

# Experiencing Homelessness

## The First Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa, 2005

### The Current Situation\*

Homelessness Indicators	2004
Number of individuals who stayed in a shelter	8,664
Number of times shelter beds were used	323,612
Length of stay in emergency shelters (days)	
Single men	40
Single women	31
Youth	23
Families	45
Housing Indicators	
Number of social housing units	22,400
Number on the social housing waiting list	10,500
Number of rent supplements	3,000
Number of supportive housing units	500
Rental vacancy rate	3.9%
Average rent for a 2-bedroom apartment	\$940
Income Indicators	
Social Assistance for a single person	\$536
Average monthly # of Ontario Works cases	17,879
Minimum wage	\$7.45
Cost of living increase	1.8%

\* Sources provided on p. 15

### What is homelessness?

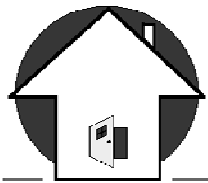
- Living on the street.
- Staying overnight in temporary shelters.
- Staying in places not meant for human habitation.
- Moving continuously among temporary housing arrangements provided by strangers, friends or family (“couch surfing”).

### Who is “at risk of homelessness”?

Families and individuals can lose their housing for any number of reasons: fleeing abuse, losing a job, or having an income too low to stay in suitable housing.

Some are at risk because of mental illness, or substance use problems, or lack the life skills or ability to live on their own.

**8,664 people were homeless and stayed in a shelter at some point in 2004.**



This is the first Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa. Report Cards measure progress over time or rate progress against defined criteria. Since this is Ottawa’s first Report Card, it will present a profile of homelessness in the City and introduce many organizations that work to reduce the impact of homelessness here. Future progress or lack of progress in Ottawa will be measured using the indicators in the table above.

The Alliance to End Homelessness in Ottawa is a coalition of community stakeholders committed to working collaboratively to eliminate homelessness by gaining a better understanding of homelessness and developing and implementing strategies to end it. The Alliance motto is “A home for every citizen of Ottawa”. With support from the United Way/Centraide Ottawa, the **Research and Evaluation Working Group** of the Alliance has produced this first report card to inform and engage the community.

For more information about the Report Card or the Alliance, please call (613) 241-7913 ext. 205 or contact: [lbrowne@ysb.on.ca](mailto:lbrowne@ysb.on.ca). PDF versions of the Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa are available in English and French at [www.unitedwayottawa.ca](http://www.unitedwayottawa.ca).

# Why Does Homelessness Exist in Ottawa?

*"There is not a full appreciation of the diversity of the homeless population and the varied reasons behind homelessness.*

*The public still perceives the population as being mostly middle-aged men with mental health problems and addictions".*

Dr. Tim Aubry  
Researcher, Centre for Research on  
Community Services, University of Ottawa



## Homelessness can occur for any number of reasons

The lack of adequate job opportunities and the lack of affordable housing are major contributors to homelessness. They make it more difficult for people with lower paying jobs or unstable employment to get and keep stable and suitable housing.

Families or individuals may be at risk of becoming homeless when they:

- have incomes too low to access and retain suitable and appropriate housing;
- become unemployed;
- experience discrimination by landlords or neighbours;
- have difficulties with their neighbours or landlord;
- do not know or understand their housing rights;
- experience abuse or violence;
- suffer from physical or mental health conditions;
- face challenges with substance use problems;
- have conditions such as a physical or developmental disability or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder;
- have difficulty managing money; or
- have language barriers or literacy problems.

## Homelessness is not forever

- It is usually a once in a lifetime experience due to job loss or illness; with timely help, people often can quickly get back on track.
- Sometimes it lasts longer or may involve several episodes.
- Disabilities, mental illness, substance use problems, or lack of life skills may contribute to longer periods of homelessness.
- Due to these individual circumstances, there is no single guaranteed way to assist every person who is homeless to find stable housing. Assistance must be targeted to individual needs with the emphasis on prevention and the provision of supports.

The Well offers a drop-in day program for women and women with children

# The Panel Study on Homelessness in Ottawa

## The surprising faces of homelessness

We have learned a great deal about homeless individuals in the Ottawa area. On any one night, there may be close to 1000 people staying in emergency shelters in this city.

In 2002 and 2003, 416 people who were homeless in Ottawa were interviewed as part of a longitudinal study undertaken by the Centre for Research on Community Services at the University of Ottawa, Carleton University and Saint Paul University.

People interviewed included youth, single adults and adults in families. In this study —

- 71% of adults in families were single mothers.
- 63% of families were not born in Canada.
- 17% of those interviewed identified themselves as being of Aboriginal descent, a much larger percentage compared to their 1% representation in the general Ottawa population.
- 33% of female youth and 10% of male youth were still attending school.
- 31% of study participants were homeless upon moving to Ottawa.
- 64% had experienced multiple periods of homelessness.
- 66% of participants had moved several times over the past three years.
- 11% of the participants in this study were working for pay.

