funding, social housing assets in Ontario communities are at risk.[2] Further estimates suggest that another 6,900 units a year of affordable rental housing are needed to meet Ontario's population needs over the next decade. It is estimated that investments made through the National Housing Strategy will support the creation of approximately one-third of the required development. This is a significant contribution to be sure, though in isolation will leave an annual shortage of rental housing in Ontario, driving down vacancy rates and increasing homelessness.[3]

We urge the Ontario government to invest in programs and incentives that will build the remaining needed units each year. Options include funding supported through revenues from housing related property taxes. For example, Ontario's Land Transfer Tax generated an estimated \$2.8-billion in 2016-17,[4] and the Non-Resident Speculation Tax has reportedly generated \$132.6-million over its first seven months in use.[5] Earmarking revenues from these taxes could significantly increase and preserve housing affordability in Ontario.

In addition, the federal government's National Housing Strategy, an ambitious \$40-billion ten-year plan, signals a landmark opportunity to re-engage in inter-provincial relations in support of provincial housing affordability priorities. The Strategy will be delivered by means of bilateral agreements with provincial and territorial governments to protect and expand the current affordable housing stock and deliver financial assistance to low-income households, and introduces direct funding initiatives such as the National Co-Investment Fund, a \$15.9-billion initiative of direct low-interest financing delivered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, (with provincial contributions that are limited to indirect funding: ie. surplus land, rebates, tax exemptions). It will be essential for the Province to commit to fully cost-sharing these programs to ensure Ontario receives its fair share of the National Housing Strategy funding.

A critical omission in the National Housing Strategy is the Indigenous Housing Strategy, still in development in consultation with Indigenous groups across the country. Given the significant over-representation of Indigenous people among the homeless population, this is a major shortcoming of the strategy. Ontario is developing its own Indigenous Housing Strategy, but without the support of the federal government, it will be difficult to address the pressing needs of Indigenous people who face some of the most challenging obstacles to finding and keeping affordable housing.

[2] ONPHA. Big Problems Need Bold Solutions: An Ambitious Model for Solving Ontario's Most Pressing Housing Needs. 2014.

[3] ONPHA and CHFC Ontario Region. An Affordable Housing Plan for Ontario. 2018.

[4] Ministry of Finance. 2017 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review.

[5] Ministry of Finance. Non-Resident Speculation Tax Collected. 2017.

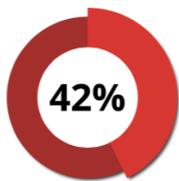
# RECOMMENDATIONS

In prioritizing and investing in the development of Ontario's affordable housing stock, we recommend the province:

- a) Enter and maintain cost-shared agreements with the federal government to leverage the funding opportunities announced in the National Housing Strategy;
- b) Invest beyond the National Housing Strategy to fund the additional affordable housing required across Ontario such as through revenues generated from housing related property taxes, by unlocking provincial surplus lands, and in consulting with municipalities on the development of the necessary planning tools to effectively leverage affordable housing development equitably across all communities;
- c) Continue to invest in the repair, maintenance and operation of existing non-profit and co-op housing, while increasing the variable use and flexibility of funding to municipalities in response to local needs;
- d) Urge the federal government to complete and implement a National Indigenous Housing Strategy.

## RENTAL HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

### Ottawa Rental Household Overspending



42% OF OTTAWA HOUSEHOLDS ARE SPENDING OVER 30% OF THEIR INCOME ON RENT AND UTILITIES



20% OF OTTAWA HOUSEHOLDS ARE SPENDING OVER 50% OF THEIR INCOME ON RENT AND UTILITIES

*"Housing is considered affordable if shelter costs account for less than 30% of before-tax household income."*  
- Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation



## 2) Increase Income Levels for Ontarians Living in Poverty

The struggles of low-income residents who are forced to make impossible decisions between using insufficient income or social assistance benefits to cover rent, utilities, and basic needs such as food, health care and transportation can be alleviated. We applaud the Ontario government's efforts to experiment with a Guaranteed Annual Income, increase the minimum wage, and improve social assistance benefits. These proposed changes will directly impact peoples lives for the better.

However, minimum wage levels and social assistance rates remain dangerously low, and are in jeopardy. For example, current Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program rates mean a single person on OW receives a mere \$721 a month in basic needs and shelter benefits. A single person on ODSP receives a total of \$1,151 a month.

These very low monthly incomes constitute a tremendous challenge for Ontarians on OW and ODSP, who are forced to live in deep poverty. In Ottawa, for example, the current affordable monthly shelter cost for single households at 30% of income is \$384 for OW recipients, and \$489 for OSDSP recipients. The average market rent for a bachelor apartment in Ottawa is \$836. This is unaffordable.

