



The Alliance to End Homelessness

www.endhomelessnessottawa.ca

CANADA' S HOMELESS IN A COMPETITIVE WORLD

**Policies and Funding Proposals
to Ensure Health, Skills and Incentives for Homeless People
and Those at Risk of Homelessness**

**Submission to the
Standing Committee on Finance, Pre-Budget Consultations
September 2006**

From

The Alliance to End Homelessness

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Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance Pre-Budget Consultation, September 2006

Executive Summary

The Alliance to End Homelessness appreciates the opportunity to share our proposals with Standing Committee on Finance. After 11 years as a coalition in Ottawa, the Alliance to End Homelessness believes it is possible for the nation's capital and other communities across the country to be inclusive communities that take responsibility for ensuring every resident has an appropriate home. Our coalition of community stakeholders is committed to working collaboratively to end homelessness by gaining and promoting a better understanding of homelessness and advocating for strategies to end it.

The Alliance to End Homelessness recognizes that long-term public policy commitments at all levels are required to meet the challenges confronting homeless people and those at risk of homelessness. On a daily basis, we see the continuing need for strengthened federal support for communities such as ours in the prevention and reduction of homelessness. Here in the nation's capital many Members of Parliament will have seen our annual **Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa** released at the end of February and will be aware of the Alliance's *Community Forum on Homelessness: Linking Research with Action* which takes place on National Housing Day, November 22nd.

Federal policies and funding are a critical component of successfully responding to the crisis in homelessness at the community level. It is both necessary and important for the Conservative government to take charge of federal efforts at solving homelessness. Policies where programs and funding are implemented at the community level will produce the best economic advantage to help individuals and families out of homelessness and into a less crisis-driven and a healthier and contributing role in the community.

The Conservative Government can expect to have a successful impact if programs and funding are dedicated to sustaining community collaboration.

THE ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS PROPOSALS

- 1. A decision to immediately create a long term, sustainable program that commits Canadian Government support for effective, innovative solutions to homelessness at the local level.**
- 2. Directly and significantly increase affordable and supportive housing.** This should include a housing strategy with significant dollars attached along with policies to ensure that the Ontario and other provincial/territorial governments be required to immediately spend funding in the Affordable Housing Program.
- 3. Increase rates and access to income support programs such as Employment Insurance (EI), Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Support (GIS) programs** to enable people receiving these benefits to pay their rent AND feed themselves and/or their families.
- 4. Reduce the lowest tax rate and increase the exemption rate to reduce the risk of homelessness.** The increase of 0.5 percent in the last Budget placed tax burden on those with the lowest incomes. For the low-income Canadians recently required to start paying income tax, the risk of homelessness has increased.
- 5. Amend the Canada Health Act to uphold the portability clause of the Act to include out-of-province mental health care provided in a psychiatric hospital institution.** For someone who is homeless or at risk of it, a mental health crisis is no less critical than a physical health crisis while away from their home province.

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After 11 years as a coalition in Ottawa, the Alliance to End Homelessness believes it is possible for the national capital and other communities across the country to be inclusive communities that take responsibility for ensuring every resident has an appropriate home. The Alliance is a coalition of community stakeholders committed to working collaboratively to end homelessness by gaining and promoting a better understanding of homelessness and advocating for strategies to end it.

The Alliance to End Homelessness recognizes that long-term public policy commitments are required to meet the challenges confronting homeless people and those at risk of homelessness. On a daily basis, we see the continuing need for a strengthened federal focus on helping communities prevent and reduce homelessness.

Our priorities are public education, research and advocacy. Our Steering Committee is responsible for decisions on the broad strategic directions of the Alliance. Members of the Steering Committee include executive level organizational representatives, persons who have experienced homelessness and Ex-Officio representatives from funding groups (see Appendix 1 for Steering Committee Members).

