



The Alliance to End Homelessness

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.

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Canadian Programs & Stimulus Measures?

Take actions to keep people housed!

The Alliance to End Homelessness in Ottawa envisions an inclusive community that ensures everyone has an appropriate home: federal measures to ensure prosperity and a sustainable economic, social and environmental future have an essential role in making that vision a reality.

The Alliance to End Homelessness

www.endhomelessnessottawa.ca

August 2009

Submission to the

House of Commons

Standing Committee on Finance

2009 Pre-Budget Consultations

Canadian Programs & Stimulus Measures? **Take actions to keep people housed!**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Alliance to End Homelessness (ATEH) recommends federal action to put in place a new National Housing Strategy that enshrines housing as a human right for everyone. The consequences of Canada's lack of a national strategy is borne out by Ottawa's increasing homeless rate even while Statistics Canada shows a 10.4% increase in the combined housing investments by all orders of government. Only a strong and direct federal role can ensure equal access to affordable housing for all people in Canada no matter their province. ATEH is actively engaged in Ontario's Affordable Housing Consultation but our province's track record in housing calls for direct federal responsibility. For the last five years ATEH has gathered housing and homelessness data that unequivocally demonstrate why Canada needs a comprehensive, coordinated and fully funded housing strategy. ATEH's five-year trend data, reported on in ATEH's *Report Card on Ending Homelessness in Ottawa*, shows that current policies allow communities to continue to maintain their efforts to assist homeless people but do not address the conditions creating homelessness. Of most concern, the data comparing 2008 to 2007 shows an increase in number of individuals using shelters in Ottawa. At 7,045 individuals it is the highest year total to date, due especially to families; the number of homeless people was relatively constant from 2004-2007, ranging from 6,500 to just over 6,700.

ATEH believes that **revamping and better funding of the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) will allow the federal government to invest in developing significantly more new affordable housing** for the majority of those who experience the tragedy of homelessness and will ensure prosperity and a sustainable future for everyone in Canada. We propose that the federal government also use all surpluses created as the federal portion of the existing social housing operating agreements expire over the next 25 years as a cost-effective method. Increasing CMHC's capacity could immediately start to address the urgent need for appropriate, affordable housing for the majority - 79% - of those who were homeless in Ottawa in 2008 when the average length of shelter stay rose to 51 days. Many homeless individuals and families find housing, either on their own or with the assistance housing support staff. The problem our community faces is that new, additional people continue to become homeless due to the lack of new affordable housing stock and high market rents combined with low incomes. The result is three groups each year: new individuals and families falling into homelessness; those who experience it episodically as their circumstances deteriorate (job loss, reduced working hours, rent increases, unexpected expenses like funerals or a long illness); and those who are chronically homeless, only 21% of Ottawa's homeless (defined by our city as in a shelter more than 60 cumulative nights a year and lacking the physical or mental health, the skills or income to access and maintain housing. ATEH also proposes that a **new National Housing Strategy include increased and ongoing funding of the federal homelessness and housing programs.** This enables communities to quickly help people while more housing stock is being created both when they are homeless or when they need assistance to stay housed, with ongoing supports or not. Homelessness funds have been frozen at \$135 million annually for the entire country for the past 10 years. These funds are still being allocated in two or three year periods, a frustrating challenge for communities, and they focus mainly on the needs of chronically homeless people, a potential limit to effective local responses.

ATEH also **urges that part of an effective National Housing Strategy be improvements in the access to and the benefit rates of national income support programs (Employment Insurance, Canadian Pension Plan, Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement) to assist people on low incomes in Ottawa.** Our members recognize that homelessness is the extreme indication of poverty and that affordable housing is fundamental to the success of other poverty measures on income and supports. Clearly, many federal Ministries need to coordinate efforts to address homelessness and poverty. That is why ATEH supports the strong recommendation in the *UN Report of the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing*, "that the right to adequate housing be recognized in federal and provincial legislations as an inherent part of the Canadian legal system."