For the first time in thirty years, a new report called 'Income Security: A Roadmap for Change', developed by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, and released in November 2017, signals a major shift in investments in and improvements to programs that affect the lives of low-income people in Ontario.

We need to eliminate the punitive rules that exist in Ontario's social services system. More money in low-income people's pockets is good for local economies, and is more cost effective in savings to other social services.

Across Ontario 14.4% of the population lives on low-income, as do 18.4% of children seventeen and under. In Ottawa West-Nepean those figures are respectively 18.2% of area residents, and 27.6% of children seventeen and under. In Ottawa-Vanier it is 22.5% residents and 33.6% of children.[6]

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Measures in alignment with the Roadmap that could help support increased income levels for Ontario residents living in poverty include [6]:

- a) Immediately implement the Roadmap's recommended Standard Flat Rate, which would collapse the "basic needs" and "shelter" portions of basic benefits into one amount, while still providing for geographical variations in housing and related costs;
- b) Immediately increase rates for all OW and ODSP recipients, in an amount that would make significant progress now toward meeting the Roadmap's "Minimum Income Standard" of the Low-Income Measure (LIM) after tax.

In addition, the Alliance recommends the province:

- c) Implement planned increases to the minimum wage, recognizing the implication for employers and resulting reprisals for workers, in rolling out a comprehensive communications and education strategy to ensure employers understand their responsibilities in terms of employment rights;
- d) Invest in upgrading labour force skills and create meaningful employment for low-income residents;
- e) Complete and assess the outcomes of Ontario's Basic Income Pilot Program, providing evidence-based research as to whether a basic income could be a tool to reduce poverty in Ontario.

The recommended measures would immediately improve the lives of people living in poverty who are the most vulnerable, such as those who live in shelters, transitional housing, long-term care facilities and other institutions, and those who are not housed at all.

[6] Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC). Backgrounder: Fast Facts: Poverty & Social Assistance. July 2018.

[7] We echo the recommendations of ISAC on these changes, and quote extensively from their submission, available at: <http://incomesecurity.org/policy-advocacy/ontario-budget-2018-take-action-on-income-security-passons-a-laction-pour-la-securite-du-revenu/>

### 3) Support Local Efforts to Prevent and End Homelessness

We have begun to see a shift in how communities across Canada are responding to homelessness. More 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'. [8].

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 risk of homelessness for individuals and families.

For any given individual, homelessness is usually the result of the cumulative impact of many factors, rather than a single cause. These factors, and the interplay between them, not only help us to understand what puts people at risk of homelessness, but also points to where our preventative efforts must lie.

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 extreme risk of homelessness that allow for the continued maintenance of 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.[9]

### RECOMMENDATIONS

To be successful, homelessness prevention will require engagement from multiple provincial ministries, such as those responsible for health, emergency services, child protective services, policing, corrections, justice and social services. A focus on a coordinated systems-level of integration, that is evidence-based and rooted in a human rights approach, is further necessary to ensure effective funding, policy and program delivery and evaluation.

Emergency shelters and response services will remain necessary to deal with crisis situations, and will provide crucial support focused on shelter diversion towards long-term, stable, preventative practices that move people quickly into safe, permanent housing, based on a Housing First approach.

In recognition of the need to work across government ministries to address homelessness, the Alliance recommends the province:

- a) Introduce an inter-ministerial approach to addressing the root causes of homelessness;
- b) Implement inter-departmental strategies that address early interventions and prevention approaches to the various pathways into homelessness and emergency responses as required;
- c) Provide funding for supportive housing that coordinates the provision of capital for housing (or housing allowances), with on-going operating funding for related support services.

It will take a concerted community effort to prevent and end homelessness in Ontario, supported by strong political leadership, that recognizes we need to respond sooner to housing loss prevention, and support those in need to stay stably housed in the long-term.

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

# Conclusion

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

In a province such as Ontario, one of the wealthiest provinces in all of Canada, there is no need for homelessness and housing insecurity to continue and grow at the rates at which they are, and investment is critical to addressing the ongoing need.

Affordable, safe, secure housing is an important investment in our cities, in our communities and in the people of Ontario – both economically and socially.

We can make a difference in creating a more prosperous, inclusive Ontario – where everyone has an appropriate, safe and affordable home. This would indeed be an amazing social legacy.

## 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

Copyright 2018 Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa

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

Policy Brief available at: [endhomelessnessottawa.ca](http://endhomelessnessottawa.ca)

Follow the Alliance: @ATEH\_OTT | #WeCanEndIt



**ALLIANCE TO END  
HOMELESSNESS**  
OTTAWA