## Reasons for their homelessness

- In the Panel Study, the most commonly cited immediate reasons for homelessness were eviction, inability to pay the rent, and conflict with family, spouse, partner, or roommates.
- A minority of those interviewed reported mental health problems, physical health problems, or alcohol use as contributing to their homelessness.
  - Participants reported a higher prevalence of chronic physical health conditions such as respiratory conditions, arthritis or rheumatism, back problems, and ulcers compared to the general population.
  - Study participants also reported a lower level of mental health compared to the general population.
  - A minority of participants reported problems with drug use and problems with alcohol use.

## Diversity requires different responses

Analyses of Panel Study participants on health status and reasons for homelessness measures revealed three distinct groups of individuals:

- An “economically disadvantaged” majority group (56%) who report higher levels of physical and mental health and lower levels of substance abuse.
- A “substance abuse” group (25%) who report higher levels of substance use problems as well as higher levels of health care utilization.
- A “health problems” group (19%) who report lower levels of physical health and higher levels of mental health problems as well as a greater number of chronic health conditions.

For the “economically disadvantaged” group, social policies targeting poverty are needed to enable individuals and families to acquire stable housing.

For the “substance abuse” group and “health problems” group, social policies and programs that combine housing and support assisting individuals with problem areas are needed.

### Next Phase

The Panel Study is currently conducting follow-up interviews with study participants two years after the initial interview to determine the pathways that help people combat homelessness.

... *social policies targeting poverty are needed* ...

# Risk Factors That Can Lead to Homelessness

*"It affects everybody.*

*Anyone can become homeless for a variety of reasons (financial, family related, illness etc.)."*

Terrie Meehan  
On the waiting list for affordable and accessible housing.

**65,620 households in Ottawa are paying 30% or more of their income for shelter.**

- Extra challenges face youth, women and newcomers working in the retail or hospitality sectors where they work an average number of 26 hours per week.
- Renters represented 40% of all Ottawa households. However, renters comprised 67% (43,930) of households spending 30% or more on shelter.
- Household income is the main factor affecting whether or not a household can afford their housing.

## Affordability is a major issue in the Ottawa area

According to the most recently available census data (2001), 65,620 households were paying 30% or more of their income for shelter in Ottawa

According to nationally accepted housing standards, households should be able to access housing that meets their needs for less than 30% of their income. That would leave sufficient income to cover food, transportation, clothing, and other basic necessities.

Renting households have significantly lower incomes than those who own their own home. The average household income of owners was \$95,635 in 2001 compared to \$44,496 for renters.

As rents rise relative to income, households have to make adjustments. Some may attempt to remain housed by devoting an increasingly higher percentage of their income to housing at the cost of other necessities.

## Ottawa is not "fat cat city" for all

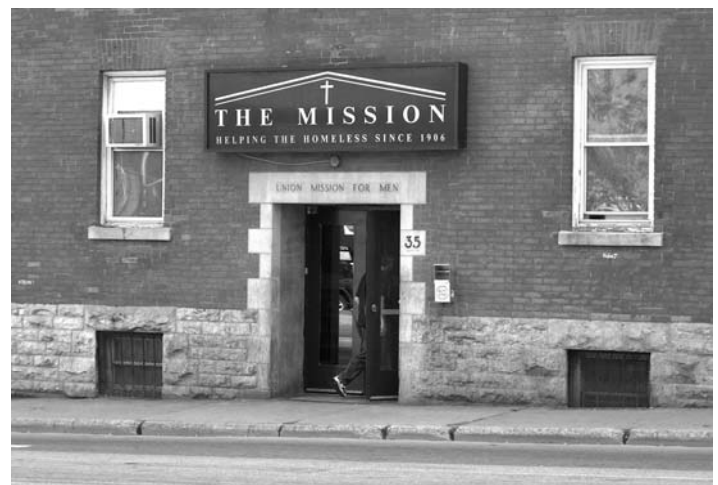
Ottawa is known as being one of the more prosperous cities in the country with a high average household income, many high paying jobs, and a stable local economy due to the presence of the federal government.

However, high paying jobs are out of reach for a segment of the population. The unemployment rate in Ottawa is similar to the national average of approximately 7% or 35,000 persons.

A strong local economy presents a particular challenge for unemployed people. They face a higher cost of living inflated by the relatively high income earned by others in the city.

Access to higher paying jobs in Ottawa is especially difficult for newcomers to Canada, people with disabilities, and those without a university education.

The Mission responds to those in need with food, clothing and shelter



# Paycheque to Paycheque

## Working at minimum wage means paying a significant percentage of your income for housing

An individual working 40 hours per week at minimum wage would have to pay 50% of their gross salary for an average bachelor unit.

In addition, many people working for minimum wage are unable to find full time work. On average, the number of hours per week worked in the retail and hospitality sectors is 26.

Two people with full time, minimum wage jobs could afford a one-bedroom apartment using 30% of their combined income.

