

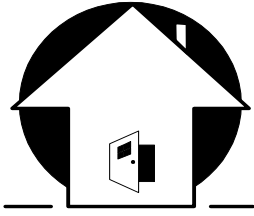
The Alliance to End Homelessness

Homeless in Ottawa

Policies and Funding to House and Help Ontario's Homeless Citizens

Submission to the
Ontario Legislature's Standing Committee on Finance
Pre-Budget Consultations
January 2005

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The Alliance to End Homelessness is an effective coalition of community stakeholders committed to eliminating homelessness in Canada's fourth largest city, Ottawa. Our coalition represents a broad cross section of 72 organizational members and funders who provide services and shelter to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Ottawa.

The Alliance has developed a model of collaboration that strengthens a cost effective delivery of service, discouraging duplication and filling in gaps. Our members provide a continuum of service beginning with prevention of housing loss through to palliative care for the City's most vulnerable homeless citizens.

The Alliance also has a Research and Evaluation Working Group which facilitates research into homelessness in Ottawa and at other sites across Canada and tracks emerging homelessness issues. This group transfers research knowledge to the members of the Alliance to End Homelessness and the broader community by making research reports available on the web and at meetings, conferences and forums. Indeed, we held **A Community Forum on Homelessness: Linking Ottawa Research with Action and Policy** for 170 people involved in homelessness in Ottawa to honour of National Housing Day on November 22, 2004.

The Alliance sees the need for more affordable housing and for the varying kinds of support needed for people to keep housing to prevent becoming homeless in the first place, to stay in housing once they have found it and to use that base to move ahead with personal and financial goals and dreams.

After nine years of work in Ottawa, the Alliance appreciates the opportunity to share with Standing Committee on Finance our recommendations. The Alliance to End Homelessness recognizes that

the challenges confronting homeless people and those at risk of homelessness require long-term public policy commitments. On a daily basis, we see the continuing need for a renewed and strengthened focus on helping communities prevent and reduce homelessness.

Section 2. The Province is on the right track

We are pleased the Province is recognizing the need for a broad approach to meeting the housing needs of low-income citizens.

Housing Loss Prevention Programs, Drop-in Programs

The Province is on the right track helping Ottawa offer assistance with housing loss prevention programs, drop-in programs and other services available during the day. Increasing funding for such programs is the most effective way to help to stop the flow of people who may eventually need to use a shelter.

Social Housing, Affordable Housing

We encourage the Province to fully match Federal funds made available for affordable, accessible and appropriate housing and to work toward a significant increase in social housing funding for cities.

In Ontario, funding under the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Affordable Housing Program was to result in 14,320 units, but only 3,031 units have been funded (2,671 units in 2004). We applaud the government for notable shift in the numbers of units being funded in this past year and recognize that the smart and creative efforts of community-based housing providers in our city can help solve the affordable housing crisis. In addition to the new homes, the AHP has generated jobs, significant community benefits and also taxes at the federal, provincial and municipal levels.

Unfortunately, less than half the new units in Ontario are affordable to low-income households even though the Affordable Housing Framework Agreement specifically stipulates: *"This initiative needs to create affordable housing for low to moderate income households."*

As well, Ontario has not matched federal dollars and relies on municipal and third parties despite promise of Ontario housing minister David Caplan on November 18, 2003: *"Our commitment is to match federal support to create some 20,000 new affordable housing units."*

The Alliance welcomes a rent supplement program as part of a Provincial social housing strategy. The rent supplements should be tied to a new social supply program. The current Affordable Housing Program offers only capital subsidies and no rent-geared-to-income assistance. In order to complete the program, rent supplements should be offered. But they must run for a minimum of 20 years, with the provision for renewal.

Minimum Wage and OW/ODSP

We applaud the recent increase in minimum wage and OW and ODSP, but recognize that further increases are needed to help people keep their homes. The lack of affordable housing is the key factor in family homelessness and the government of Ontario can help to ease family homelessness

by tying the minimum wage to cost of living increases and increasing the shelter portion of OW payments. We call for shelter allowances indexed to the CMHC average rents in each specific municipality.

