

NO MORE WAITING:

*A Call to Action
Against Homelessness
and Food Insecurity*



It's too bad that there's not more places like this. Programs like ODSP aren't enough for people to afford their own place.

I feel very fortunate to be here.

“

SHAUN,
who lives in an Ottawa Mission
rent-g geared-to-income apartment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We have reached a tipping point in Ottawa, our province and our country where housing precarity and food insecurity are now so severe that the lives of millions of people 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 successive decades and the gradual privatization of the housing market. **Although governments are now returning to investing in affordable housing, much ground has been lost, with many people at risk of losing their homes** due to the lifting of rent controls, renovictions, demovictions, and other factors focusing on profit rather than public need.

Food insecurity, which often accompanies housing precarity since increasing numbers of people must choose between feeding their families or paying their rent, is so pronounced that many people are forced to rely on emergency food supports to survive. Across Ottawa, more than one million meals were served to community members by The Ottawa Mission in 2022–2023, and across Canada, almost seven million people are food insecure. While the federal government has identified access to food as part of its poverty reduction strategy to ensure “dignity”, one out of 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 as well as inadequate minimum wages and public income supports such as social assistance and other programs. While this “housing-food insecurity nexus” affects many people, vulnerable populations are at particular risk due to poverty associated with unemployment, underemployment, work in low-wage positions, as well as discrimination based on personal background, and other factors.

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

In 2023, Canada saw a significant increase in the arrival of numerous asylum seekers at emergency shelters in Ottawa and other Canadian cities without increased government support to meet their basic needs. At The Ottawa Mission, which remains at over 100% capacity, now clients sleep on chairs in its lounge overnight as they wait for a bed. The arrival of asylum seekers also has impacted the shelter's meal program, clothing room, housing case managers, and other staff. This influx has placed an extraordinary strain on the homelessness continuum and is not sustainable. 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 made under economic and political systems that regard housing and food largely as for-profit commodities without sufficient provision for them as basic 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:

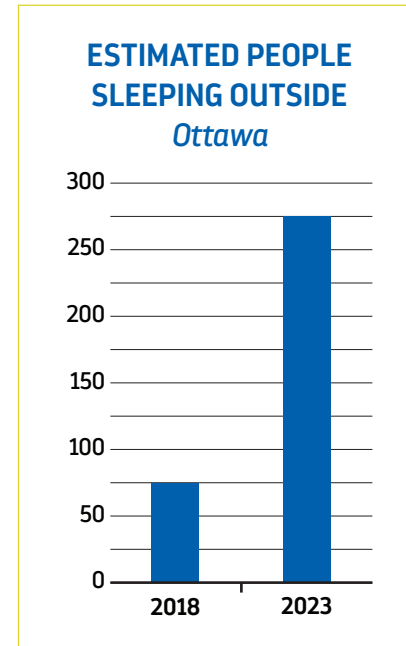
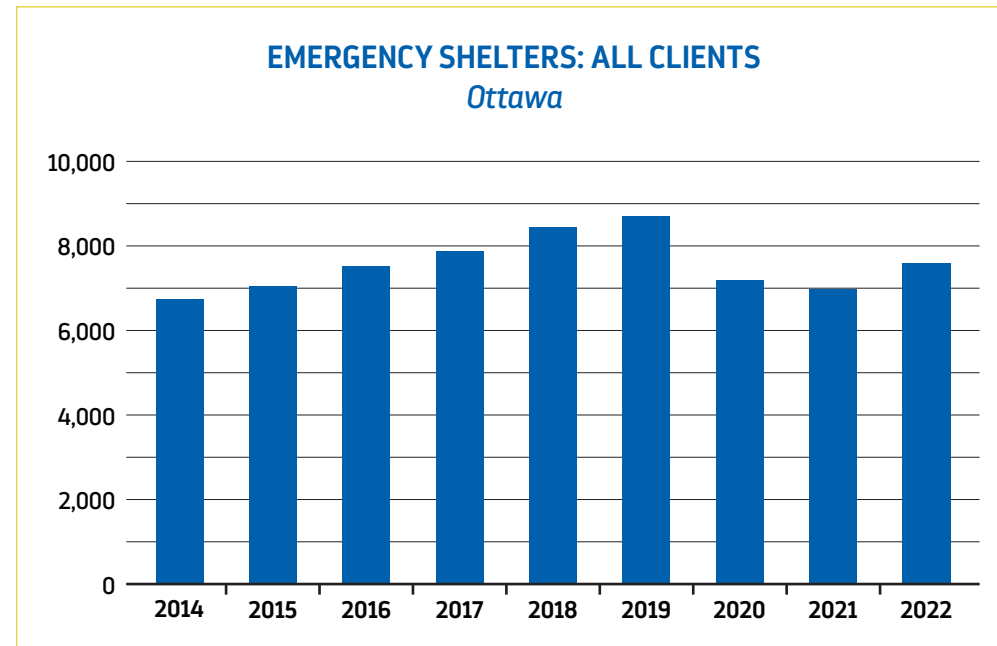
- ↳ **Implement the recommendations from the 2024 City of Ottawa's Auditor General's report on the City's Ten-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan.**

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.

