

Homelessness in Ottawa and across our province and country has reached epidemic levels. In January 2020, Ottawa City Council declared a homelessness emergency. Since then, while homelessness has marginally declined, it remains higher than it was in 2014.¹ And homelessness continues to disproportionately affect those who are especially vulnerable. This toolkit is designed to help advocates advance urgently needed solutions at the municipal, provincial and federal levels.

Increase the supply of affordable and supportive housing



PROVINCIAL/MUNICIPAL

Ban “demovictions”.

Replace lost units, support tenant relocation to similar units and rents in their neighbourhoods, offer temporary accommodation and rent top-ups during construction, and provide 4 months’ notice.

Increase affordable housing through inclusionary zoning.

Adopt Montreal’s 20/20/20 bylaw requiring developers to set aside new housing units for social housing, affordable housing, and family units.

FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL/MUNICIPAL

Increase public acquisition of private market housing supply.

Support community-based acquisition of affordable rental housing through land trusts, dedicated funding, and other mechanisms.

Convert unused buildings into housing.

Provide grants, tax credits and zoning changes to convert unused commercial and office space into safe and affordable housing.

Increase new builds of supportive housing.

Increase funding allocations for new affordable housing and make it easier for non-profit housing providers to access grants for new builds.

Prevent people from becoming homeless



PROVINCIAL/MUNICIPAL

Increase rent supplements, portable housing benefits, and rents geared to income.

Divert monies spent on providing housing in offsite motels and change provincial-municipal funding arrangements to support such measures.

Increase support for assistance with arrears.

Create a municipal rent bank in Ottawa and expand current emergency provincial assistance to provide interest-free assistance with arrears.

Increase support for rent and security deposits.

Through the rent bank, increase access to interest-free rent and security deposits to remove barriers to tenants.

Ban “renovictions”.

Adopt New Westminster’s bylaw requiring landlords to provide tenants with temporary accommodation and allowing them to return to renovated units on the same terms.

PROVINCIAL

Ban evictions related to COVID-19.

Reimpose the ban on Covid-19 related evictions to allow tenants who have rental arrears to access interest-free loans to pay these arrears.

Increase social supports for people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness



PROVINCIAL

Increase support for education assistance.

Remove barriers to education by providing free support so vulnerable people may pursue their goals such as high school and college graduation.

Increase support for job training.

Remove barriers to training by providing free support so vulnerable people may pursue their employment goals and live independently.

Increase support to address mental health conditions.

Remove barriers to treatments for mental health conditions so vulnerable people may move forward toward wellness, wholeness and independence.

Increase support to address problematic substance use.

Remove barriers to treatments for problematic substance use to address trauma, reduce the risk of relapse, and support the journey to recovery.

FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL

Enact a basic income program.

Implement a basic income program based on the Parliamentary Budget Officer’s analysis of Ontario’s 2017 program to reduce poverty as a primary risk factor for homelessness.

1. The date of Ottawa City Council’s first 10-year housing and homelessness plan.

Address structural barriers to assistance



PROVINCIAL/MUNICIPAL

Move toward a coordinated access system for the homelessness continuum.

Remove barriers to accessing help for vulnerable people by streamlining the process to connect them to housing and supports based on their preferences and need.

Increase partnerships with related service providers.

As part of coordinated access, increase partnerships with homelessness service providers through incorporating them in decision-making, oversight, guidance, monitoring and evaluation.

Close gaps in organizational discharge planning.

As part of coordinated access, ensure that partnerships include hospitals, corrections, child care protection, etc., to ensure that clients don't fall into homelessness upon release.

FEDERAL/MUNICIPAL

Challenge stigma concerning homelessness.

Promote public awareness and understanding through regular public education campaigns concerning why people may become homeless.

Increase accountability and transparency through regular reporting.

Promote accountability and transparency through real-time data on homelessness and annual reports on homelessness, including outcomes.

Prioritize populations most at risk of homelessness



FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL/MUNICIPAL

Those who are chronically homeless.

Put measures in place to ensure "functional zero homelessness" which is as brief as possible with the supports to make a return to homelessness unlikely.

Those with physical or mental health conditions, or addictions.

Expand supportive housing with individualized case management and programs for people who are especially vulnerable.

Those who are fleeing violence.

Expand emergency, transitional and permanent housing options for those fleeing violence, including women, immigrants and refugees, youth, people with disabilities, people who are GLBTQ2I+, and others.

Those who are Indigenous, racialized and GLBTQ2I+.

Expand emergency, transitional and permanent housing options for those with unique cultural needs to ensure they feel welcome, safe and accepted.

Those who live in a family group.

Expand emergency, transitional and permanent housing options for families experiencing homelessness to ensure they feel safe, cared for, and supported.

When engaging with candidates, elected officials and government representatives



DO

Always be non-partisan



Prepare yourself on the issues beforehand



Keep your communication in writing or in person to the point, stick to the facts and underline why the issue is important to you. Offer a personal example you feel comfortable sharing it, e.g., if you were homeless once or someone you cared about was. If you live in the candidate's or elected official's riding or ward, note this. Be courteous. After your communication, send a message of thanks for the opportunity to convey your thoughts.



DON'T

Advocate for any political party.



Request actions that are outside their jurisdiction or scope.



If they don't agree with you, become upset. Instead, reiterate your original points and thank them for the opportunity to convey your views.



A CALL TO ACTION

If you care about homelessness and believe everyone should have a safe, decent and affordable home, let your municipal, provincial and federal officials know by:

Becoming informed about issues concerning homelessness.

Contacting your representatives to outline your concerns.

Participating in election campaigns by attending debates and talking to candidates directly.