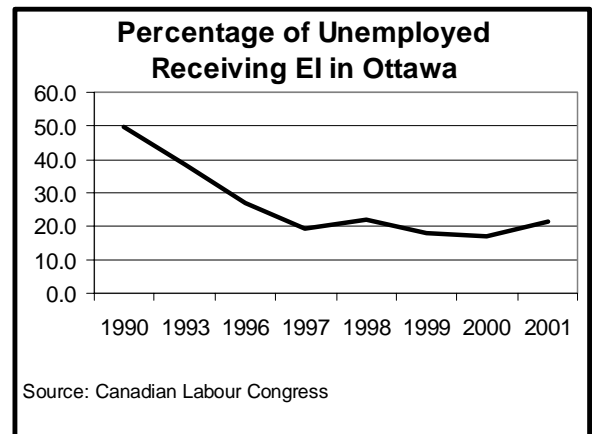
*However*, if they have a child (or other dependents) and require a second bedroom, it will cost them an extra 8% of their combined income, in addition to the costs of caring for that other person.

## A few weeks of unemployment can become a crisis

The number of unemployed people eligible for income support from the Employment Insurance (EI) program has declined.

A study by the Canadian Labour Congress showed that in 2001, 22% of unemployed people in Ottawa received EI benefits, down from 50% in 1990.

Over time, fewer and fewer people in Ottawa have been able to rely on help from EI while they look for new work.



## Low-income households

Low income “cut-offs” refer to the income level below which households spend more than 50 percent of their income on food, shelter and clothing. The “cut-offs” are based on household and community size.

There were 23,985 families in Ottawa living on low incomes in 2001.

**While this number is down from 28,405 families in 1996, it is still a significant challenge for 11% of Ottawa’s families.**

Low Income Cut-offs Ottawa, 2001	
1 person	\$18,371
2 people	\$22,964
3 people	\$28,560
4 people	\$34,572
5 people	\$38,646
6 people	\$42,719
7 people	\$46,793
<b>23,985 families were living on low income in 2001</b>	

*... individual factors such as mental illness or a disability often “seal the deal”*

# Finding and Paying for a Place to Call Home

## Higher vacancy rates do not mean lower rents

The cost of renting in Ottawa has not decreased over the past five years – according to Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation – even though the vacancy rate increased to 3.9% in October 2004 from 0.2% in 2000.

### Average Monthly Rents in the Ottawa Area

Unit Size	Average Monthly Rent 2004	Average Monthly Rent 2003	Average Monthly Rent 2000
Bachelor	\$623	\$627	\$573
One Bedroom	\$771	\$768	\$723
Two Bedrooms	\$940	\$932	\$877
Three or More	\$1,156	\$1,168	\$1,056

## Pay the rent or feed the kids?

As the cost of housing relative to income rises for low income earners, less money is available for other necessities such as food. The use of food banks reflects the fact that many households are facing significant economic problems and are thus vulnerable to homelessness.

Every day, nine tons of food is shipped from the central warehouse of the Ottawa Food Bank to 103 agencies who distribute food in the city.

The Ottawa Food Bank provides food that would serve 40,000 people each month. *40% of Food Bank clients are children.*

## What it Takes to Pay for a Place to Call Home

Accommodation		Income Sources for One Adult*				
Unit Size	Average cost in Ottawa, October 2004 (monthly)	E.I. income from \$30,000 salary (monthly)	Senior on average CPP, OAS & GIS (monthly)	Minimum Wage** @ 40 hours/ week (monthly)	Ontario Works *** (OW) (monthly)	Ontario Disability Support *** (ODSP) (monthly)
Room	\$450	\$1,375	\$818	\$1,291	\$536	\$959
Bachelor	\$623	\$1,375	\$818	\$1,291	\$536	\$959
1 Bedroom	\$771	\$1,375	\$818	\$1,291	\$987 (1 parent, 1 child)	\$1,468 (1 parent, 1 child)
2 Bedroom	\$940	\$1,375	\$1,687 (two seniors)	\$1,291	\$1,215 (1 parent, 2 children)	\$1,825 (1 parent, 2 children)

\* One adult's income except as noted. \*\* Minimum wage rate as of February 1, 2005 \*\*\* OW/ODSP rate effective March 2005

# OW and ODSP Have Let People Down

## OW/ODSP rates do not begin to cover private market shelter costs

Ontario Works (OW) is the Ontario program (formerly known as “welfare” or social assistance) that provides income supports for individuals and families without any other source of income. In 2004, the average monthly number of OW cases in Ottawa was 17,879.

The Ontario Disability Support Plan (ODSP) provides a continuing income source for people living with a disability. The OW/ODSP rates vary by family size. In 2004, the average monthly number of ODSP cases in Ottawa was 17,033.

If two members of a family live on one person’s OW benefits, average one bedroom rental units require 77% of the total benefits.

The percentage of total benefits required to pay for rental accommodations is less for ODSP recipients but still above 50% of the total benefits.