INTRODUCTION

Canada, despite its status as one of the wealthiest countries in the world, has 260,000–300,000 people who experience homelessness each year — an increase of about 30% since before the pandemic¹ and one of the highest rates amongst OECD countries.² As homelessness has worsened in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the erosion of affordable housing and double digit rent increases, encampments have increased across the country. This prompted a review by the *Federal Housing Advocate*, who determined that 20–25% of homeless people across the country live in encampments, which are not a safe or sustainable solution for housing.³



The City of Ottawa declared a homelessness emergency in 2020 and also released its refreshed *10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan*.⁴ While shelter occupancy declined in 2020 and 2021, it rose again in 2022, and by 2023, all shelters in Ottawa were once again at over 100% capacity.⁵

Municipalities receive just 10% of the taxes paid by Canadians, while the other 90% goes to the federal and provincial governments.⁶ The City of Ottawa set ambitious targets within its refreshed 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan released in 2020, but without needed federal and provincial support, was unable to meet these objectives. In its 2024 budget, the City of Ottawa doubled its spending for new affordable housing from \$15 to \$30 million, a move The Ottawa Mission applauds. But the City will still need support from both the federal and provincial governments to actualize its objectives under the Plan.⁷

Even more alarming are the estimates of people living outside, which have quadrupled from 72 in 2018⁸ to 275 in the fall of 2023, prompting the city to form an emergency shelter task force in October 2023 to ensure that no one sleeps outside this winter.⁹ Encampments are spreading across Ottawa, and the number of fires at these sites has risen from eight in 2022 to 19 in 2023.¹⁰

Food insecurity, which often accompanies housing precarity, has also surged as the high cost of food and housing continues. In Ontario, 2.8 million people are food insecure; almost 700,000 children in the province live in a food-insecure household.¹¹ From 2021–2022, food insecurity in the ten provinces rose from 15.9% to 17.8% totaling 6.9 million people.¹² Almost 1.8 million children across Canada’s provinces lived in food-insecure households, an increase from almost 1.4 million in 2021.¹³

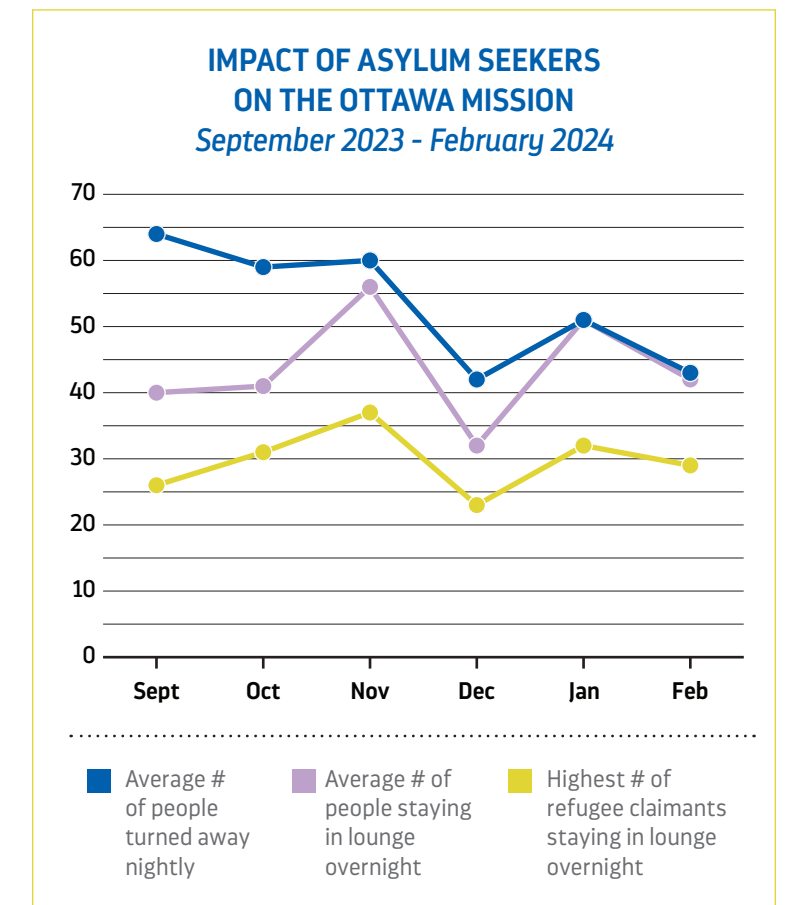
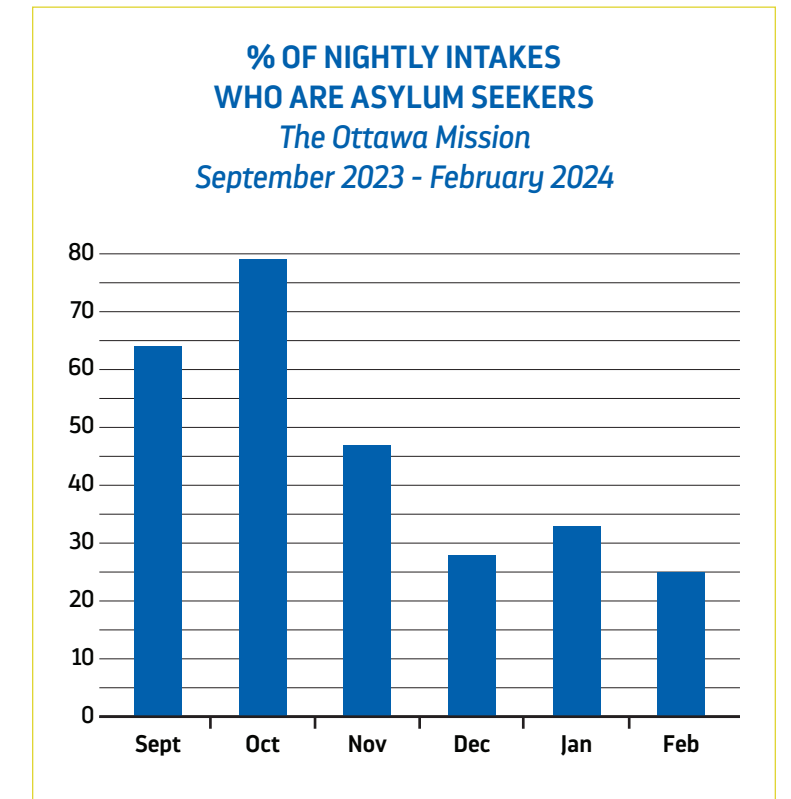
Despite a high after-tax household income,¹⁴ food insecurity in Ottawa has reached catastrophic levels. One in seven households (14.8%) is food insecure.¹⁵ In November 2023, the Ottawa Food Bank reported that visits surged by 22% from 2022 to 493,951, the highest increase ever recorded.¹⁶

