



Alliance to
End Homelessness
Ottawa

Annual Report

2025/
2026





Land Acknowledgement:

Ottawa is located on unceded Algonquin, Anishnabek territory, and also the home of many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. Put simply, these lands were stolen from the traditional keepers for the purposes of settlers. Dispossession of land is just one form of ongoing colonization that has led to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people disproportionately experiencing homelessness. Research shows that Indigenous Peoples account for 20-50% of the total homeless population.

Statement of Reconciliation

We are grateful for the work of Métis scholar Jesse Thistle in defining homelessness as experienced by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people.

The 12 dimensions of Indigenous homelessness make clear the connection between historical and ongoing colonization and the over-representation of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness.

To truly have an impact on homelessness in our community, we must lead with this knowledge.

Embracing Indigenous leadership and collaboration is crucial to ensuring the prevention, reduction, and ultimate end of homelessness.

We support the call for a fully-funded Indigenous Housing Strategy with an Indigenous-led governance structure.

This acknowledgment is a reminder of the responsibility we have to Indigenous Peoples and a commitment to reconciliation.



Executive Director's Message

This past year has been one of momentum, collaboration and growing possibility for the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa.

At a time when homelessness continues to affect far too many people in our community, the Alliance has remained focused on bringing people together, mobilizing our community and advocating for the changes needed to end homelessness.

One of the most significant moments of the year was Mayor Mark Sutcliffe's commitment to ending youth homelessness in Ottawa by 2030. This commitment represents an important opportunity to move beyond managing youth homelessness and toward solutions that prevent homelessness before it begins and ensure young people can quickly find pathways to safe, stable housing. The Alliance is proud to help bring together partners, expertise and momentum to support this ambitious work.

We also continued to create spaces for our community to learn together through Lessons in Ending Homelessness. These events have brought people together to explore what is working, what needs to change and what it will take to move from responding to homelessness toward ending it.

This year, we were especially proud to see The Empathy Project grow beyond Ottawa and gain national attention. What began as a local initiative is now helping spark conversations across Canada about homelessness, challenging assumptions and reminding us of the power of human connection in building the public will for change.

These accomplishments reflect the strength of our community. The Alliance's work is made possible by our members, partners, people with lived experience, funders, volunteers and advocates who continue to believe that homelessness is not inevitable.

There is much work ahead, but progress is happening. Ottawa is moving beyond asking whether homelessness can be ended and instead asking what it will take to end it.

The Alliance will continue to help lead that conversation—and, more importantly, mobilize our community toward action.

Thank you for being part of this work. Together, we can do this.

Kaite Burkholder Harris
Executive Director

Chair's Message

This past year has been an important one for the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa.

As Ottawa continues to face a deepening housing and homelessness crisis, the Alliance has continued to strengthen its role as a convener, mobilizer and advocate for meaningful solutions.

A key accomplishment this year was the creation of our new strategic plan. This process gave us the opportunity to reflect on the Alliance's growth and clarify the role we want to play in the years ahead. The resulting plan provides a strong foundation for our future and a clear direction for how we will continue to coordinate, mobilize and advocate for a city where everyone has a place to call home.

This year also brought important momentum through Mayor Mark Sutcliffe's commitment to ending youth homelessness by 2030. Alongside this work, Lessons in Ending Homelessness continued to bring our community together to learn, challenge assumptions and explore solutions, while The Empathy Project expanded beyond Ottawa and gained national attention.

These accomplishments demonstrate what is possible when people and organizations work together around a shared goal.

On behalf of the Board, I want to extend my sincere gratitude to everyone who contributes to the Alliance's work—our members, partners, volunteers, funders and advocates.

I especially want to thank the Alliance staff. Their dedication, expertise and commitment have helped the organization continue to grow while advancing important work across our community. Their passion for this mission is evident every day, and we are deeply grateful for all they do.

While the challenges ahead remain significant, this year has given us reason for hope. We have a clear strategic direction, growing momentum and a community committed to the belief that homelessness is not inevitable.

Together, we can build a city mobilized to end homelessness.



Susan Farrell
Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa, Board Chair
CMHA Ottawa, CEO

In memory of Dr. Donna Pettey, 1961–2026

This year, the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa and many community partners mourned the loss of Dr. Donna Pettey, a remarkable community leader, researcher, advocate and colleague whose work helped shape Ottawa's response to homelessness and housing.

Donna spent 39 years with the Canadian Mental Health Association Ottawa, where she became a leading voice in community mental health, housing and homelessness. But her contribution to ending homelessness in Ottawa reached far beyond her work at CMHA.