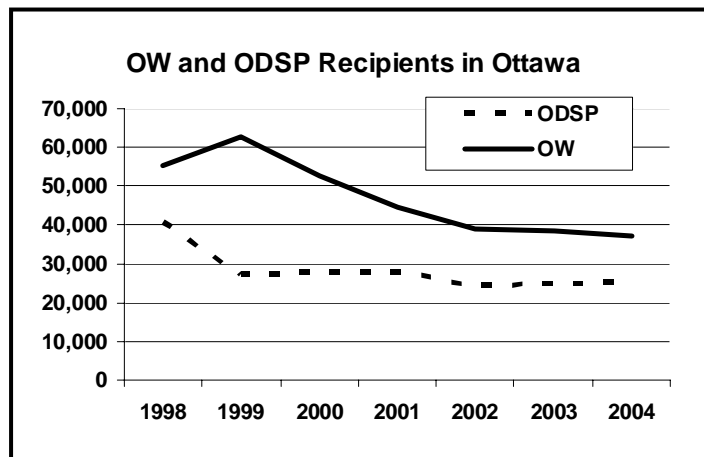
The table to the left shows the benefits under OW/ODSP compared to housing costs in the Ottawa area.

Cornerstone provides emergency shelter and support to homeless women.



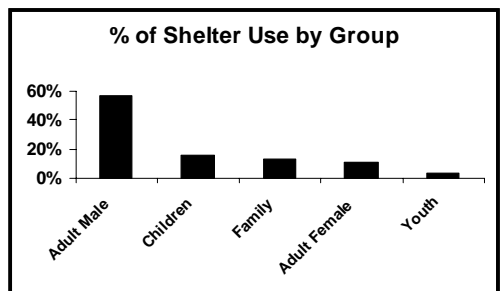
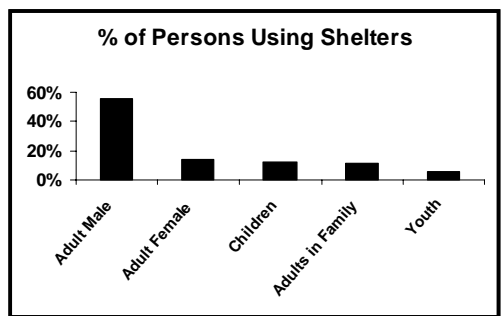
## OW/ODSP benefits were designed as a safety net

- Meant to provide basic necessities, they are now too low to allow many recipients to afford private market housing.
- Although OW/ODSP benefits will be increased slightly by 3% in 2005, they had not been adjusted in the past ten years after being cut back 21% in 1995.
- In Ontario as a whole, the number of social assistance recipients has declined by more than 50% since the peak in 1995.
- The “Social Assistance in the New Economy” project (University of Toronto) has characterized “welfare reform” as making assistance more difficult to get while leaving former recipients to struggle with marginal jobs that provide no benefits or security. The graph below demonstrates this situation in Ottawa.



The rent for an average bachelor unit is 116% of the total monthly benefit paid under Ontario Works to a single person.

# What We're Doing Now to Help in Ottawa



## Ottawa is meeting the need for emergency shelter

Ottawa provides emergency shelter to all eligible people who are homeless and seek refuge each night.

The City of Ottawa's Housing Branch directly operates two emergency shelters for families and administers the municipal and provincial funds to subsidize the shelter services provided by non-profit agencies.

## Shelter use in 2004

There were 8,664 people who were homeless and staying in a shelter at some point in 2004\*.

- 4,845 single men
- 1,221 single women
- 509 youth
- 631 different families with 1,092 children and 997 adults (adults include parents and children over 18 years).

In 2004, an average of 932 people per night needed to use an emergency shelter in Ottawa.

### Average length of stay

- Single men – 40 days
- Single women – 31 days
- Youth – 23 days
- Families with children – 45 days

\* Source: 2004 City of Ottawa Homeless Individual and Families Information System

Families stayed in emergency shelters longer than individuals. This reflects the greater difficulty families have in accessing suitable, affordable accommodations in Ottawa.

Average time spent in shelters rose from 1998 to 2001 but more recently has declined slightly.

- Shelters for singles provide meals and have staff on duty to help find housing and provide other support.
- Family shelters are available 24 hours a day. Families purchase and prepare their own meals.

## Helping in Ottawa

### Shelters for single people who are homeless

- Cornerstone/Le Pillier Women's Shelter, for homeless women
- The Mission for adult 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

### Shelters for families who are homeless

- City of Ottawa Emergency Family Shelters
- Oshki Kizis Lodge, Aboriginal Women's Support Centre for aboriginal women with children, single adult and young women.
- Reception House, Catholic Immigration Centre, for newcomers to Canada
- When all regular shelter beds are occupied, the City offers shelter at the YMCA-YWCA and in motel rooms.

### 964 shelter beds in Ottawa

- 510 for single men
- 108 for single women
- 36 for youth
- 260 for families
- 25 for mixed population
- 25 for overflow
- More overflow shelter spaces are made available as needed

Each emergency shelter in Ottawa has a housing support worker to assist people in finding permanent housing.