Stimulus measures are a very important opportunity for Ottawa's homelessness agencies and its non profit housing sector to take on significant projects, but given our experience this spring and summer, more effective stimulus guidelines are definitely required. (1) The benefits of federal stimulus measures should be fair and equal across all communities in Canada. (2) Broader target populations are needed to respond to the needs of homeless families, youth, adult women and adult men and those living on very low incomes and at risk of becoming homeless. (3) *Most importantly,* guidelines need to recognize that non profits require adequate resources and realistic turn-around times for projects as they operate on very tight budgets, especially smaller agencies, and have limited capacity to respond quickly.

Canadian Programs & Stimulus Measures? Take actions to keep people housed!

The Alliance to End Homelessness in Ottawa envisions an inclusive community that ensures everyone has an appropriate home: federal measures to ensure prosperity and a sustainable economic, social and environmental future have an essential role in making that vision a reality.

What do people in Canada need from the federal government?

PROGRAM SPENDING AND HOMELESSNESS

The Alliance to End Homelessness (ATEH) recommends federal action to put in place a new National Housing Strategy that enshrines housing as a human right for everyone. Over the last five years ATEH has gathered housing and homelessness data that demonstrate why Canada needs a housing strategy that is comprehensive, coordinated and fully funded. ATEH sees three programs currently at the heart of federal response to homelessness and housing need: the *Affordable Housing Initiative*, the *Homelessness Partnering Strategy*, and the *Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program*.

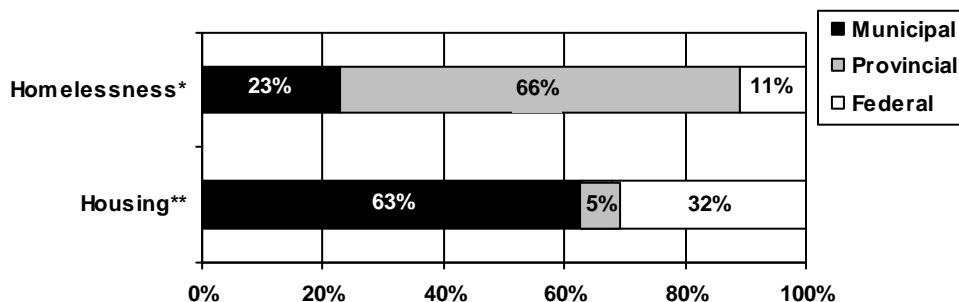
- ATEH believes that revamping the role of the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) will allow the federal government to re-invest in developing significantly more new affordable housing for the majority of those who experience the tragedy of homelessness and ensure prosperity and a sustainable future for everyone in Canada.
 - The benefits of significant investment in affordable housing will be experienced by the diverse sectors involved in developing and maintaining housing; by people who are homeless or at risk of losing their homes; by all Canadian communities that struggle to assist community members in achieving the fundamental stability necessary for meaningful personal and economic civic participation.
- ATEH proposes that an initial cost-effective method for the federal government to fund this program is to use the surpluses created as the federal portion of the existing social housing operating agreements expire the next 25 years.
 - In our community alone, 7,045 individuals were homeless in 2008. Increasing CMHC's capacity could immediately start to address the urgent need for appropriate, affordable housing for the **79%**, or 5,575 individuals, who were homeless for less than 60 days in 2008 (the average length of shelter stay rose to 51 days in Ottawa).
- A National Housing Strategy will need to ensure equal access to affordable housing for all people in Canada no matter their province. The chart below shows the 2008 homelessness and housing expenditure breakdown for Ottawa and highlights our community's challenges.
 - Only 134 new units of affordable housing were built in Ottawa in 2008 after just 74 new units in 2007, reflecting a limited Ontario response on new affordable housing. ATEH members are actively engaged in Ontario's Affordable Housing Consultation but our province has the worst record in Canada when it comes to affordable housing investments. In the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009, Ontario spent \$64 per capita on affordable housing, about half of Canada's provincial average. To make matters worse, Ontario, more than any other Canadian province, has downloaded the cost of affordable housing to our community's local government.