Tenant Protection Act

At the same time, we urge that the Province recognize the great need for sufficient low-income rental accommodation in the private market with improvements to the Tenant Protection Act. People who are evicted are at immediate risk of becoming homeless. That risk will be dramatically reduced with the end of vacancy decontrol, the permanent removal of the extra 2% base in the annual rent increase guideline, and changes to the default system so that it no longer leads to immediate evictions.

The current system has resulted in hardship for renters but not, unfortunately, in an increase in rental housing development. Three recommendations in particular will immediately bring relief in the affordable rental market: 1. the end of vacancy decontrol; 2. the permanent removal of the extra 2% base in the annual rent increase guideline; and 3. changes to the default system so that they no longer lead to immediate evictions. Eviction should only be used as a last resort. It is a traumatic experience for adults and children alike and creates even greater financial and emotional hardship as people frantically search for new accommodation.

Provincial Supports for those in Supportive Housing

The Alliance is finding that Ottawa needs increased supports for people in supportive and transitional housing. Here in Ottawa, we have put emphasis on using federal SCPI funds for bricks and mortar, but what is missing are sufficient ongoing Provincial supports and services that are needed to accommodate homeless persons with a variety of special needs - addictions, mental illness, history of abuse etc.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services has the infrastructure for supports in place as does the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care for mental health and addictions supports, but we urge you to consider an increase of at least 3% this next year. We also commend the Province for its recognition of the importance of local flexibility in the consolidation the five MCSS funding streams for homelessness.

Section 3. Who Are the Homeless in Ottawa?

The Ottawa Panel Study

We are very fortunate in Ottawa to have detailed information and research done here in our own community. The Ottawa Panel Study was done late 2002 and early 2003 with homeless people in the City of Ottawa. We learned a great deal about homeless individuals in the Ottawa area where, on any one night, there may be as many as 1000 people staying in emergency shelters.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 416 homeless people in Ottawa's emergency shelters and drop-in centres:

- 88 Single Men
- 85 Single Women
- 79 Male Youth
- 81 Female Youth
- 83 Adults in Families

The Panel Study investigated diversity among the homeless population in Ottawa looking for implications for developing effective housing policies and programs.

This study is the first longitudinal study of its kind in Canada to examine the pathways out of homelessness by following persons who are homeless over time. There is recognition among policy-makers that the homeless population is characterized by diversity requiring a wide variety of responses based on specific needs. This study is part of ongoing collaborative research efforts in Ottawa to inform policy and program development.

The recent analysis of the health status of the homeless citizens in this Ottawa study may come as a surprise to some. The analysis looked at the role played by physical and mental health status, including use of alcohol and or drugs, presence of chronic health conditions, utilization of health services, and childhood stressors?

Previous research in the United States has attempted to differentiate the homeless population into subgroups according to contributing factors to and consequences of homelessness. This research builds on this line of research by identifying health-related characteristics of different subgroups making up the homeless population in a Canadian city.

Results show that there are three distinct clusters or groups in these 416 people are homeless, characterized by different levels of severity of health problems:

- 232 people (56%) form a predominantly “Economically Disadvantaged” group of individuals who have significantly higher levels of health than the other two groups.**
- 103 people (25%) are in another group with “Substance Abuse Problems” being prominent.**
- 80 people (19%) are in a third group presenting with the most severe “Health Problems” that include chronic health conditions, physical health problems, and mental health difficulties.**

These findings challenge the way some people in the community have viewed the nature of homelessness in our city in the last decade. The findings suggest:

- That social policies addressing poverty and its negative effects on housing stability of those who are economically disadvantaged will have a significant impact on reducing the size of the homeless population.
- For this “economically disadvantaged” subgroup of individuals and families, social policies targeting poverty are needed to address homelessness, including:
 - Social housing
 - Rent subsidies and rent supplements
 - Increased income support.
- For the other two subgroups faced with substance abuse problems and health problems, the development of programs that combine housing and support are indicated such as:
 - Supported housing (portable intensive supports focusing on finding and maintaining housing;
 - Supportive housing; and
 - Transitional housing especially for persons with severe addictions and minimal independent living experience.