In addition, there are 64 beds for victims of family violence.



A room at The Mission

# Homeless All Day Long

## Getting out of the elements during the day

A network of day programs or drop-in centres is operated by faith and non-profit groups with funding from the City of Ottawa.

They provide people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness with food and other supports, as well as a base to make phone calls and contact other agencies.

There are at least seven such programs throughout the city serving adults. In addition, centres specifically for Aboriginals and Youth offer drop-in programs.

In all, these programs provide 375,000 services to individuals over the course of a year.

**The Salvation Army outreach van patrols the downtown streets seven days a week, noon to 4 a.m., to ensure people are safe, and offers a ride to a shelter to those who are interested.**



## Not all will come in from the cold

Despite the availability of emergency shelter, for a number of reasons some people choose to stay outside for some or all of the nights they are homeless.

- They may not wish to be separated from a partner of the opposite sex or from a pet.
- Some cannot find a shelter to meet their needs.
- Some object to shelter rules or policies.
- Some have concerns about living conditions in shelters, such as being in proximity to many other people.

## Street Needs Assessment

A 2002 study conducted by the Centre for Research on Community Services at the University of Ottawa found 98 persons who were homeless and not using shelters during a two week period in January and February 2002.

Interviews with 80 people found that they had stayed overnight in different locations over the two months prior to the interview:

- 71% had stayed with family and friends;
- 71% had stayed in an emergency shelter; and
- 45% were living on the street.

## Helping in Ottawa

**The Help for the Homeless Phone Line – 580-2626**  
(City of Ottawa)

## Daily Drop-In Centres

- Centre 454
- Centre 507
- Centre Espoir Sophie
- Operation Go Home
- Shepherds of Good Hope
- St. Luke's Lunch Club
- St. Joe's Women's Centre
- The Well
- Downtown Services and Drop-in, Youth Service Bureau

*"It is not just the guy panning on the corner, in fact that's a small part of it."*

Paul Weber,  
Homeless Individuals & Families  
Information System  
National Secretariat on Homelessness

*"Most people who are homeless wish to have stable appropriate housing that offers a sense of community."*

*People do not understand that housing isn't enough, a shelter with community is better than a home in isolation."*

Diane Morrison,  
Executive Director, The Mission

*Day programs offer support, food and a place to make phone calls*

# Shelter Is the First But Not the Only Need

## Health is often an issue

### Physical health

People who suffer long periods of homelessness often have health problems. In Ottawa, the Inner City Health, Youth Services Bureau and the Community Health Centres work to meet the health needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Between June 2002 and January 2003, a Saint Paul University and University of Ottawa study found 25 deaths among the homeless population, all the result of physical illnesses: 30% HIV/AIDS, 20% cancer and 15% liver disease. The average age at time of death was 52 years for men and 39 years for women.

### Mental health

Several organizations provide mental health assistance to people without a home.

The Royal Ottawa Hospital works with partners to provide consultation and education to the staff as well as diagnostic and referral services for those people requiring mental health services.

The Canadian Mental Health Association, Ottawa Branch, helps people with severe and persistent mental illness access and maintain suitable housing, and supports them to live in integrated housing situations in the community (i.e. apartments and houses in regular buildings providing housing for a variety of individuals, not only those with a mental illness).

The multidisciplinary services offered include housing, hospital, and court outreach as well as long-term case management support through community support workers.

## Beyond shelter

People who are homeless have a variety of needs.

Young people need help to find employment and education.

Aboriginal people need culturally appropriate programs and services to help them re-establish bonds with their community.

Immigrants and members of multicultural communities may require services that are culturally appropriate or in their own language.

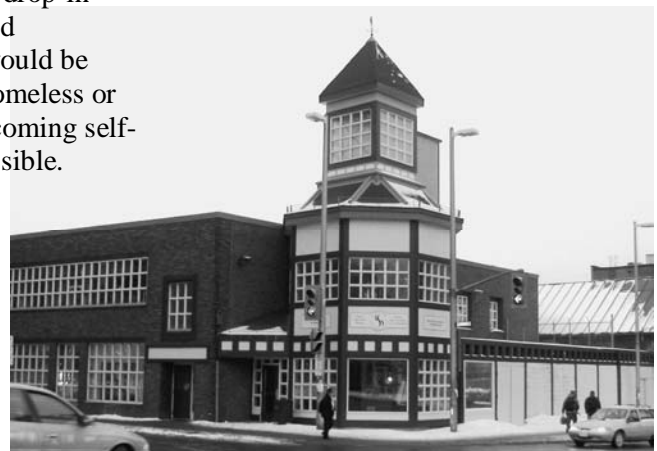
Many homeless people live for long periods in the downtown core, which becomes their access point for their service and social network.

The downtown shelters for single people provide the only source of “family” for some homeless people. Thus, for some, the shelter may become their preferred long-term location option.

