

# The Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa (ATEH) L'Alliance pour mettre un terme à l'itinérance

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

## MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS OF THE ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS OTTAWA IN 2013

Action-Logement / Action-Housing  
Bruce House  
Canadian Mental Health Association –  
Ottawa  
Carlington Community Health 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 Community Health Centre  
City of Ottawa, Housing Services Branch  
Community Legal Services Ottawa  
Centre  
Cooperative Housing Association of  
Eastern Ontario  
Cornerstone Housing for Women/Le Piliier  
Daybreak Non-Profit Shelter  
Elizabeth Fry Society of Ottawa  
Housing Help  
John Howard Society of Ottawa  
Minwaashin Lodge/Oshki Kizis Healing  
Lodge  
Monfort Renaissance  
Montfort Renaissance Inc.  
Multifaith Housing Initiative  
Nepean, Rideau, Osgoode Community  
Resource Centre  
Operation Come Home  
Options Bytown Non-Profit Housing  
Corporation  
Ottawa Inner City Health Inc.  
Ottawa Inner City Ministries  
Ottawa Pastoral Counselling Centre  
Ottawa Salus Corporation  
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  
The Ottawa Mission  
The Salvation Army Ottawa Booth Centre  
The Well/La Source  
Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health  
Western Ottawa Community Resource  
Centre  
Wigwamen Incorporated  
YMCA-YWCA, National Capital Region  
Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa

## Presentation to the Ontario Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs Pre-Budget Consultation

Kingston, January 23, 2014  
Mike Bulthuis, Executive Director

## INTRODUCTION

The Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa (ATEH) is a non-profit, non-partisan association with 43 organizational and additional individual members. Our members provide emergency shelter, day programs, service and supports for families and individuals who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless. They assist people in their search for housing and in accessing health and other services. Some members develop and offer new affordable housing. All of our members greatly appreciate the essential role that the Province of Ontario plays in the successes they achieve in our community.

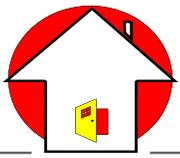
The Alliance, and its members, represent a community committed to responding to the needs of Ottawa's homeless individuals and those at-risk. In November, 2013, coinciding with National Housing Day, our tenth annual community forum brought together 200 participants, exchanging information on innovative new (and local) health, lifeskills, employment, housing and outreach programs. The community's response illustrated our local citizenry's concern about homelessness – and a desire to find solutions. There is ever growing frustration; resources are not meeting demand.

## Ottawa's Ten-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan

During 2012 and 2013, as required by the Province, the City of Ottawa convened the community – including housing providers, service providers, tenants, consumers and government and community leaders – in consultations towards developing a ten-year plan towards ending homelessness. Ottawa's Plan articulates a number of goals, including – by 2024 - ending chronic (long-term) homelessness, by employing a 'housing first' approach, and working for emergency shelter stays of only 30 days or less. These goals are ambitious – but achievable, and worthy of broad support. Consider our current scenario:

- In 2012, for the 7308 individuals and family members who used a shelter, the average length of stay was 68 days; this included an average of 88 days for families, a length more than double that of six years earlier.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa (2013) "Report Card on Ending Homelessness in Ottawa, Jan to Dec 2012"



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- A 2013 study<sup>2</sup> by Tim Aubry and others found that 12% of individuals accessing Ottawa's shelter system between 2004 and 2007 were doing so repeatedly or for long periods (many for years), consuming 52% of the shelter bed spaces. The same study found a similar pattern of shelter bed use in Toronto. Ending homelessness for these shelter users could return our shelter system to its emergency orientation – responding to emergencies like fire, family breakdown, illness, etc.

We know that ending homelessness is not only good social policy; it's good economic policy. We pay in economic terms for homelessness every day. In a 2012 report, *The Real Cost of Homelessness*, Stephen Gaetz found that providing supports to someone who would otherwise become homeless saves the system an estimated \$9,390 per year and \$350,000 over the person's lifetime. When individuals and families are homeless, their health declines, they are more likely to have injury, they are more likely to come into contact with law enforcement and their school success suffers.

We all know that the better strategy is to invest in housing stability and long-term solutions. However, the high cost of affordable housing makes it a particular challenge. So, how do we get there?

## **Alliance to End Homelessness: Targets to end homelessness**

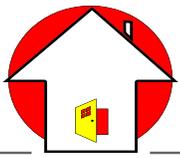
The Alliance to End Homelessness regards the articulation of goals in our ten-year plan as an important step. Since 2009, we have identified four inter-related targets – based on evidence of how we are doing in real terms – that if achieved annually, over a ten-year period, would enable Ottawa to effectively end homelessness for individuals and families. Our targets are:

- To reduce the number of people using emergency shelters by 500 each year,
- To reduce the average length of stay in a shelter by 3 days per year,
- To create 1000 new affordable housing options each year -- using a combination of newly built housing and rent supplements, and
- To make housing more affordable for people on low incomes by improving their incomes.

In 2012, results for each target varied – but we were pleased to see progress in new affordable housing options, in part arising from the provincial upload. The City of Ottawa has, since 2011, allocated \$14m per year in additional funding towards housing and homelessness. While only 139 new affordable units were constructed in 2012, 613 households were helped with rental assistance by the City – a combination of rent supplements and housing allowances - supporting homeless families and individuals. In other areas, average length of shelter stay, and numbers in shelters, were holding steady – without progress. Clearly, until there is a sufficient amount of new affordable housing and considerable improvement in low incomes, we will struggle to gain ground. Achieving our ten-year goals – and those of the plan now supported by the Province – will require enhanced initiatives. To that effect, we identify five recommendations – including some at virtually no-cost – below.