The shocking acceleration of homelessness and food insecurity is starkly illustrated at The Ottawa Mission. Before the pandemic, the shelter was at over 100% capacity and laid down mats on its chapel floor so people were not turned away. During the pandemic, occupancy fell to less than 100% capacity, as some clients were diverted to *Physical Distancing Centres*. Although it was very difficult to find permanent housing for clients during the pandemic, the shelter nonetheless placed 424 clients into housing from 2019–2023. As affordable housing continued to erode, the shelter returned to overcapacity (105%) in 2022–2023.¹⁷

In June 2023, numerous asylum seekers began arriving at the shelter, pushing its overoccupancy levels even higher, leaving The Mission no choice but to have dozens of people stay on chairs in its lounge overnight each night and turn others away to alternate accommodation.¹⁸

While numbers have moderated somewhat for asylum seekers arriving at The Mission since December, it is too soon to tell if this is a temporary reduction or longer-term trend. While the numbers are somewhat better, the shelter is still placing people in its lounge and turning others away due to a lack of available beds, and these numbers are not sustainable.

As of January 18, 2024, the City of Ottawa estimated that 190 people remained unsheltered.¹⁹





The Ottawa Mission food truck outside partner organization Centre 507, December 2020

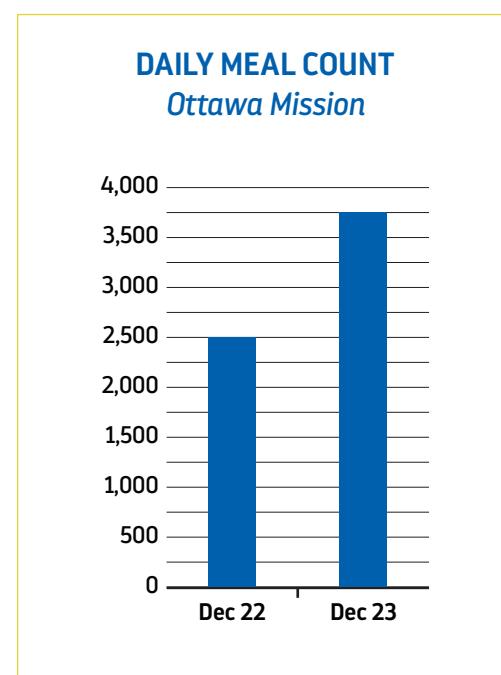
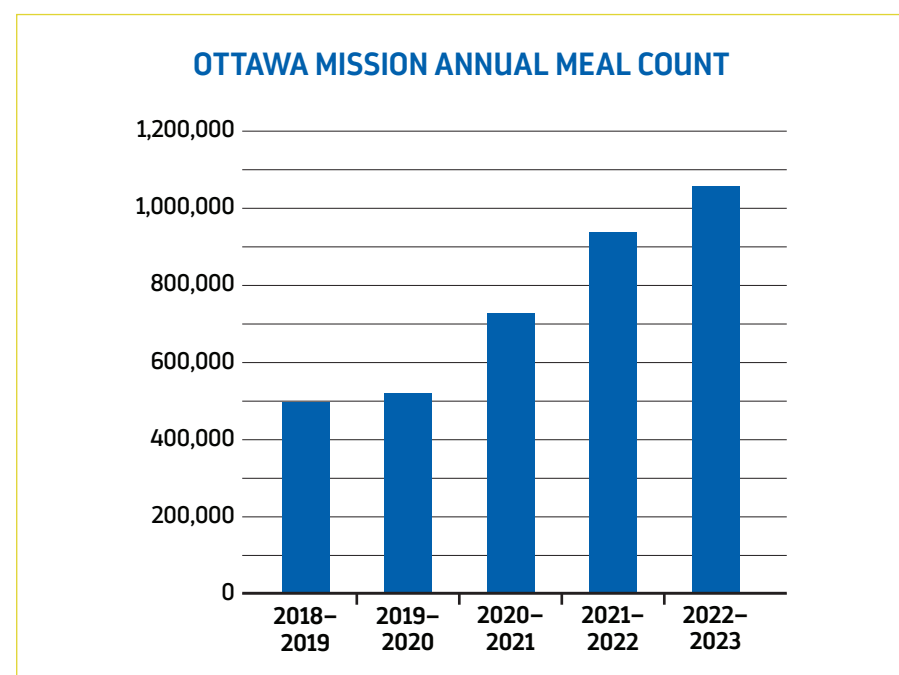


"After rent and other expenses are paid, for people who are on ODSP (disability) or other public programs, there's not a lot left. That's why this truck is so needed."
Ron, food truck client, 2021



In April 2022, in response to ever-increasing need, The Mission added another truck and more stops to its food truck program.

Concomitantly, The Mission's annual number of meals skyrocketed over the pandemic to more than one million meals in 2022–2023. **The shelter's food truck program — which began as a pandemic response — has grown from one truck, five stops and 500 meals per week in 2020 to now two trucks, 35 stops across Ottawa and more than 7,000 meals per week served to vulnerable people, including children, across Ottawa.**²⁰ Average daily meal numbers are even higher now due to unabated community hunger as well as increased occupancy levels at the shelter.



