



NO MORE WAITING:

A Call to Action Against Homelessness and Food Insecurity

 Support The Ottawa Mission

We have reached a tipping point where housing precarity and food insecurity are now so severe that the lives of millions of people across Canada are compromised by these conjoined factors.

Despite the *National Housing Strategy* commitment to housing as a human right, encampments have expanded in the wake of the pandemic and skyrocketing rents. Affordable housing continues to disappear due to the withdrawal of government funding for housing over decades and the privatization of the housing market. Although governments have returned to investing in housing, much ground has been lost, with many people at risk of losing their homes due to renovations, demovictions, and other factors focusing on profit rather than public need.

Food insecurity, which often accompanies housing precarity since many people must choose between feeding their families or paying their rent, is so pronounced that more people are forced to rely on food supports to survive. Across Ottawa, more than one million meals were served by The Ottawa Mission in 2022–2023, and across Canada, almost seven million people are food insecure. While access to food was identified as part of the federal poverty reduction strategy to ensure “dignity”, one in five Canadians went hungry in 2022 due to not having enough money for food.

In addition to housing costs, food insecurity is fueled by food inflation and inadequate minimum wage and social assistance levels. While this “housing-food insecurity nexus” affects many people, vulnerable populations are at particular risk due to poverty, unemployment, underemployment, work in low-wage positions, and discrimination.

Food insecurity and homelessness are also linked to negative health impacts on those experiencing them, and compromised sustainability of Canada’s healthcare system, which has been strained by the pandemic.

In 2023, Canada saw significant increases in asylum seekers arriving at emergency shelters without increased government support to meet their needs. At The Mission, which remains at over 100% capacity, clients sleep on chairs in its lounge as they wait for a bed. This situation has also impacted the shelter’s meal program, clothing room, housing case managers, and other staff. While the federal government has provided additional support to the City of Toronto concerning asylum seekers, thus far, the City of Ottawa has received none.

The housing-food insecurity nexus is the result of policy choices that regard housing and food as for-profit commodities without sufficient provision for them as human needs and rights.

All governments have a role to play in addressing the housing-food insecurity nexus.

We call upon the government of Canada to:

- ↳ **End the distinction between refugee claimants and asylum seekers** by establishing welcome centres to support new arrivals, and flow additional funds to Ottawa and other cities to support newcomers.
- ↳ **Implement a *Homelessness Prevention and Housing Benefit*** to support up to 385,000 households at risk of homelessness, help over 50,000 people leave homelessness, and reduce pressure on Canada's homelessness systems.
- ↳ **Implement all recommendations from the Federal Advocate on encampments** through launching a *National Encampments Response Plan* by August 31 to save lives.
- ↳ **Implement all recommendations from the Auditor General of Canada's 2022 report on the *National Housing Strategy*.**
- ↳ **Implement a grocer's code of conduct** to ensure transparency and fairness in food prices, and further measures in addition to its recently announced school food policy to address food insecurity in children.

We call upon the government of Ontario to:

- ↳ **Implement all recommendations from the Auditor General of Ontario's 2021 audit of homelessness programs.**
- ↳ **Address the erosion of affordable housing by reintroducing rent controls** to buildings erected after November 2018, increasing the *Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit* and making it permanent, clarifying the *Residential Tenancies Act* to support municipal bylaws to prohibit bad faith renovations, and ensuring increases to Ottawa's share of the *Homelessness Prevention Program* appropriate to the need.
- ↳ **Address inadequate incomes for vulnerable Ontarians** by increasing social assistance rates to enable vulnerable Ontarians to live with dignity and security as well as the provincial minimum wage to enable earners to meet their expenses without having to work multiple positions.

We call upon the municipal government to:

- ↳ **Implement the recommendations from the 2024 City of Ottawa's Auditor General's report on the City's *Ten-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan*.**



We call upon the federal, provincial and territorial governments to:

- ↳ **Collaborate to explore options for a pan-Canadian *Basic Income Program*** with emphasis on those populations especially vulnerable to food insecurity and homelessness.
- ↳ **Establish a pan-Canadian information system** to determine accurate information of homeless community members who are street-involved.
- ↳ **Establish a pan-Canadian registry of encampments**, including the numbers of people who live in them, critical incidents such as fires, and deaths.