* **Homelessness includes:** emergency shelter per diems, homelessness services (incl. drop-ins and housing loss prevention), Rent Bank, and domiciliary hostels.

** **Housing includes:** new affordable housing, homeownership down payment program, operating subsidies for 56 housing providers (incl. rent subsidies).

Federal, Provincial & Municipal Funding Shares

Homelessness Services and Affordable Housing Programs
City of Ottawa, 2008



CURRENT FEDERAL HOMELESSNESS PROGRAMS

Homelessness funds have been frozen at \$135 million annually for the entire country for the past 10 years and these funds are still being broken down and allocated in two or three periods a continuing challenge to communities' effectiveness. As well, these funds are focused on the needs of chronically homeless people for various forms of housing with supports.

- ATEH recommends that a new National Housing Strategy include increased – *and ongoing* – funding of the federal homelessness and housing programs will enable communities to quickly help people when they are homeless and to provide the assistance some households need to stay housed, whether ongoing supports are involved or not. ATEH recognizes that the best national housing strategy will be built from the community up, allowing communities to address a broad range of needs concurrently to help all who are homeless.
- We ask the committee to be mindful that the 7,045 homeless people in Ottawa's shelters in 2008 were not the same individuals as the 6,572 homeless people as in 2007. Homeless individuals and families do continually find housing, either on their own or with the assistance of effective housing support staff but it is important to remember that staying in a shelter is the end point of a difficult, devastating, crisis for the individual or family. Returning to a stable situation and finding permanent appropriate housing are seldom immediately possible.
 - The problem is that more people keep becoming homeless due to the lack of new affordable housing stock and high market rents combined with low incomes. This means there are three groups each year: new individuals and families falling into homelessness; those who experience it episodically as their circumstances deteriorate; and those who are chronically homeless and need supports to be housed successfully.
 - Some 1,116 households which were at the final stage in the eviction process were helped by 'Housing Loss Prevention' workers in addition to the 7,045 individuals who stayed in an Ottawa emergency shelter in 2008. Those households near eviction – and homelessness – were among the nearly 11,000 renter households helped that year in Ottawa. Shockingly, the number of homeless people is not decreasing in spite of these highly successful efforts! We ask the committee to consider the potential increase in homelessness in our community alone without housing loss prevention efforts – 1,116 households facing eviction = 3,348 individuals or 11,000 households = 33,000 individuals (average Canadian family size is three).
 - At the same time insufficient supportive housing in Ottawa meant that 21% or 1,470 people were chronically homeless in 2008, using the City Of Ottawa's criteria of more than 60 cumulative nights in the past year in an emergency shelter and/or on the street and who have reached the point where they lack the physical or mental health, the skills or income to access and maintain housing (1073 adult male, 277 adult female, 52 young men and 68 young women).

By now we all know homelessness is not free, but Canada is still spending relatively little directly on affordable housing and homelessness compared to the demonstrated need in communities. Personal income taxes underwrite the federal contribution to ending homelessness. Most people were glad to see the federal government extend housing and homelessness programs for five years starting April 2009. In fact, many people joined the Alliance to End homelessness in its efforts to help bring this about.

- ATEH also **urges that part of an effective National Housing Strategy be improvements in the access to and the benefit rates of national income support programs (Employment Insurance, Canadian Pension Plan, Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement) to assist people on low incomes in Ottawa.**
 - Our members recognize that homelessness is the extreme indication of poverty and that affordable housing is fundamental to the success of other poverty measures on income and supports. Clearly many federal Ministries need to coordinate efforts to address poverty and homelessness and this should be reflected in a National Housing Strategy.
 - Anyone working for low wages that loses their job or gets reduced to part-time status runs the risk of losing their housing. Someone working full time at minimum wage has to spend 44% of their income to cover the average cost of \$ 671 for a bachelor apartment in Ottawa.