The influx of asylum seekers has also impacted The Mission's clothing room operations, doubling the need to provide warm winter clothing and footwear to vulnerable community members. For example, **the number of winter coats and boots provided to asylum seekers doubled from November 2022 to November 2023.**²¹

The arrival of asylum seekers has meant significant impacts on frontline and emergency services, meal services, clothing room operations, and other shelter programs. The shelter is grateful for the support of the community and the City of Ottawa to meet these needs, but the continuing need among asylum seekers is not sustainable and support from other levels of government is urgently required for our community.

Homelessness and food insecurity often accompany each other since a primary reason for utilizing hunger relief services such as food banks and meal services is the cost of housing and lack of affordable housing. For example:

- ↳ Housing costs (in addition to food costs, low wages and not enough hours of work) is noted as a main reason why there were almost two million visits to food banks in 2023 — a 32.1% increase from 2022, and the highest yearly increase ever reported. Food bank visits by children comprise 33% of total visits.²²
- ↳ In Ontario, from 2022–2023, over 800,000 people accessed a food bank in Ontario, visiting nearly 5.9 million times. They represent increases of 38% and 36% respectively over the previous year, and the largest yearly increases ever recorded. Two out of five visitors had never accessed a food bank before, an increase of 41% in new food bank users.²³ A failure to invest in affordable and supportive housing was noted as a “longstanding driver” of food bank use. **“The lack of affordable housing continues to be a significant driver of food bank use as more Ontarians are faced with housing costs that require the majority of, or even exceed, their monthly income... two thirds of food bank visitors have less than \$100 left each month after paying for housing.”**²⁴

This confluence of food insecurity and the risk of homelessness has been called the “housing-food insecurity nexus,” or concurrence of food and housing insecurity within the context of public policy decisions that render access to housing and food unaffordable.²⁵

Homelessness and food insecurity affect many Canadians, negatively impacting their physical health, mental health and human dignity. These conditions also cost governments (and, by extension, taxpayers) given the increased demand for emergency shelter, healthcare, corrections, and emergency response.

This report will examine the impacts of food insecurity and homelessness and offer recommendations to all levels of government to ameliorate current shocking levels of homelessness and food insecurity locally, provincially and nationally. It will also discuss homelessness and food insecurity resulting from policy choices made under economic and political systems that regard housing and food largely as for-profit commodities without sufficient provision for their provision as a basic human need and right, and the impacts of these choices. Finally, we will offer recommendations to municipal, provincial and federal governments to alleviate both conditions.

WHAT CAUSES HOMELESSNESS AND FOOD INSECURITY

What do we mean by food insecurity?

Food insecurity is defined as the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or sufficient quantity of food, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.²⁶

While food insecurity and hunger are linked, they are also distinct from one another. Access to emergency food distribution does not make an individual food secure²⁷ because only a limited number of food insecure households access food support programs such as food banks.

Reasons for not accessing food banks may include:

- ↳ a lack of knowledge of or access to food banks;
- ↳ difficulty in getting to food banks; or
- ↳ accessing food banks as a last resort and managing through other strategies, e.g., delaying or missing bill or rent payments, asking for help from family members, friends or organizations, or selling or pawning possessions.²⁸

Although many households are food insecure, they nonetheless often go without food supports, thus incurring the adverse physical and mental health conditions associated with hunger.²⁹

What do we mean by homelessness?

Accordingly to the Ottawa 2021 *Point-in-Time Count*, homelessness can take many forms, including:

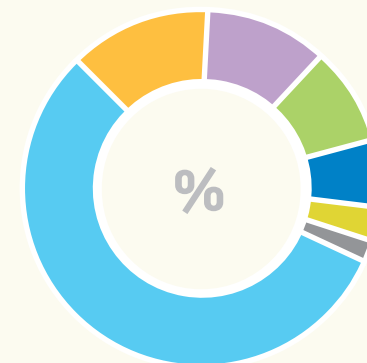
- ↳ **emergency shelters**
(including overcapacity arrangements)
- ↳ **transitional housing**
(temporary housing between homelessness and permanent housing)
- ↳ **staying in someone else's home**
- ↳ **treatment centres, hospitals or corrections**
(no fixed address)
- ↳ **encampments**
(e.g., groups of unhoused individuals living in tents)
- ↳ **living in insecure and unsafe environments**
(e.g., on the street, in a car, or elsewhere)³⁰

While the majority of people stay in emergency shelters, many people stay elsewhere. The reason most often noted for housing loss is not enough income (26%), followed by substance use (16%), conflict with a landlord (13%), conflict with a spouse or partner (12%), and unfit or unsafe housing (10%).³¹ Given the duration of the pandemic and associated job loss,^{32, 33, 34} personal and business bankruptcies,³⁵ mental health distress,³⁶ high inflation,^{37, 38} as well as more recent estimates by the City of Ottawa and the Federal Advocate for Housing concerning the number of people living on the street or in encampments these numbers are no doubt higher now since the 2021 PiT count.



During the pandemic, The Mission changed its community meal program to a take-out service to ensure that its clients did not go hungry.

2021 POINT-IN-TIME COUNT FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS IN OTTAWA



- 55 | emergency shelters
- 13 | transitional housing
- 11 | staying at someone's home
- 9 | street
- 6 | no fixed address
- 3 | not sure
- 2 | encampments

Pay the rent or feed the kids: Who is food-insecure and homeless and why.