Donna was part of the early movement to build a coordinated community response to homelessness. In 1999, she served on the steering committee for Ottawa-Carleton's Community Action Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness: the work that helped establish the foundations for our community's collective approach to homelessness. She understood early that homelessness could not be solved one program or one organization at a time.

She was also instrumental in developing CMHA Ottawa's Housing First approach, helping advance a model that placed housing, dignity and choice at the centre of the response to homelessness. CMHA's early scattered-site housing program demonstrated what was possible when people experiencing homelessness were offered real homes in ordinary neighbourhoods, with support available rather than conditions imposed.

Donna's belief in housing as a fundamental right was clear and uncompromising. As she said in 2010:

"Housing should never be dependent upon taking your medication or agreeing to see a social worker: housing is a basic human right."

That philosophy remains deeply embedded in the work of our community today.

Donna later brought her research expertise to the study of Housing First, supportive housing and homelessness, helping build the evidence base for approaches that are now central to homelessness systems across Canada. Her work examined not only whether people could be housed, but how housing stability, health, substance use and quality of life were affected, and what communities needed to do differently to help people thrive.

Donna also gave her time and leadership directly to the Alliance. She served on the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa's Board of Directors, bringing decades of experience, research knowledge and a deep commitment to social justice to our collective work.

We are particularly grateful that Donna contributed to this work across generations. She understood that systems change is long work: that it requires evidence, persistence, collaboration and, above all, a belief that something better is possible. We are building on foundations that Donna helped lay decades ago.

Donna's legacy lives on in the people who found a home through Housing First, in the research that continues to shape our practice, in the organizations she strengthened, in the partnerships she helped forge, and in the community of people who continue the work of ending homelessness in Ottawa. We are honoured to carry that work forward.



2025-26 by the numbers

Between April 1, 2025, and March 31, 2026, the Alliance...

Was quoted in
54 news stories



Presented **7**
deputations



Delivered **5** full-length Empathy Projects and **4** abridged Empathy Project variants.

Delivered **12**
trainings

Engaged **over 500** people during our Lessons on Ending Homelessness event series

Insight to Impact (i2i)

This year marked a new phase of growth for the Alliance's education and training offerings with the development of Insight to Impact (or i2i), a new education and training stream focused on delivering educational offerings across one of two pillars:



- Resources about housing and homelessness developed and delivered by people with lived experience of homelessness.
- Resources to support more ethical, sustainable, and meaningful lived experience engagement practices

Building on the expertise of the Expert Steering Team (EST), and with the generous support of the Maytree Foundation, we spent the year writing a foundational toolkit document, alongside practical resources, workshops, and services. This work was informed by the years of practice, collaboration, and learning we've undertaken with the EST, community partners, academia, government, and people with lived experience across Canada.

Throughout the year, the Alliance shared this work with organizations and networks across the housing and homelessness sector through presentations, consultations, and conference sessions – including a launch session at CAEH25. We look forward to exploring new opportunities for the i2i brand as we move from planning to implementation.

By transforming lived experience expertise into accessible training and resources, Insight to Impact is helping organizations move beyond consultation toward authentic partnership, creating stronger policies, services, and systems for everyone.

Expert Steering Team Highlights

The Expert Steering Team continued their vital work of bringing lived expertise to systems change by sitting on various City leadership tables. These include the Housing and Homelessness Leadership Table, the Youth Homelessness Planning Table, and the newly created Health, Housing and Homelessness Action Table. Their collaborative efforts at these tables have driven meaningful impact; most notably leading to the creation of a dedicated table focused on keeping people experiencing homelessness safe during extreme temperatures.

The team also works actively to engage with the broader lived-experience community to ensure their voices and needs reach decision-makers. To support this, they created **Expertise Matters**, an online newsletter for people with lived experience of homelessness in Ottawa. The newsletter shares opportunities and City updates while serving as a direct feedback loop to the team's representatives.

The team was fortunate to partner with various organizations and community members to share their expertise and impact the system through consultations and projects. Key partners included iSisters, Operation Come Home, the Ottawa Food Bank, the University of Ottawa, and students conducting research.

The Empathy Project

The Empathy Project continued to grow this year, bringing together people with lived experience, community partners, educators, and decision-makers to build a shared understanding of homelessness through immersive, experiential learning. This year also marked the beginning of the Empathy Project's adaptation into new settings, from conference sessions to brief knowledge-levelling exercises. We are proud that the Empathy Project is quickly becoming a key mobilization tool for decision-makers.

During the 2025–2026 fiscal year, we delivered five full-length Empathy Project sessions, engaging approximately **400 participants** and nearly **100 trained volunteers**.