## Continuum of Supports

These include all supports and services – outreach, drop-in programs, advice and counselling – that would be needed to assist a homeless or at-risk person in becoming self-sufficient where possible.

Youth Services Bureau  
Downtown Services  
and Drop-in



## Suitable housing is:

- large enough for the household size (meets the need for privacy);
- affordable in relation to the income of the individual or family;
- accessible for those with a disability;
- safe and adequate in terms of the quality of the unit; and
- secure from the risk of loss of housing.

## Supportive housing

In supportive housing, staff are available on site to provide advice, coaching and help to residents.

- In Ottawa, there are now 500 units of supportive housing operated by private non-profit organizations for people who are at risk of homelessness for psychological or other reasons.
- About 2,000 people are currently on the Supportive Housing Waiting List.

# Helping Homeless People in Ottawa\*

## What is “Supportive Housing”?

Residents living in supportive housing receive advice, coaching and help from staff available on site.

## What is “Supported Housing”?

People receive supports that are not tied to housing.

## What is “Transitional Housing”?

This is housing for individuals, typically available up to three years, that teaches life skills and self-sufficiency.

Clients may include young mothers, people who have undergone treatment for a psychiatric illness or addiction, or people who have been released from jail.

Transitional housing can also help victims of family violence through the resettlement process.

## What is a “Domiciliary Hostel”?

Residential board and care is provided for 850 low income people by private contractors funded by the City.

## What is “outreach”?

The outreach process involves engaging people where they are, assessing their needs and connecting them with needed services and supports.

## Housing services

Action-Logement  
Housing Help

## Supportive housing

Bruce House  
Cornerstone  
Daybreak  
Emily Murphy Non-Profit Housing  
Options Bytown  
Ottawa Salus Corporation  
Project Upstream  
Shepherds of Good Hope (Hope Community)  
Youth Services Bureau

## Transitional housing

Elizabeth Fry Society  
John Howard Society  
Harmony House  
Salvation Army  
St. Mary's Home  
Youth Services Bureau  
Youville Centre

## Health organizations for homeless people

Community Health Centres (Carlington Community Health Centre, Centertown Community Health Centre, Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Services, Sandy Hill Community Health Centre, Somerset West Community Health Centre, South East Ottawa Centre for a Healthy Community)  
Inner City Health  
St. Anne's Medical Centre

## Daily drop-ins and support services for persons who are homeless

Causeway Work Centre  
Centre 454  
Centre 507  
Centre Espoir Sophie  
Operation Go Home  
Shepherds of Good Hope  
St. Luke's Lunch Club  
St. Joe's Women's Centre  
The Well  
Downtown Services and Drop-in, Youth Service Bureau

## Shelters for abused women (& children)

Chrysalis House  
Interval House  
La Présence  
Maison D'Amitié  
Nelson House

## Support services for those with mental illness

Canadian Mental Health Association  
Local Mental Health & Addictions Agencies  
Royal Ottawa Hospital

## Organizations serving the multicultural community

Catholic Immigration Centre  
Chinese Social Services  
Jewish Family and Children Services  
Immigrant Women Services Ottawa  
Ottawa Community Immigrant Organization (OCISO) Services

## Services for Indigenous Peoples

Aboriginal Women's Support Centre  
Aboriginal Youth Home  
Minwaashin Lodge  
Odawa Native Friendship Centre  
Tungasuvvingat Inuit  
Wabano Aboriginal Health Centre



Salvation Army  
Transitional Housing

\* This list is not exhaustive.

*Many organizations work to reduce the impact of homelessness in Ottawa*

# An Ounce of Prevention . . .

## Help is often needed to keep housing

It is far better to prevent the loss of housing from occurring than to try to fix it afterwards. Restoring homeless families and individuals to stable housing is difficult and distressing.

Many families and individuals in our society live one or two pay cheques from financial disaster.

Higher income people have assets to dispose of or expenses they can trim to tide them over the loss of a regular pay cheque. For them, a reduced income, while serious, can be dealt with, at least in the short run.

*People with low incomes have no cushion.* When an unexpected expense arises they cannot resort to credit or other assistance.

The City of Ottawa helps individuals and families keep their housing through the Employment and Financial Assistance program. Those receiving assistance may be OW/ODSP recipients as well as “the working poor”. The financial assistance can be put towards rent arrears. The City will also assist individuals in obtaining employment.



Housing Help is a one-stop housing information and assistance agency.

## Preventing housing loss

The City of Ottawa has a Housing Loss Prevention Program that helps as many as 3,000 households each year.

The program is operated through the Community Health and Resource Centres, Housing Help and Action-Logement and is funded by provincial and federal programs.

Housing loss prevention workers assist tenants to retain housing. They help in resolving issues between landlords and tenants, advocating with Social Services, and providing information and referrals to social and legal services.

Early intervention includes providing information on tenant rights and responsibilities as well as educating on relevant legislation such as the Tenant Protection Act and the Social Housing Reform Act.