While anyone can become homeless or food insecure, some populations have higher rates of these conditions. Increasingly, more people — including those who derive their income through employment (10% of people who live in Ottawa's emergency shelters are employed³⁹) — who have never had to worry about being without a home or food now find themselves needing support. The degradation of income levels (through inadequate levels for minimum wages and income support payments) is another reason why so many people are caught in the "housing-food security nexus" along with high housing costs. They are the result of public policy choices that commodify housing and food, and promote austerity regardless of increased need.⁴⁰

While increasing numbers of people have become homeless and food insecure, certain groups (those who are Indigenous and racialized, those who rent instead of own their accommodation, those who live with a disability, those who are female, etc.) have higher rates of each due to several factors,⁴¹ a number of which we will expand upon.

The impact of poverty.

Food insecurity and homelessness are tied to poverty, defined as the inability to afford "the cost of a specific basket of goods and services in their community, after adjusting for family size. The basket represents a modest, basic standard of living. It includes the costs of food, clothing and footwear, transportation, shelter and other expenses for a reference family."⁴² One of the most comprehensive approaches to ending each is alleviating poverty. Despite significant overall declines in poverty from 2015–2020, poverty rates for some populations remain above the average due to continuing levels of unemployment, underemployment, work in low-wage positions, continuing inadequate levels of both income support and also minimum wage levels, various forms of discrimination based on personal background, and other factors.⁴³ For example →

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

There is a strong link between unemployment and poverty given that those who experience unemployment have a higher risk of material deprivation due to the loss of income and work-related benefits.^{44, 45}

The unemployment rate for people with disabilities aged 16–64 is almost twice the rate than for those without disabilities. Median hourly wages for persons with disabilities are 5.5% less than for those without disabilities. **Persons with disabilities are employed at lower rates than those without disabilities due to several factors, including lack of accommodation and workplace discrimination.**^{46, 47}

RACIALIZED PEOPLES.

Poverty persists among some racialized Canadians from the first generation to the third generation or more.⁴⁸

Racialized workers in Ontario are more likely to work in low-wage occupations than non-racialized workers.

People who identified as Black had higher labour force participation rates than non-racialized workers, but their unemployment rates and wage gaps were also larger than the average for all racialized workers.⁴⁹ Poverty is particularly severe for newcomers and refugee claimants and asylum seekers to Canada: 34% are estimated to live in poverty.⁵⁰ The findings of an analysis concluded that Ontario's labour market *"is not equally welcoming to all immigrants. They also indicate that differences in immigrants' outcomes are not based only on education levels and language skills, but also on racialization."*⁵¹

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES.

While 13% of Canada's non-Indigenous population lives in poverty, about 25% of Indigenous peoples in urban areas live in poverty.^{52, 53} The situation is more dire on reserves: 53% of Status First Nations children on reserves live in poverty compared to 41% who live off reserve.⁵⁴ **Indigenous Peoples face barriers to employment, including barriers to education, cultural differences, racism, discrimination and stereotyping, poor housing, lack of transportation and lack of child care.**⁵⁵

WOMEN.

The overall rate of poverty for women and girls has fallen from 14.8% in 2014 to 7.7% in 2021. However, **disproportionate rates of poverty nonetheless still exist for women who are Indigenous** (13.7% for those living off reserve; those living on reserve were not surveyed), **immigrants** (8.4%), **those with disabilities** (11%), **one-parent households headed by women** (17.2%), **and those who are unattached** (22.2%).⁵⁶ Women who are primary caregivers (e.g., heads of single parent households) and lower wage earners (e.g., immigrant women)⁵⁷ may be unable to leave situations involving intimate partner violence or economic abuse.⁵⁸ Women who are mothers are also more vulnerable to food insecurity by skipping meals as one way to avoid eviction so that other household members can eat.⁵⁹

GENDER AND SEXUAL MINORITIES.

Gender and sexual minorities are more likely than cisgendered, heterosexual people to live in poverty⁶⁰ and experience discrimination in the workplace.

Partnered gay men earn approximately 5% less than heterosexual men and some employers discriminate in the hiring process, preferring to hire heterosexual applicants over gay men and lesbians. Trans people are particularly vulnerable to workplace discrimination and a high risk of unemployment and underemployment.⁶¹

In Ottawa, 11% of shelter guests identify as a gender or sexual minority, and 27% of these respondents are under 25 years old,⁶² mirroring national trends of overrepresentation of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth homelessness.

PEOPLE ON INCOME SUPPORT.

Analysis of welfare incomes across Canada shows that while 54% of households saw their total incomes nominally increase between 2021 and 2022, those increases were at rates below the 6.8% inflation increase, thus, **their incomes did not keep up with the rising cost of living.** Furthermore, 98% of welfare income households lived in poverty in 2022, and 83% lived in deep poverty.⁶³

EMPLOYED PEOPLE.

While social assistance recipients are particularly vulnerable to poverty, being employed is no guarantee of being able to make ends meet. A 2019 study found that most minimum wage earners across Canada spend more than 30% of their income on rent (the threshold considered affordable) because minimum wage levels across jurisdictions are too low.⁶⁴ A more recent analysis of Ontario's minimum wage found that while the rate has been increased to \$16.55 as of October 1, 2023, a living wage for the province ranged from 18.65 in the southwest region to \$25.05 the GTA to be able to afford basic necessities. **Of particular note is the impact of rental and food inflation rates, with the highest increases being in Ottawa (12%).**⁶⁵ In Ottawa, this is one reason why 10% of people living in homeless shelters derive their income through employment cannot afford Ottawa's sky-high rents.^{66, 67, 68}

STUDENTS.