Lead Researchers:	Tim Aubry, Fran Klodawsky, Daniel Coulombe & Lara Mills
Study Partners:	University of Ottawa (Centre for Research on Community Services, Institute of Population Health) Carleton University St. Paul University City of Ottawa, Housing Branch and Alliance to End Homelessness
Funding:	Social Science Humanities Research Council, Homelessness and Diversity Issues in Canada and National Homelessness Initiative, Supporting Communities Partnerships Initiative (SCPI) through the City of Ottawa, Housing Branch

Section 4. Conditions for Homeless People in Ottawa

Three Levels of Government Working Together:

There is much to be proud of here in Ottawa. Working collaboratively with the community, in spite of funding challenges, Alliance partners have developed many effective and creative programs and services to meet the needs of those who are homeless. With the Province’s help we are, in effect, “managing homelessness”. We need to focus on ending it.

The Province and the City:

Over \$16 million per year for services for homeless individuals or those at risk of becoming homeless funded by Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) delivered by the City.

Federal Funding and the City: Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative (SCPI)

City managed one time Federal Funds for Homelessness

- **2001-2003 – \$ 13.6 million** with \$ 9.5 million for support services and \$4.1 million for capital projects (supportive and transitional housing, improvements to shelters). *
- **2004- 2006 – \$ 15 million** with \$4.5 million for support services and \$10.5 million for capital projects. *

Social Housing

Who is on Ottawa’s Social Housing Waiting List?	
5,000 +	Families
4000	Single individuals under 60 years of age
1,500	Seniors

- **11,500 families are on the waiting list for 5 to 10 years**
- 25,000 rent-geared to income units now (approx.)
- **The City of Ottawa as the provincially legislated service manager**, gives priority to absolutely homeless (residing in shelters or on the street) and to other vulnerable populations

- 58 housing providers, including OCHC, accessed through the Ottawa Social Housing Registry.
- \$180 million – total operating cost
- \$60 million – City’s portion
- \$30 million – Federal portion
- Remaining portion is rent income from tenants.
- **3,000 rent subsidies in a rent supplement program**

Supportive Housing

The City of Ottawa now **has 500 units of supportive housing** for people who cannot live independently in the community.

About 2000 individuals are on the waiting list to get in.

Affordable Housing Development in Ottawa

Within the Action Ottawa Program, the City of Ottawa provides incentives and capital investment to reduce the cost of development to make rents affordable.

Although, the pace is picking up, it is short of the 500 new units a year that we believe is required to reduce the waiting list for social housing.

Affordable Housing Development through the Action Ottawa Program

Year	# Units	City Funds*	Federal/ Provincial	Total
2002	39	\$ 1.9 million	None	\$ 1.9 million
2003	329	\$ 3.8 million	\$ 8.1 million	\$ 11.9 million
2004**	220	\$ 7.3 million	\$ 5.94 million	\$ 13.24 million
Total	588	\$ 13.0 million	\$ 14.04 million	\$ 27.04 million

* Additional incentives were provided by the City of Ottawa to reduce the cost of development to make rents affordable.

** These funds are budgeted but not yet allocated.

Emergency Shelters The per diem of \$39.15 is cost shared: 80% Provincial – 20% City

Shelters for Single People who are Homeless

- Cornerstone/Le Pilier Women’s Shelter, for homeless women, aged 18-65
- The Mission for homeless men
- Salvation Army Booth Centre for adult and young men
- Shepherds of Good Hope for men and women
- Young Women's Shelter, Youth Services Bureau, (12-20 years).

Shelters for Families Who are Homeless

- Carling Family Shelter, City of Ottawa,
- Forward Family Shelter, City of Ottawa,
- Oshki Kizis Lodge, Aboriginal Women's Support Centre for aboriginal women with children, single adult and young women.
- Reception House, Catholic Immigration Centre,
- Emergency Housing, YMCA-YWCA, for homeless families, women, youth and men.

The Salvation Army Outreach Van patrols the street every night to offer people a ride to a shelter and, if not, to ensure they are safe.

Ottawa turns no one away.