Thus ATEH supports the *UN Report of the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing*, especially that the strong recommendation "that the right to adequate housing be recognized in federal and provincial legislations as an inherent part of the Canadian legal system." We give priority to the adoption of "a comprehensive and coordinated national housing policy based on indivisibility of human rights and the protection of the most vulnerable. This national strategy should include measurable goals and timetables, consultation and collaboration with affected communities, complaints procedures, and transparent accountability mechanisms." "Reinstating or increasing, where necessary, social housing programmes for those in need, improving and properly enforcing anti-discrimination legislation in the field of housing, increasing shelter allowances and social assistance rates to realistic levels, and providing adequate support services for persons with disabilities." "In order to design efficient policies and programmes, federal, provincial and territorial

authorities should work in close collaboration and coordination and they should commit stable and long-term funding to a comprehensive national housing strategy. Federal, provincial and territorial authorities should also collaborate with authorities that are the closest to the need of the population such as municipal authorities, service providers and civil society organization.”

STIMULUS FUNDING AND HOMELESSNESS AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ottawa’s homelessness agencies and its non profit housing sector are extremely interested in creating more affordable housing by accessing stimulus funds which are a very important opportunity for significant projects in our sector. Given our experience this spring and summer though, more effective guidelines are definitely required.

- To do that, broader target populations are needed to meet the needs of families, youth, adult women and adult men who are homeless or living on very low incomes and at risk of becoming homeless.
- Benefits of federal affordable housing stimulus measures should be fair and equal across all communities in Canada.
- Any federal stimulus funds for housing should recognize the strengths and challenges faced by those at the forefront of increasing affordable housing and addressing homelessness in accessing stimulus funds. Non profits operate on very tight budgets and smaller agencies especially have limits on their capacity to respond quickly.
 - These funds need to provide adequate resources and realistic turn-around times for project development, adequate lead-in time and realistic completion timelines.
 - Agencies and groups in the non profit sector do not have the capacity to develop plans ‘on speculation’ or keep projects on hand in case funds become available. Anyone involved in developing, building or repairs knows that two years is simply not adequate to effectively to prepare and complete projects.

CONCLUSION: OTTAWA’S FIVE YEAR TREND IN ENDING HOMELESSNESS

ATEH was pleased to note that governments at the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal levels across Canada have increased investments in housing by 10.4% in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009 (Statistics Canada) bringing consolidated government investments in housing to almost 1% of overall government spending. Unfortunately, ATEH’s **5 Year Trend Graphs** (next page) with data reported on in *The Report Card on Ending Homelessness in Ottawa* lay bare that current policies of all orders of government allow communities to continue to maintain their current efforts to assist homeless people, but do not address the conditions creating homelessness.

Our data on homelessness and length of shelter stay is gathered using the federal “Homeless Individuals and Families Information System” by the City Of Ottawa. It shows **there was an increase in number of individuals using shelters in Ottawa to 7,045 from 2007 to 2008**, the highest total to date, due especially to families; **the number of homeless people was relatively constant from 2004-2007, ranging from 6,500 to just over 6,700**. Average length of stay in emergency shelters increased to 51 days (53 for families). Demand for Ottawa shelter beds now exceeds our capacity. Along with more effective guidelines for federal stimulus spending, this powerful data reflects the consequences of Canada not having a housing strategy that is comprehensive, coordinated and fully funded and reinforces ATEH’s commitment to our recommendation.