Among students, the risk of poverty, food insecurity and homelessness is high due to increases in tuition and precarious employment; **about 40% of post-secondary students are food-insecure.**⁶⁹ **Sky-high rents and low vacancies have left international students are particularly vulnerable to housing arrangements that are unsafe** (e.g., without fire alarms or carbon monoxide detectors), **illegal** (e.g., without the proper permits), **overcrowded** (e.g., multiple occupants of the same suite), **and unhygienic** (e.g., pest infestations).⁷⁰ In January 2024, the federal government announced that it would decrease the number of international students allowed to come to Canada by 35% as one measure to address the housing crisis in Canada as well as increasing the financial requirements needed by international students. In response, housing expert Professor Carolyn Whitzman of the University of Ottawa called the cap "largely performative", noting that it will not have a major impact on vacancy rates or rent costs.⁷¹

RENTERS.

How you pay for housing costs also affects your risk of being food insecure. **People who pay market rent face a much higher risk of being food insecure at 28.5%**, while those who pay a mortgage have a risk of 11.6%, and those who own their own homes have a risk of 4.3% respectively.⁷² And it is no surprise that as the cost of living in general and rents in particular have soared in Ottawa and across Canada,⁷³ more and more people who rent find themselves at greater risk of homelessness.⁷⁴ **People who rent lower-cost units are particularly vulnerable to renovictions, which increased by a shocking 545% across the province from 2017–2022, and by 160% in Ottawa during the same period.**⁷⁵

Hamilton has recently adopted a bylaw to deter landlords from engaging in bad faith evictions and enhance protection for tenants in affordable units; the city saw a 983% increase in renovictions from 2017–2022.⁷⁶ The city of New Westminster, BC, also has a bylaw to address renovictions. In 2021, the Supreme Court of Canada dismissed an application to appeal the Westminster bylaw.⁷⁷

The impact of eroding affordable housing.

Governments historically played a major role in housing from the 1940s until the late 1970s, with direct investments in the development of publicly owned housing and tax measures directed to developers to create purpose-built rental housing. However, beginning in the 1980s, the federal and provincial governments began to retreat from housing and instead increased their reliance on the private market to meet the diverse needs of Canadians for housing.

Over the intervening decades more and more Canadians have been placed in the position of paying more than 30% of their income on housing, the level recommended by the *Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation* as being affordable.⁷⁸ While the 2021 Census had found that the percentage of Canadians who spend more than 30% of their income on housing had declined from 24.1% in 2016 to 20.9% in 2021 (the percentage is much higher for renters than homeowners),⁷⁹ **the National Payroll Institute reported in October 2023 that 54% of working Canadians are now being forced to allocate a third or more of their household incomes toward their monthly housing costs. Sixty-two percent of employed respondents reported being “concerned” about housing costs, while 58% said that their spending on housing has increased over the past year.** And among homeowners, 28% said that they are “concerned” about the value of their assets in the current economic environment.⁸⁰

The continuing lack of affordable housing is a main factor in homelessness and people turning to emergency shelters. In Ottawa, the increasing loss of affordable housing units is striking. A study by Steve Pomeroy of Carleton University shows that while Ottawa has lost seven units for every one new unit of affordable housing priced at \$750 per month rent from 2011–2021, that number jumps to 31 units lost for every one new unit rented at \$1,000.⁸¹ Among major metropolitan areas, only Kitchener-Waterloo and Winnipeg had higher lost ratios at 39:1 and 35:1 respectively.⁸² As Pomeroy has noted, any increase in housing supply will be lost unless the erosion of affordable housing and halting people from losing their homes to begin with is stopped.⁸³



The Ottawa Mission in winter, January 2022.

In Ottawa, about 2,500 people are experiencing homelessness, including singles and families living in shelters, staying in someone else’s home, on the street, or in encampments.⁸⁴

As part of the city’s emergency shelter task force, three community centres are being used as emergency overflow shelters.⁸⁵ Other spaces that have never had overnight occupancy now have overnight occupancy such as the Graham Spry building, a vacant federal office building in Westboro⁸⁶ and day program centres such as Centre 507 in downtown Ottawa.⁸⁷

7:1

The number of affordable housing units lost in Ottawa for every unit built and rented at \$750

31:1

The number of affordable housing units lost in Ottawa for every unit built and rented at \$1,000

The impact of food inflation.

In Canada, the number of major food retailers has shrunk from 10 in 1986 to five in 2023, who control an estimated 80% of the grocery market share.⁸⁸ In October 2022, in response to persistent high food inflation, the *Competition Bureau* launched an investigation of food prices. In its report, the Bureau found that **“Canada’s largest grocers’ food gross margins generally increased by a modest yet meaningful amount over the last five years. This longer-term trend pre-dates the supply chain disruptions faced during the pandemic and the current inflationary period.”**⁸⁹

In December 2023, *Canada’s Food Price Report*, a collaboration between Dalhousie University and the Universities of Guelph, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia, observed that **“it is concerning to note that Canadians are, in fact, spending less per capita on food retail in comparison to last year, even in the face of elevated food prices.”**⁹⁰ Higher costs, including for rent were offered as a possible explanation for this trend.⁹¹ The report also notes that those countries such as the United Kingdom, Ireland and Australia that have adopted grocery codes of conduct show more modest increases in food prices after adjusting for inflation than other jurisdictions — including Canada — that have not.⁹²

Concerns regarding how Canadians are coping with food inflation are borne out by recent surveys on the changing nature of how Canadians are coping with rising food prices. For example:

↳ A June 2022 poll released by *Food Banks Canada* reported that one in five Canadians reported going hungry at least once between March 2020 and March 2022. **Almost a quarter of Canadians reported eating less than they should because they didn’t have enough money for food; this figure almost doubled for those earning under \$50,000 a year.**⁹³

↳ In an October 2023 report, Dalhousie University’s *Agri-Foods Analytics Lab* noted that **64.1% of Canadians have substantially altered their grocery shopping habit due to rising food prices:** 49.2% reduced the quantity of meat or protein sources they purchase (an increase from 2022). And although 45.5% prioritize cost over nutritional value when grocery shopping, 63.3% are apprehensive that compromising on nutrition due to high food prices may have adverse long-term effects on their health.⁹⁴



1 in 5

The number of Canadians who went hungry at least once in 2022 due to not having enough money for food

In 2019, the federal government unveiled its national food policy with the following goals between 2019–2024:

Help Canadian communities access healthy food.