The project expanded into new settings, including conference sessions at CAEH25, emergency shelter boards, the Federation of Community Municipalities, Reaching Home, and the Simulation Canada Conference, and sessions with municipal politicians across the country. This year has highlighted the flexibility of the simulation and opened new doors to future variations and adaptations.

Data collected annually at our University of Ottawa sessions has demonstrated consistent positive growth. As of the 2025/2026 fiscal year **99% of participants indicated that they would recommend the Empathy Project**. When asked how they'll actualize their learnings, 100% of participants indicated they consider homelessness is important to them, with 99% predicting they will use what they learned from the Empathy Project in their professional practice.

I think the work and project the team at The Empathy Project has developed is so well organized and presented with such thought, intention and creativity that it is unlike any workshop I have ever attended.

- Empathy Project participant

This has been the most effective way to explain the situations individuals experiencing homelessness face in our city that I have seen or experienced.

- Empathy Project participant





Race to End Homelessness

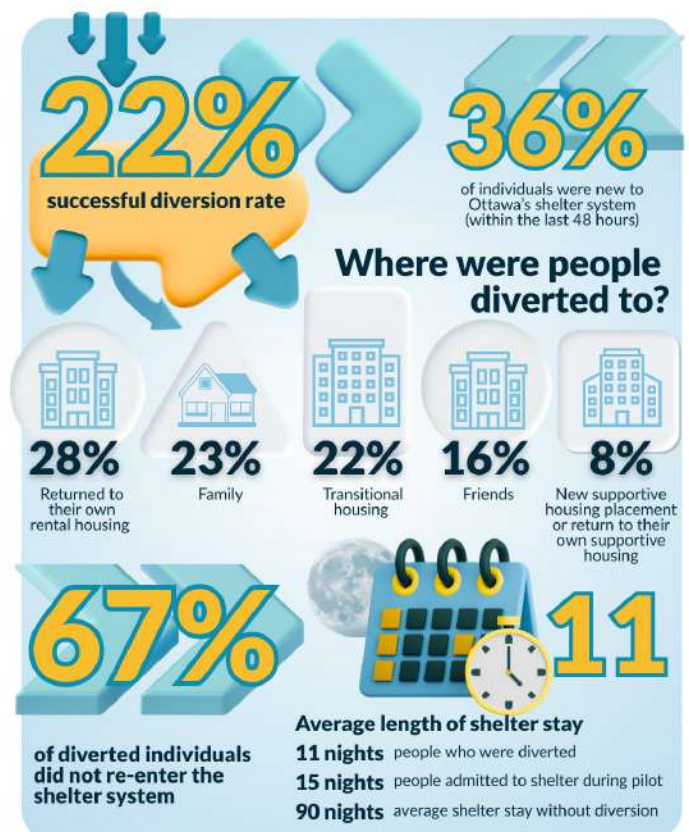
On October 4, 2025, we held our first annual Race to End Homelessness. **263 runners** took part, raising **\$31,983.75** for our member organizations. We look forward to making this race a yearly tradition, and continuing to grow the event year over year.

Diversion report

Between April and September 2025, Shepherds of Good Hope (SGH) carried out a pilot project on shelter diversion, an intervention that helps people who are seeking shelter to identify and access safe and appropriate housing arrangements in their communities as a positive alternative to entering an emergency shelter.

This project was undertaken in partnership between SGH as the lead agency, the City of Ottawa as the funder and the Alliance as the system convener. In December 2025, we published a summary of the results from the pilot.

With funding from the City and advocacy support from the Alliance, Youth Services Bureau now also has a youth homelessness diversion program. We're happy to see this model rolling out and scaling up across the youth and adult homelessness systems.





Ending youth homelessness in Ottawa

Each year, an estimated **1,200–1,400** young people experience homelessness in Ottawa.

In September 2025, Mayor Sutcliffe pledged to end youth homelessness in Ottawa by 2030. Building on the strength of the shelter diversion pilot, Ottawa invested **\$400,000** in its 2026 budget to hire four diversion workers to help youth avoid entering shelters by first exploring safe alternatives.

This work will also be supported by the Ending Youth Homelessness in Ottawa by 2030 Fund through the Community Foundation of Ottawa. Almost **\$500,000** has been raised so far towards a goal of \$2 million/year.

On January 30, 2026, the United Way East Ontario announced a five-year commitment to raise **\$1 million** in new funds to prevent and end youth homelessness in Ottawa.

The City also created the **Youth Homelessness Champions Table**, bringing together cross-sector leaders and funders.

The Alliance has served as a leader working with the Mayor's Office and bringing together agencies, partners, and community leaders with the power to make change, and supporting and advocating for evidence-based goals and strategies.