## HomeSafe

This program is operated by the Salvation Army to provide short-term assistance including an emergency loan to help families keep their housing when faced with a financial crisis.

## Share the Warmth Funding

Through the community resource centres, families can sometimes access Share the Warmth Funding that can help cover the cost of a heating bill.

# Eviction Can Often Lead to Homelessness

## 5,000 applications by landlords for non-payment of rent

Disputes between tenants and landlords often end up before the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal.

In Eastern Ontario, landlords made 6,500 applications to the Tribunal in 2003 (the last year for which complete data is available).

- 5,000 (80%) of these applications, were for non-payment of rent.
- 3,200 of that 5000 were not contested by tenants, resulting in the loss of their housing.

## Preventing eviction

Eviction prevention workers from Housing Help and Action Logement and the legal clinics across the city provide advice and help to tenants who go before the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal.

The Royal Ottawa Hospital and the Canadian Mental Health Association also help clients who have mental health problems to maintain their housing *but it is not possible to meet all of the needs for service.*

## Eviction – the most common immediate cause of homelessness

The most commonly cited immediate reasons for homelessness found in the Panel Study on Homelessness in Ottawa were:

**29% Eviction**

**23% Inability to pay the rent**

**21% Conflict with family, spouse, partner, or roommates**

Another study, also conducted by the Centre for Research on Community Services at the University of Ottawa, monitored Ottawa eviction prevention programs in 2001-2002.

**Over 80% of individuals and families with eviction risk factors who received services from these programs were still housed at a six-month follow-up.**

Eviction risk factors included:

- Tenant being in arrears on rent payments;
- Tenant having received an informal eviction notice;
- Tenant having received a legal eviction notice; or
- Landlord having applied to the Rent Tribunal for an eviction against tenants.



Options Bytown provides housing for those requiring support in order to live independently.

*The Housing Loss Prevention Program helps 3,000 households a year*

# Social Housing for Modest Incomes



Canadian Mental Health Association,  
Ottawa Branch poster

## Social housing includes subsidized units (*rent is geared to income*)

The stock of 22,400 subsidized social housing units in the City of Ottawa was built through various federal and/or provincial programs over the past few decades.

The rent is geared to income (RGI) for these units and is set at 30% of household income.

It is made up of approximately:

- 14,604 units administered by the Ottawa Community Housing Corporation;
- 7,817 units administered by private non-profit projects (15%) and cooperative housing projects (18%).

The Social Housing Registry administers access to over 75% of the above units, plus 1,579 units in privately-owned buildings on which rent supplements are provided.

## Rent supplements

The Rent Supplement Program provides eligible landlords with a subsidy to offset rents for lower income tenants registered on the Social Housing waiting list.

Rent supplements cover the difference between the rent a household can afford to pay (set at 30% of household income) and market rents. Private, non-profit housing providers and cooperatives may have units designated for rent supplements.

Who is on Ottawa's Social Housing Waiting List?	
Families	5,000
Single individuals under 60 years of age	4,000
Seniors	1,500
<b>Total households</b>	<b>10,500</b>

# Choosing a Better Option for the Community

## New social housing is critical

- From 1987 to 1996, an average of 600 units of social housing were built each year in Ottawa.
- From 1996 to 2000 production fell to almost nil.

New Affordable Housing Units Completed in Ottawa*	
2000	16
2001	61
2002	147
2003	190
2004	16
Five Year Completed Total	450 units

\* Through the National Homelessness Initiative and the Action Ottawa Program.

- In 2004, the City awarded funding for construction of an additional 422 affordable units that are not yet complete and will soon be awarding funding for a further 200 units.

## Helping in Ottawa

### Social Housing

Asher Christian Seniors  
 Barrhaven Non-Profit Housing Corp.  
 Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corp. (CCOC)  
 Chinese Community Housing Corp.  
 Community Works Non-Profit Housing Corp.  
 Cumberland Housing Corp.  
 Daybreak Non-Profit Shelter (Ecumenical) Corp.  
 Ellwood House Seniors Incorporated  
 Emily Murphy Non-Profit Housing Corp.  
 Gignul Non-Profit Housing Corp. OM8  
 Gloucester Non-Profit Housing Corp.  
 Goulbourn Non-Profit Housing Corp.  
 Harmer House  
 Inuit Non-Profit Housing Corp.  
 Kanata Baptist Place Incorporated  
 King's Sons and Daughters  
 LIUNA Non-Profit Housing  
 Muslim Non-Profit Housing Corp. of Ottawa-Carleton  
 National Capital Region Vietnamese Canadian Non-Profit Housing Corp.  
 Nepean Housing Corp.  
 OCISO Non-Profit Housing Corp.  
 Options Bytown  
 Osgoode Non-Profit Housing Corp.  
 Ottawa Community Housing Corp.  
 Rankin Terrace  
 Rideau Non-Profit Corp.  
 Serson Clarke Non-Profit Housing Corp.  
 Shikun Oz Non-Profit Housing Corp.  
 St. Vladimir's Russian Residence  
 Taiga Non-Profit Housing Corp.  
 Unitarian House  
 Vanier Non-Profit Housing Corp.  
 West-Carleton Non-Profit Housing Corp.  
 Youth Services Bureau

**Note:** There are many other providers in the affordable housing field, notably locally- and federally-administered co-operative housing projects.