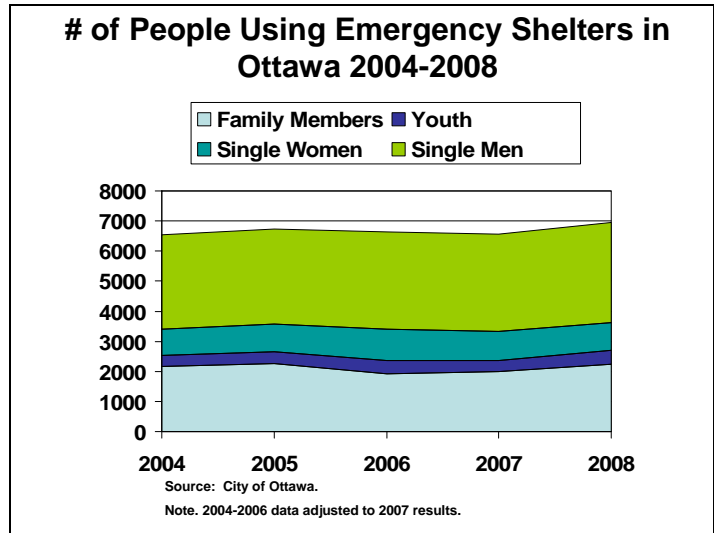
Alliance to End Homelessness Program Recommendation – That the 2009 budget include federal action to put in place a new National Housing Strategy that enshrines housing as a human right for everyone. The strategy should include a re-vamped role for CMHC and a re-investment of federal social housing surpluses as operating agreements expire. **The new strategy should also include: increased and ongoing funding of the federal homelessness and housing programs** to enable communities to quickly help people when they are homeless and to provide the assistance some households need to stay housed, whether ongoing supports are involved or not; and **improvements in the access to and the benefit rates of national income support programs** (Employment Insurance, Canadian Pension Plan, Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement) for people on low incomes.

Changes and more effective Guidelines for Stimulus Measures: Benefits of federal stimulus measures should be fair and equal across all communities in Canada. Broader target populations for affordable housing are needed to meet the needs of homeless families, youth, adult women and adult men and those living on very low incomes and at risk of becoming homeless. *Most importantly*, adequate resources and realistic turn-around times are required to recognize the strengths and challenges faced by non profits at the forefront of increasing affordable housing and addressing homelessness.

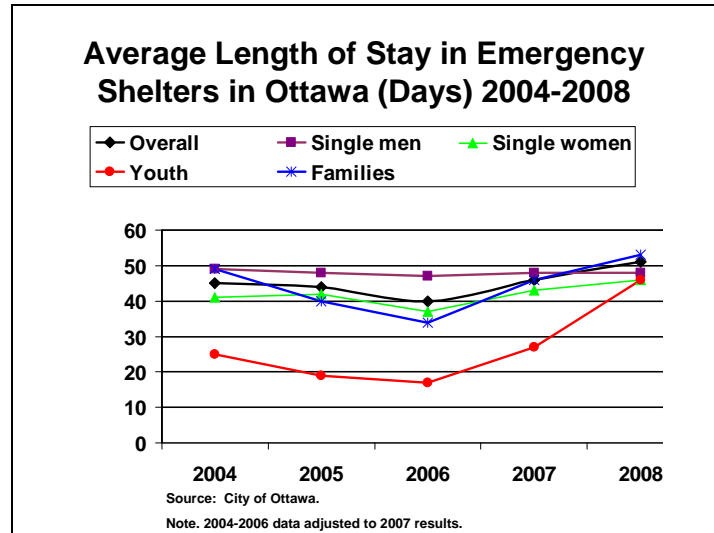
5 Year Trend Graphs: Homelessness in Ottawa, 2004-2008

Report Card on Ending Homelessness in Ottawa, Alliance to End Homelessness

There has been an increase in number of individuals using shelters from 2007 to 2008 to 7,045, the highest total to date in the five years of collecting data, due especially to families (the number of people was relatively constant from 2004-2007, ranging from 6,500 to just over 6,700).



The average length of stay in shelters increased from 2006 to 2008 to the point where the shelter stay in 2008 is the highest of the five-year period (2004 -2008) for which we have data. There were initial decreases from 2004 to 2006.



The total number of shelter beds used reflects a combination of the number of different individuals using shelter and the average length of stay.

From 2004-2006 there was relative stability followed by increases in 2007 and 2008.

Over the five year period the greatest use was in 2008, reflecting the need for more than 1,000 beds per night (only 966 beds are available).