Make Canadian food the top choice at home and abroad.

Support food security in Northern and Indigenous communities.

Reduce food waste.⁹⁵

While the federal government identified access to basic needs such as food part of its poverty reduction strategy to ensure “dignity,”⁹⁶ as part of its food policy, it has made explicit reference to food charity as part of the answer to food insecurity, stating that **“Now more than ever, we must support the work of organizations and food banks that help those who need it most ... our Government takes concrete and direct action, which will allow them to continue to ensure access to healthy and nutritious food.”**⁹⁷ Given the gap between the numbers of people who are food insecure in Canada and the number of people who use food supports such as food banks, this approach seems to guarantee both continuing levels of hunger amongst very vulnerable community members across Canada and also even higher levels of need being placed on overburdened not-for-profit organizations.

In Ottawa, the depth and breadth of food insecurity has reached epidemic levels with unprecedented use of food support services by food banks and The Ottawa Mission’s food services. **The Mission’s food truck program provides warm and nutritious meals at its 35 stops across Ottawa as well as groceries for clients. From 2021–2023, the shelter dispersed 113,735 bags of groceries through the food trucks.**⁹⁸

In September 2023, The Ottawa Mission surveyed clients of its food truck program. In response to the question “In the last year, did you ever worry that food would run out before you have the money to buy more?,” 86% of respondents reported some level of food insecurity, with 47% replying “Often”. **Ninety percent of families accessing the program reported some level of food insecurity. Clients on average picked up meals for two people when visiting the trucks.**

The Mission’s food truck program costs have climbed to over \$900,000 per year. The shelter is in a unique position of being able to contain costs through having students of its *Food Services Training Program* prepare many of the meals served within the program and do their placement shifts on the trucks. Other cost savings are leveraged through in-kind food donations. The Mission estimates that this program would cost over \$2 million per year if it were provided by other agencies since these savings would not be available.

A major advantage of the food truck program is its accessibility to clients since its trucks travel throughout the city, and information about the program is available through the shelter’s website. Accessibility and making the program as low-barrier as possible is important to The Mission as the program started as a pandemic response after many community meal programs and food cupboards were closed, leaving tens of thousands of people hungry.^{99, 100} More than half of the program stops are located at *Ottawa Community Housing* buildings. **The Mission also has a waiting list of potential community partners waiting for stops given the overwhelming need for hunger relief in Ottawa.**

I know I’m not the only one. People who are not in our position think that it’s only the homeless who need to come for help, but it’s not true anymore.

— “ —
Isabelle,
Ottawa Mission food truck client,
quoted in CBC’s The National,
“Inflation front line: the shift in
who needs a free meal,” July 2022



HOMELESSNESS AND FOOD INSECURITY COSTS EVERYONE

Food insecurity is a strong predictor of poor physical and mental health.¹⁰¹

Food insecurity predicts the probability that adults will need to access the healthcare system more frequently at greater cost. It also poses barriers to self-care for those with chronic conditions and increases the risk of negative disease outcomes.¹⁰²

Given the risk of negative disease outcomes, it is not a surprise that food insecurity is closely associated with many significant health conditions, including:

- diabetes¹⁰³
- cardiovascular disease¹⁰⁴
- worsening mental health¹⁰⁵
- early death¹⁰⁶

People experiencing food insecurity are more likely to require more emergency interactions with the healthcare system, including:

- a higher likelihood of having same-day surgery
- longer hospital stays
- a greater chance of readmission¹⁰⁷

Food insecurity in children has been associated with a higher risk of:

- anxiety disorders
- poor mental health
- hyperactivity
- inattention

Severe food insecurity in children has been linked to increased risk of developing depression and suicidal ideation in adolescence and early adulthood.¹⁰⁸

Homelessness also has significant healthcare impacts and costs:

↳ People who are homeless are much more likely to report significant health conditions. They are:

29x
more likely
to have
Hepatitis C

20x
more likely
to have
epilepsy

5x
more likely
to have
heart disease

4x
more likely
to have
cancer

3.5x
more likely
to have
asthma

3x
more likely
to have
arthritis or rheumatism¹⁰⁹

↳ Estimates of the **percentage of people who are homeless who have mental health conditions range from 30–50%.**¹¹⁰

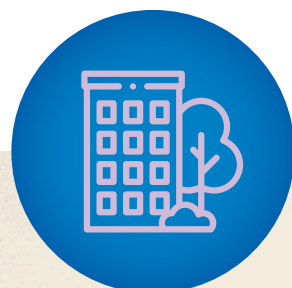
↳ **Substance use was the main reason cited for loss of housing within the 2018 national point-in-time count:** 25.1% of respondents cited this as the reason for their loss of housing.¹¹¹

↳ **People who are homeless are more likely to die prematurely than people who are not.** In one shocking example, Toronto Public Health has reported that the median age of death of people experiencing homelessness in 2022 was 55 for males and 42 for females as compared to the median age for the general population in Toronto, which is 79 for males and 84 for females.¹¹²

↳ In a 2017 study of the costs of homelessness in five Canadian cities, healthcare costs (including substance use treatment, emergency room visits and psychiatric services) ranged from 48% in Vancouver to 40% of total costs in Montreal and Toronto. **Total costs for homelessness, which include healthcare, corrections and the legal system, and emergency shelter costs were estimated at \$53,000 per person.**¹¹³

In Ottawa, the potential impact of food insecurity and homelessness on the healthcare system is stark given the phenomenon known as “Level Zero” when there are no available ambulances in the city. There were 750 “Level Zero” events in 2021, and more than 1,800 in 2022.¹¹⁴ Ottawa hospitals also have some of the longest hospital wait times in the province, with wait for an initial assessment ranging from 2.4–4.1 hours (the provincial average is 2 hours) and wait for admission up to 22 hours.¹¹⁵ Given this level of strain, we should do everything we can to ameliorate homelessness and food insecurity since both are related to adverse health conditions, and our system currently may not be able to provide timely access to care.