Our members participate in Working Groups with a goal of developing creative responses to the homeless crisis. The Research and Evaluation Working Group focus is to identify local research priorities; to facilitate, monitor, advocate and support research on the causes of homelessness and on effective interventions; and to transfer that knowledge to the community at large. The Public Affairs Working Group focus is to increase public awareness and understanding through education for different audiences, to develop and facilitate the implementation of both education and communications strategies, and to develop the skill level in community members to enhance participation in creating solutions.

Here in the nation's capital, many Members of Parliament will have seen our annual Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa released at the end of February and will be aware of the Alliance's Community Forum on Homelessness: Linking Research with Action which takes place annually on November 22nd, National Housing Day.

Coalition members represent the interests the following sectors:

Aboriginal
Day Program
Disability
Francophone
Health
Housing Loss Prevention

Housing Search and Stabilization
Immigrant and Refugee
Mental Health and Addictions
Outreach
Shelters for Families, Men,
Women & Youth

Social Housing Network
Supportive Housing Network
University Sector
Women's Sector
Youth Sector

The Homelessness Crisis Requires Federal Leadership

The homelessness issues being tracked by the Alliance in its Report Cards and responded to by services providers and a very concerned general community in the City of Ottawa are played out right across the country.

If indeed Canada is to have a meaningful place in the world of the future, then people who comprise the 1% of the population who experience homelessness and the countless others who are one personal crisis away from becoming homeless also must have opportunities to prosper.

Recognize homelessness as the ultimate constraint individuals and communities face

The new budget is a vital opportunity to be prepared and be proactive to end homelessness and ensure that those individuals are healthy, have the proper skills and are presented with appropriate incentives to work and to save. In its work towards ending and preventing homelessness, the Alliance to End Homelessness recognizes five concrete solutions where the Conservative government could provide remarkable leadership in the next budget.

It comes down to supply and demand to build a healthy and strong country for all: adequate income and affordable, appropriate housing are needed to quickly move homeless individuals and families and those living at risk of homelessness from a crisis-driven life to a more healthy and contributing role in the community.

A concerted federal crisis response is needed more than ever

1. Too many people have inadequate incomes.
2. We have a serious shortage of affordable, appropriate housing for those living on low incomes in Canada.
3. And for some, challenging health problems are part of the struggle to find adequate housing and supports.

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, and/or substance use problems, or lack the life skills or ability to live on their own.

The Alliance to End Homelessness Proposals

1. A decision to immediately create a long term, sustainable program that commits Canadian Government support for effective, innovative solutions to homelessness at the local level. More than ever the families, women, men, youth and children who are homeless and continually at risk of homelessness need a sustainable federal program commitment to supporting ending homelessness to put in place effective, innovative solutions at the local level.

2. Directly and significantly increase affordable and supportive housing. This should include a housing strategy with significant dollars attached along with policies to ensure that the Ontario and other provincial/territorial governments be required to immediately spend funding in the Affordable Housing Program. People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are still waiting here in the nation’s capital and right across the country and it is past the time to recognize that an emergency shelter is not a home.

3. Increase rates and access to income support programs such as Employment Insurance (EI), Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Support (GIS) programs to enable people receiving these benefits to pay their rent AND feed themselves and/or their families.

4. Reduce the lowest tax rate and increase the exemption rate to reduce the risk of homelessness. The increase of 0.5 percent in the last Budget placed a tax burden on those with the lowest incomes. For the low-income Canadians recently required to start paying income tax, the risk of homelessness has increased. The impact of change to the basic personal amount from \$9,039 to \$8,639 can very easily be a disaster for those affected. People on low incomes are now even more vulnerable to any change impacting their income whether it is due to reduced working hours, unexpected over the counter medical expenses, or an increase in their transportation costs. The GST reduction has less affect for those living with little disposable income who do not pay as much GST as those with higher incomes and spending power.