Housing and Homelessness Leadership Table (HHLT)

The Housing and Homelessness Leadership Table brings together housing providers, shelters, service agencies, City of Ottawa staff, Indigenous partners and people with lived experience to co-design solutions through a data-driven, systems-level approach.

In our role as the HHLT secretariat, the Alliance led engagement and communication with the housing and homelessness community in the development of the refreshed 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan. Engagement took place from spring to fall 2025, with **almost 80% of Alliance members participating** in one or more engagement sessions. The Plan has been codesigned with the HHLT, and was approved by Ottawa's City Council in March 2026.

The HHLT has several other projects underway, and is developing a workplan and annual review process for early 2027. The HHLT also launched a newsletter and website to share information and updates.

The strength of the Alliance is evident at the Table. All of the community sector members of the HHLT are Alliance members and partners, and the Table is co-chaired by the Alliance and the City.

PHOTO: CURTIS PERRY



Lessons in Ending Homelessness

Over four days in January 2026, the Alliance curated a series of events and meetings with Mike Lethby from the RAFT Youth Shelter and Sandra Clarkson from the Calgary Drop-In Centre to bring lessons in shelter transformation to Ottawa, and to spark hope and mobilize action toward ending homelessness. **Over 500 people took part.**

We held separate, targeted events for:

- Academics, researchers and students, at the University of Ottawa Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services (CRECS)
- City of Ottawa Housing and Homelessness Services staff
- Alliance members and guests, including staff and boards from local agencies across the housing and homelessness ecosystem
- Federal staff virtual “lunch and learn”
- Public event with livestream watch parties across Canada
- Multi-department senior federal staff presentation and discussion
- Mayor’s breakfast with members of Council, funders, donors and community leaders
- Plus: individual meetings with key politicians and lots of media

Alliance Board of Directors 2025-2026

- **Past President:** Catharine Vandelinde (Options Housing)
- **Chair:** Susan Farrell (Canadian Mental Health Association Ottawa)
- **Vice-Chair:** Stephen Bartolo (Shepherds of Good Hope)
- **Treasurer:** Mark MacAulay (Ottawa Salus)
- **Secretary:** Tamara Chipperfield (Pinecrest Queensway CHC)
- Tanya Ironstone (Community Member)
- Rae Goslett (Community Member)
- Cindy Newell (Ottawa Community Housing)
- Rachel Robinson (Community Member)
- Darren Graham (Youth Services Bureau)
- Peter Tilley (Ottawa Mission)
- Elizabeth Tanguay (Montfort Renaissance)
- Jayne Stoyles (Social Housing Registry of Ottawa)

We could not do the critical work of advocacy and pushing for system-level change in our community without the incredible support of our agency members and funders.

We also have a growing number of individual members and are grateful for their engagement and support.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to this work.

We can prevent, reduce, and end homelessness together.

Funders



United Way
East Ontario



**OTTAWA
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION**

Our Member Organizations

Action-Housing • Arts Ottawa • Bruce House • Cahdco • Canadian Hard of Hearing Association • Capital City Mission • Carlington CHC • Carty House • Catholic Centre for Immigrants • CCOC • Centre 507 • Vanier Community Services Centre • Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services, University of Ottawa • Centretown CHC • Centretown Churches Social Action Committee (CSAC) • Canadian Mental Health Association Ottawa • Council on Aging • Daybreak • Eastern Ottawa Community Resource Centre • Elizabeth Fry Society • Ellwood House • FAM Network • Habitat for Humanity • Harmony House • Helping With Furniture • Housing Help • Interval House • iSisters Technology Mentoring • John Howard Society of Ottawa • Just Food • Lowertown Community Resource • Matthew House Ottawa • Matthew Perry House • Minwaashin Lodge • Montfort Renaissance • Multifaith Housing Initiative • Nelson House of Ottawa • Nepean Housing • Nepean, Rideau and Osgoode Community Resource Centre • OMRA • Operation Come Home • Options Housing • Orléans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre • Ottawa Community Housing • Ottawa Community Benefits Network • Ottawa Community Land Trust • Ottawa Food Bank • Ottawa Inner City Health • Ottawa Innerscity Ministries • Ottawa Mission • Ottawa Salus • PAL Ottawa • Parkdale United Church • Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre • Upstream Ottawa • Restoring Hope • Rideau-Rockcliffe CRC • Salvation Army Booth Centre • Shepherds of Good Hope • Social Housing Registry of Ottawa • Somerset West Community Health Centre • South-East Ottawa Community Health Centre • Stepstone House • The Royal • Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ottawa • Veterans House Canada • Wabano Centre For Aboriginal Health • Western Ottawa CRC • YMCA of the National Capital Region • Youturn Youth Support Services • Youth Services Bureau •