## Data Sources for the Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa, 2004

- CPP, OAS and GIS rates – HRSDC Website
- Low Income Cut-offs for Ottawa, Statistics Canada
- Monthly Rents, Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation, Rental Market Report – Ottawa, 2004
- OW/ODSP Recipients, Statistics Canada, "Social Assistance by Province, 1993-2003", November 2004
- Panel Study on Homelessness, Aubry, T., Klodawsky, F., Runnels, V., 2004
- Percentage of Unemployed Receiving Employment Insurance, Canadian Labour Council, "Falling Unemployment Insurance Protection for Canada's Unemployed", 2004
- Program Monitoring Results of the City of Ottawa's Homelessness Initiative. Aubry, T., Flynn, R., & Ready, T., 2003
- Shelter Use, City of Ottawa, Homeless Individual and Families Information System
- Street Needs Assessment: An Investigation of the Characteristics and Service Needs of Persons who are Homeless and not Currently using Emergency Shelters in Ottawa. Farrell, S., Aubry, T., & Riesing, E., 2002
- A Study of the Deaths of Persons who are Homeless in Ottawa - A Social and Health Investigation. Guirguis, M., Runnels, V., & Aubry, T., 2003

## Terms used in this report

CMHA – Canadian Mental Health Association  
 CMHC – Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation  
 CPP – Canada Pension Plan  
 EI – Employment Insurance  
 GIS – Guaranteed Income Supplement  
 HIFIS – Homeless Individual and Families Information System  
 HRSDC – Human Resources and Skills Development Canada  
 LICO – Low Income Cut-Offs  
 NIMBY – Not In My Backyard  
 OAS – Old Age Security  
 ODSP – Ontario Disability Support Program  
 OW – Ontario Works  
 RGI – Rent Geared to Income  
 ROH – Royal Ottawa Hospital  
 YM/YWCA – Young Men's/Young Women's Christian Association  
 YSB – Youth Services Bureau

# What IS Needed to End Homelessness?

## Overall requirements

- A significant increase in social housing units.
- Ongoing funding of supports to help people keep appropriate housing.
- An increase in the number of supportive housing units.
- An increase in the number of rent supplements tied to social housing.
- A significant increase in OW and ODSP rates.
- Improved access to Employment Insurance.
- Stable funding for homelessness programs.
- A community consensus to end homelessness.

## What can YOU do?

1. **Educate** yourself and others about the problem of homelessness.
2. **Volunteer** your time to work directly with people experiencing homelessness.
3. **Advocate** on behalf of people who are homeless and organizations that work with people who are homelessness.
4. **Contribute to** and help organizations that work to end homelessness.
5. **Become aware of the language you use** and refrain from using words that refer to people experiencing homelessness in derogatory ways.
6. **Be aware of and help change attitudes** about homelessness among your friends, family and people within the community to help reduce NIMBY (“not in my backyard”) reactions.
7. **Be inclusive** and promote inclusive communities throughout the city.

## Major Policy Changes

### Federal Level

- Introduce a National Housing Program for Canada.
- Fast track funding for rental housing affordable to renters on low incomes.
- Improve income security for people on low incomes.
- Improve benefits under Employment Insurance.
- Provide stable funding for local homelessness programs, social housing, supportive housing and research.
- Increase funding for rent supplements tied to social housing.

### Provincial Level

- Improve social assistance benefits, especially the shelter component.
- Increase the minimum wage to reflect the rising cost of living.
- Provide more funding for support services for all supportive housing.
- Increase funding for mental health, violence prevention and addiction services.
- Increase funding for rent supplements tied to social housing.
- Fast track social housing funding.
- Limit increases on vacant rental units and end default evictions.

### Municipal level

- Continue to use municipal levers and resources to build new affordable rental housing for those with low incomes.
- Continue to provide emergency shelter to all who seek refuge each night.
- Advocate with other levels of government for Ottawa’s residents on low incomes.
- Promote the integration of affordable housing into local neighbourhoods.
- Be the champion in working to end homelessness.

Many agencies and their dedicated staff assist homeless individuals and families.

However, the elimination of homelessness requires the cooperation of the entire community as well as all levels of government.

This first Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa is an opportunity to inform the community about the issue of homelessness and how it is being addressed in our city. Homelessness is not a new phenomenon, although it has become more common in Canada since the 1980s.

That is not to say it will “always be with us” and that we should learn to “live with it” – *quite the contrary*. Homelessness is a complex issue that involves both economics and individual circumstances. Progress has been made and tools and solutions are emerging to help Ottawa as a community address homelessness. This Report Card will help to find new avenues to further this process.