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Aubry, Susan Farrell, Stephen W. Hwang, Melissa Calhoun (2013) "Identifying the Patterns of Emergency Shelter Stays of Single Individuals in Canadian Cities of Different Sizes" *Housing Studies*, 28:6, 910-927.



## Recommendations

**Strategies for New Supply:** From 2004-2012, only 1232 new-built affordable housing units were added in Ottawa. However, 30% of renters experience core housing need, with 10% paying more than 50% of their income on shelter. 37,000 renter households have annual incomes under \$25,000. Our 2.9% rental vacancy rate at the end of 2013 is doing little for those seeking affordable units; CMHC has shown that rental condos – the bulk of new rental units being created – cost 25% more per month than purpose-built rentals and are rarely suited to families.

As noted by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association in *Where's Home 2013*, “the longer households remain in unaffordable housing, the harder it is on their health, their long-term career prospects, their children’s education, and our province’s future.”

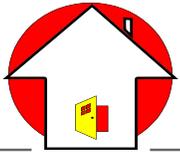
- **(1) ATEH recommends** that Ontario sign, as soon as possible, and commit to a renewed Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) agreement with the federal government, matching the five-year 2014-2019 commitment announced by the federal government in 2013. *The development of new, non-profit and other good quality affordable rental housing will further stimulate construction – creating more jobs for the Ontario economy while increasing the number of affordable places for people on a low-income to live.*

We support the creation (and maintenance) of mixed-income communities across our city. We are pleased that the City of Ottawa, officially, has as a goal that 25% of new residential development be affordable. We are pleased to see increased application of Section 37 (pertaining to `community benefits`) and the principle of density bonusing. However, limited existing tools have made achievement of a 25% goal impossible.

- **(2) ATEH recommends** as a low-cost proposal for the Province, and to ensure consistency across our communities, that Ontario grant municipalities the express authority to implement inclusionary housing programs, ensuring that a specified percentage of housing units in all new housing developments of a minimum size contain or contribute to housing units that are affordable.

**Strategies for Enhanced Incomes:** We join with leaders from across Canada and the United States in citing the growing inequality crisis as a challenge for our time. The gap between high rents and tenant incomes is unacceptable. In Ottawa, in 2012, an individual receiving Ontario Works would need a staggering 124% of their monthly receipt to cover the average rent for a bachelor apartment. An individual receiving Ontario Disability Support would find themselves in a situation only slightly better – needing 70% of his or her monthly income. The situation is inadequate, leaving individuals on benefits with little – or no – purchasing power for other basic needs.

The Province of Ontario increased social assistance by \$14 for single adults in 2013 and increased the benefit rate for OW and ODSP by 1%. This was a welcome recognition that benefits must reflect the real cost of housing, utilities and food in Ontario communities. At the same time, from October 2012 to October 2013, average market rents increased by an average of 2%. By raising assistance levels – or introducing a Housing



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Benefit – the Province can make affordable housing much easier to reach!

- **(3) ATEH recommends** that Ontario adequately respond to the recommendations of the 2013 report of the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance, with a \$100 / month increase in OW and ODSP, coupled with full indexation moving forward.

Affordability for the working poor is a growing concern. The Alliance to End Homelessness has been tracking housing affordability, and identified that in 2012, a full-time worker earning minimum wage in Ottawa required a full 46% of monthly earnings to afford average rent for a bachelor apartment – an increase from 44% only two years earlier – arising from Ontario's minimum wage, frozen since 2010. We join with Health Providers Against Poverty and others across the province – recognizing the difficult choices low-income earners face, between paying for rent or paying for food, between spending time with the kids or working a second job – in calling for implementation of a living wage.

- **(4) ATEH recommends**, as a low-cost proposal for the Province, that Ontario move towards implementation of a \$14 minimum-wage – in order to place a full-time worker above Ontario's poverty line.

**Homelessness Initiatives:** When the Province realigned homelessness-related programs into the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) in 2013, municipalities were granted welcome additional flexibility to address local priorities. However, the elimination of the Community Start-up and Maintenance Benefit, the capping of shelter *per diems* and an overall reduction in program funding, left the City of Ottawa needing to allocate \$4.4 million, from other important municipal funding envelopes (including other social supports), to meet community needs. Even after doing so, \$2.2 million in benefits were eliminated. In our efforts to end homelessness, moving the yardstick forward while investments are reduced is a challenging proposition. Transition funding, in effect from January 2013 to March 2014, was welcome.

- **(5) ATEH recommends**, alongside a province-wide coalition, that the \$42 million in CHPI transition funding be made a permanent annual investment to address critical housing and homelessness initiatives.

## CONCLUSION

Based on 2012 data, and on nine-year trends related to shelter stays, the Alliance to End Homelessness projected the costs facing the Ottawa community if investments to end homelessness remained static – and if trends continued. While actual expenditures on shelter (by the Province and City) were just under \$22 million in 2012, these numbers would be projected to rise to \$56 million by 2023. Clearly, there is a cost to doing nothing more than what is currently being done. We call on the Province to continue in its housing and homelessness investments, and to demonstrate its firm commitment towards full implementation of Ottawa's new ten-year housing and homelessness plan, with action on the recommendations noted today.