5. Amend the Canada Health Act to uphold the portability clause of the Act to include out-of-province urgent mental health care provided in a psychiatric hospital or institution. For someone who is homeless or at risk of it, a mental health crisis is no less critical than a physical health crisis while away from their home province.

Understanding the Federal Impact in Ottawa

Federal policies and funding are a critical component of successfully responding to the crisis in homelessness at the community level. It is both necessary and important for the Conservative government to take charge of federal efforts at solving homelessness. Policies where programs and funding are implemented at the community level will produce the best economic advantage to help individuals and families out of homelessness and from a crisis-driven life to a healthier and contributing role in the community.

The Conservatives can expect to have a successful impact if programs and funding are dedicated to sustaining community collaboration. The following is an overview of significant gains made possible through dedicated federal funding.

In the 2004-2006 years alone, the federal government made it possible for the City of Ottawa Housing Branch to give capital support to:

- 98 units of supportive housing;
- Two 30 bed facilities for youth;
- Aboriginal drop-in;
- Major renovations to transitional housing facility and a women's drop-in;
- Small capital for safety and client service equipment in shelters and drop-in.

In addition, valuable strategies here in Ottawa received federal funding for evolving and effective services:

- Aboriginal street outreach and drop-in;
- Increase in number of housing search and stabilization workers in shelters/transitional housing;
- Increased on-site tenant support in supportive and social housing;
- Increase in number of community-based housing loss prevention workers.

The Tables 1 and 2 on the next page demonstrate the range of services and housing results made possible with federal funding. The 1,774 new households served is a significant addition to the 7,932 new client households funded through and served by the City of Ottawa Housing Branch in the same time period.

Table 1
SUMMARY OF FEDERALLY-FUNDED HOMELESS SUPPORT SERVICES IN
OTTAWA (SCPI), January – June 2006

| SERVICE | SCPI-funded NEW CLIENTS SERVED* January-June 2006 |
|---|--|
| Street Outreach | 64 households** (64 individuals) |
| Drop-in | 197 households (336 individuals including 9 children) |
| Housing Search/ Stabilization, on-site | 316 households (377 individuals including 44 children) |
| Housing Search/ Stabilization, community-based | |
| Housing Loss Prevention, on-site tenant support | 330 households (330 individuals) |
| Housing Loss Prevention, community-based | 867 households (1,604 individuals including 544 children) |
| TOTAL | 1,774 households (2,711 individuals) including 597 children |

*This does not include the ongoing caseload of each worker

** Household = single or couple or family

Table 2
SCPI-FUNDED HOUSING RESULTS OF THE 2,711 INDIVIDUALS SERVED IN
OTTAWA, January – June 2006

| TYPE OF HOUSING | NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS CLIENTS |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Moved to Emergency Shelter | 137 |
| Transitional or Supportive Housing | |
| ▪ moved to | 196 |
| ▪ retained | 484 |
| Long term social or private market housing | |
| ▪ moved to | 264 |
| • retained | 974 |
| TOTAL | 2,055 |

Indicators of Homelessness in 2005 — The Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa

In the nation's capital in 2005, there were 8,853 people who were homeless and who had to stay in a shelter at some point. The Alliance to End Homelessness in Ottawa produced a 16 page Report Card in 2004 and 2005. Table 3 below shows the homelessness, housing and income indicators used by the Alliance to assess the progress the community is making in ending homelessness or in reducing the numbers of individuals and families at risk of becoming homeless. Policy and programs at the federal level directly affect many of these indicators.