In 2004, between 700 and 1,000 people per night needed to use an Ottawa Shelter.*

- **4,845 single men**
- **1,221 single women**
- **509 youth**
- **631 families with 1092 children**

* HIFIS 2004 data for the City of Ottawa

Out of the elements during the day

There is a network of day programs or drop in centres, operated by faith and non-profit groups with funding from the City. They provide people who are either homeless or at-risk of homelessness with a base to make phone calls and contact other agencies as well as with food and other support.

There are at least seven such programs serving adults throughout the city. In addition, centres catering either to First Nations and Youth offer drop in programs. **In all, these programs provide 375,000 services to individuals over the course of a year.**

People at Risk of Homelessness

The Average Monthly Rents in the Ottawa Area, October 2004

Unit Size	2004 Average Monthly Rent	2003 Average Monthly Rent
Bachelor	\$ 623	\$ 627
One bedroom	\$ 771	\$ 768
Two bedroom	\$ 940	\$ 932
Three or more bedrooms	\$ 1,156	\$ 1,168

Higher vacancies have not meant lower rents.

The cost of renting in Ottawa has not gone down – according to *Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation* – even though the vacancy rate has increased in Ottawa to 3.9% in October 2004, from 0.2% in 2000.

As the cost of housing a family rises, less money is available for other necessities such as food. The use of food banks is an indication of economic stress in the community that increases vulnerability to homelessness. Ottawa Food Bank serves almost 40,000 of people each month *and 40% of them are children.*

Housing Loss Prevention

The Alliance believes it is better to prevent a housing problem from occurring than to try and fix it afterwards. Restoring homeless families and individuals to stable housing is difficult and time consuming. Many families and individuals in our society live one or two paychecks from financial disaster.

Some people have assets to dispose of or expenses they can trim to tide them over the loss of a regular paycheck. For them reduced income, while serious, can be accommodated, at least in the short run.

People with modest or low incomes, have little choice. When an unexpected expense arises they cannot resort to credit or other assistance. The City of Ottawa has a Housing Loss Prevention Program, funded by provincial and federal programs to assist tenants to maintain their housing by helping to resolve issues with the landlords, between tenants and by counseling tenants themselves. Ongoing and stable funding for housing loss prevention makes good economic sense in Ontario.

Section 5. Clearly, the Homelessness Crisis is Still with Us

1. Too many people have inadequate incomes.
2. We have a serious shortage of affordable, accessible and appropriate housing for Ontario's citizens living on low incomes.
3. Challenging health problems require adequate housing and supports.

Recommendations for the 2005 Ontario Budget

Our recommendations build on our own experience helping homeless people and on the Provincial government's past successes. People who are now homeless and those who are at risk of homelessness are counting on this budget to bring about significant improvements and changes. **The Alliance to End Homelessness recognizes that "managing homelessness" is not the best solution, that prevention is possible and that a shelter is not a home.**

Therefore, we have the following recommendations:

1. Increase funding for programs such as housing loss prevention programs, drop-in programs and other services available during the day as the most effective way to help to stop the flow of people who may eventually need to use a shelter.
2. Tie the minimum wage to increases in the cost of living in each municipality and index the Shelter Allowance portion on OW and ODSP to the CMHC average rents in each specific municipality as an immediate deterrent to family and individual homelessness.
3. Substantially increase the number of new units funded under the Affordable Housing Framework, especially for those on the lowest incomes; and fully match Federal funds made available for affordable, accessible and appropriate housing.
4. Work toward a significant increase in social housing funding for cities.
5. Increase Provincial supports and services needed to accommodate homeless persons with a variety of special needs - addictions, mental illness, history of abuse etc. through infrastructures in the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care.
6. Change the Tenant Protection Act to end vacancy decontrol, permanently remove the extra 2% base in the annual rent increase guideline, and end immediate evictions in the default system.
7. Immediately commit to the government's election promise of 20,000 new affordable homes, 6,600 new supportive units, 35,000 housing allowances as the first step towards a comprehensive provincial housing and homelessness strategy.

Respectfully submitted by Lynne Browne, Coordinator, on behalf of the Steering Committee for the Alliance to End Homelessness in Ottawa.