



MEDIA RELEASE

November 14, 2019

Homelessness is the number one issue of concern as Housing Access Worsens in Ottawa *Governments urged to work together as Ottawa Mission releases major report with recommendations and Nanos Research public opinion poll on homelessness*

Ottawa, ON – With bitter temperatures and a colder than normal winter forecast, The Ottawa Mission is urging governments at all levels to work together to address the worsening situation concerning homelessness in Ottawa and nationally. This comes as a new public opinion poll by Nanos Research indicates significant concern about the impact of homelessness both in Ottawa and nationally, and a strong desire for governments to work with other stakeholders towards solutions.

“We know that when people have access to stable, safe and affordable housing, this allows them to focus on other aspects of their lives,” stated Councillor Catherine McKenney, Special Liaison for Housing and Homelessness on Ottawa City Council. “Unfortunately, homelessness in Ottawa has gotten worse, not better, and we have reached a crisis point in the availability of affordable housing and also homelessness.”

Ottawa Mission CEO Peter Tilley noted the City’s mid-point review of 10-Year Plan, which shows that the wait list for affordable housing increased by 14.8% to over 12,100 households, and emergency shelter use increased by 6.5% in the past year. “If the goal was to reduce shelter use by 40%, the number of shelter users should now be 5,150, declining to 3,862 people by 2023. Instead, the number is almost 8,000,” Tilley noted.

Nanos Research President Nik Nanos noted the seriousness with which poll respondents viewed the impact of homelessness on people they care about, individuals who are homeless, and our country as a whole. “Almost 50% of Ottawa residents say that the people they care about face a risk of being homeless. Over 90% of Ottawa residents say that homelessness in Canada has a serious or somewhat serious impact on the individuals affected. Almost 90% of Ottawa residents say homelessness has a serious or somewhat serious impact on Canada as a country.”

Nanos noted the desire of respondents for governments to work together with other stakeholders to reduce homelessness. “15% each of respondents think that the federal government and the municipal government should be most responsible for homelessness, while 13% indicate the provincial government. 38% said that all levels of governments are responsible along with other stakeholders. Furthermore, respondents said that housing/homelessness is the most important issue of concern to them at the municipal level, with 29% of respondents’ choosing this option,” Nanos added. The environment, policing, road maintenance and the LRT followed at 24.7%, 19.6%, 12.5%, and 11.1% respectively.

“We appreciate the allocation of \$15M within the draft 2020 City of Ottawa budget, but this is not enough. Given the gravity and urgency of this crisis, the provincial and federal governments must also be involved now given the limited ability of the city to raise funds for homelessness,” Tilley added.

Tilley noted the challenges imposed by the high rate of homelessness in Ottawa, including:

- Being at over 100% capacity for more than 2 years, and having to lay down mats in its chapel almost every night to provide more bedding.
- Dealing with very high rates of food insecurity. Last year, the Mission served over 495,000 meals. Based on trends for this year, it will serve well over half a million meals through its community meal program.

- Huge increases of 74% for patient consults within the Mission’s primary health clinic for vulnerable people who would otherwise face barriers to care.

The Mission has introduced measures to address these challenges, including:

- Creating a new Department of Housing to increase housing placement, diversion and retention. First quarter results are encouraging: diversions have increased by 20% and housing placement by 43%.
- Expanding its Food Services Training Program to support more people in reaching employment. This program has a success rate of 95% in students finding employment within the industry.
- Expanding existing primary care service provision and introducing new services such as clinics for diabetes and women’s health to keep vulnerable people as healthy as possible.

“As we consider the update to the City’s 10-year Plan, we must establish bold targets supported by achievable actions to end homelessness. I’m pleased that the recommendations for action by the Ottawa Mission are in sync with those that I’m advocating for as Special Liaison,” noted McKenney.

The Ottawa Mission is recommending that all levels of government involved in:

- Adequate funding of affordable housing units and organizations within the homelessness continuum to support people on their journey out of homelessness.
- Expanding rental supplements and housing allowances to enable vulnerable community members to obtain and maintain housing;
- Intensive case management to prevent housing loss and place people into appropriate housing quickly.
- A strong inclusionary zoning policy to ensure affordable housing units in new developments.
- Measures to address the root causes of homelessness, such as poverty reduction and supports for people with physical or mental health conditions.
- Public education to broaden public awareness and understanding of the root causes of homelessness.

“We have to do better. At least 235,000 people are homeless nationally and almost 8,000 in Ottawa. The City is currently reviewing its plan; its original assumptions, goals and targets must be considered carefully and adjusted so that strides are made in reducing homelessness in our community. The provincial and federal government must also ensure meaningful support in reducing homelessness along with the municipal government. We cannot afford another course correction five years down the road,” Tilley concluded.

About The Ottawa Mission

Since 1906, The Ottawa Mission has been serving the homeless, the hungry and the lost by providing food, clothing, shelter and hope. In 2018 - 2019, The Ottawa Mission provided emergency shelter to an average of 195 men every night and served an average of 1,358 meals every day. The Ottawa Mission also provides health services, mental health and addiction treatment programs, hospice care, dental services, educational support, job training, spiritual care, and men’s clothing to thousands in need in our community.

Methodology: Nanos conducted an RDD dual frame (land- and cell-lines) random telephone survey of 801 City of Ottawa residents, 18 years of age or older, between October 22nd and November 1st, 2019. Participants were randomly recruited by telephone using live agents and administered a survey. The margin of error for this survey is ±3.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The research was commissioned by Ottawa Mission and was conducted by Nanos Research.

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