Table 3
Indicators of Homelessness or the Risk of Homelessness
in Ottawa in 2005
In the Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa 2005

| Homelessness | Base Year 2004 | 2005 | Difference |
|--|-----------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| # of individuals in a shelter | 8,664 | 8,853 | 2% more |
| Single men | 4,845 | 4,905 | |
| Single women | 1,221 | 1,267 | |
| Youth | 509 | 543 | |
| Families (1,035 children & 1,103 adults) | 631 | 668 | |
| # of times shelter beds were used | 323,612 | 310,299 | 4% less |
| Average length of stay in shelters (days) | 38 | 36 | 4% less |
| Single men | 40 | 39 | |
| Single women | 31 | 32 | |
| Youth | 23 | 17 | |
| Families | 45 | 37 | |
| Housing | | | |
| # of social housing units (all pre-1995) | 22,400 | 22,400 | 1% more |
| # of rent supplements | 3,000 | 3,085 | |
| # of supportive housing units | 500 | 669 | |
| # Action Ottawa & NHI* units | 356 | 441 | 3% less |
| # households on social housing waiting list | 10,500 | 9,914 | |
| # on supportive housing waiting list | 2,000 | 2,214 | |
| Housing Market Indicators | | | |
| Rental vacancy rate | 3.9% | 3.3% | .6 less |
| Average rent for a 1-bedroom apartment | \$771 | \$762 | 1% less |
| Income | | | |
| Social Assistance for a single person | \$520 | \$536 | 3% more |
| ODSP Assistance for a Single Person | \$930 | \$959 | 3% more |
| Average monthly # of Ontario Works cases | 17,879 | 17,552 | 2% less |
| Minimum Wage | \$7.15 | \$7.45 | 4% more |
| Increase in Consumer Price Index | N/A | 2.3% | N/A |
| Sources – Homelessness: HIFIS City of Ottawa. Housing: City of Ottawa (*National Homelessness Initiative) and CMHC Rental Market Survey. Income (and Support Programs): Province of Ontario Website. | | | |

1% of Ottawa’s Population Homeless in 2005 — including 1035 Children

The need for a strong federal policy and funding response to the crisis of homelessness is very apparent in the analysis of the indicators for 2005 in the Report Card on Homelessness. With 8,853 different individuals experiencing homelessness in Ottawa in 2005 in a population of 800,000, this rate is approximately 1% of the population. This is a small increase in homelessness and we are still heading in the wrong direction.

The larger number of people who experienced homelessness in Ottawa in 2005 offsets small gains in the areas of housing and income over the past year. Almost 10,000 households remain on the social housing registry waiting list although there was a reduction of 586 households on the list. Supportive housing can be an important step on the road to full independence and there was an increase in the number of supportive housing units available from 500 to 670. In these projects, on-site assistance is available to the residents. Unfortunately, the waiting list for this type of housing has grown over the last year to more than 2000. There was also a small increase in the number of rent supplements made available for people with severe and persistent mental illness through the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care.

The Federal-Provincial agreements to increase the availability of affordable housing resulted in the building of only 440 units under the Action Ottawa since 2000. In 2005, there were 85 new affordable units built in Ottawa, but only 60% (51) are available to people on the social housing waiting list. There are a further 420 in the pipeline. Also, the City of Ottawa now permits accessory suites throughout the city allowing basement rentals and that could increase the supply of affordable housing. CMHC has reported that rents have eased somewhat leading to a small decline in the vacancy rate as the units are absorbed.

Many who are homeless or at risk of being homeless are dependent on the income support systems (Employment Insurance, Old Age Pensions, Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program) or they work at a low wage job. However, those individuals still spend a significant proportion of their income for market housing in Ottawa.

Community social service agencies in Ottawa have devoted significant effort in assisting the large number of people who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. However to make real headway in decreasing homelessness in our city, a major commitment is needed by senior levels of government in developing more affordable housing, increasing income levels of individuals and families living in poverty, and correcting the tax implications of the last federal budget.

Proposals for the 2006 Federal Budget

- 1. A decision to immediately create a long term, sustainable program that commits Canadian Government support for effective, innovative solutions to homelessness at the local level.**
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**Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Steering Committee
for The Alliance to End Homelessness**
September 5, 2006

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Appendix 1

STEERING COMMITTEE – Alliance to End Homelessness **September 4, 2006**

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