Given the fiscal implications of both food insecurity and homelessness on our publicly funded healthcare system, **actions to address them by level of government will not only restore human dignity to those experiencing these conditions, but also help to ease the pressure on our healthcare system, which has been badly strained by the pandemic.**



Andre, a former naval officer, has a wealth of experience living and working across Canada and in different parts of the world. But a debilitating heart condition and memory loss meant that one day, Andre found himself unable to work. Eventually, he was without a home and staying in our shelter.

After working with his case manager at The Mission, he secured an affordable one-bedroom apartment he is now proud to call home.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENTS IN FOOD INSECURITY AND HOMELESSNESS

The withdrawal of both the federal and provincial governments from housing has contributed to worsening housing affordability and homelessness since the 1980s, leaving the development of housing largely to the private sector.^{116, 117}

Traditional supply-demand economics do not apply anymore in the housing sector. Housing is for households and not speculative investment. Changing that vision was a colossal mistake.

— “ —
CBC. The Sunday Magazine.
“The federal government used to build social housing. Then it stopped. How is that going?”,
August 27, 2023

The federal role in homelessness and food insecurity.

The federal role in housing shrank dramatically in the 1990s with a series of policy decisions, including:

1992
ending its
cooperative
housing program

1993
freezing
investments
in social housing

1995
stopping the
development
of affordable
housing

1999
shifting the responsibility
for administering and
funding social housing
to the provinces¹¹⁸

Cuts to CMHC spending on affordable rental housing has been identified as one reason why so many minimum wage earners have to spend more than they can afford on rent.¹¹⁹

The unveiling of the *National Housing Strategy* (NHS) marked a return by the federal government to the housing realm in 2017, with the initial announcement of \$40 billion over 10 years to:

- ↳ remove 530,000 households from core housing need
- ↳ reduce chronic homelessness by 50%
- ↳ repair and expand community housing
- ↳ repair existing housing and expand new housing
- ↳ provide 300,000 households with affordability support¹²⁰

When someone treats you with kindness, it makes all the difference in the world.

The Ottawa Mission saved my neck; I want to thank God for The Mission.

— “ —
ANDRE

Subsequent federal budget announcements have expanded the spend under the NHS to \$82 billion.

While the right to housing is recognized as a human right under the *National Housing Strategy Act 2019*, **a 2021 report by the Parliamentary Budget Officer found that under the NHS:**

- ↳ CMHC spending designed to help low-income households represented a decline of 15% in the real purchasing power of federal spending.
- ↳ A significant portion of the community housing supported under CMHC's agreements with provinces have reached the end of their operating agreements, resulting in a 42% reduction in low-income community housing units supported under these agreements.
- ↳ Over the first three years of the NHS, CMHC spent less than half the funding allocated for the *National Housing Co-Investment Fund and Rental Construction Financing Initiative*.¹²¹

In a follow-up analysis of the Strategy (2023), the PBO estimated that total spending for the program will be closer to \$89 billion.¹²²

A 2022 report by the Auditor General of Canada concerning the NHS found that:

- ↳ Five years after the launch of the NHS, there was still no organization within the federal government leading the strategy to ensure that the goal to reduce chronic homelessness by 50% is met by 2028.
- ↳ *Infrastructure Canada and Employment and Social Development Canada* did not know whether their efforts to prevent and reduce chronic homelessness were leading to improved outcomes.
- ↳ *Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation* did not know who was benefiting from its initiatives.
- ↳ Canada will likely not meet its goal to reduce chronic homelessness by at least 31% by March 2024.¹²³

And **a 2023 report by the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate estimates that Canada faces a deficit of three million homes for low and very low-income households who can afford less than \$1,050 per month, and an additional 1.4 million for moderate and median-income households.** The basis of this conclusion is a conflation by CMHC of the demand for home ownership with housing need.¹²⁴

In a similar vein, also in 2023, the *Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness* urged the federal government to support low-income Canadians with a new proposal for a *Homelessness Prevention and Housing Benefit* (HPHB). The Alliance noted that while increasing the supply of affordable housing is needed, this will take years to complete. During that time, more and more people will fall into homelessness since **“85 per cent of people experiencing homelessness and three-quarters of people in core-housing need simply cannot afford proper housing. Using rent or income support is a rapid and effective way to prevent homelessness.”**¹²⁵

For the past several months, the federal government has made successive announcements concerning funding under its *Housing Accelerator Fund* (HAF), a program created in 2023 and designed to help municipalities build more homes more quickly. Municipalities apply to the federal government directly and are funded based on agreeing to follow certain conditions such as implementing changes to local zoning rules.¹²⁶

The federal government estimates that the HAF will lead to the creation of over 550,000 new homes for people across Canada over the next decade.¹²⁷

In the summer of 2023, the City of Ottawa applied to the HAF, requesting \$150 million in its submission. In February 2024, it was confirmed that Ottawa will receive \$176 million under the HAF to support the construction of 4,400 new units over the next three years, and 32,600 units over the next 10 years dependent on certain conditions to support intensification, leveraging city owned land for housing, and other factors.¹²⁸

This is welcome news as the 2024 report of the Auditor General for the City of Ottawa noted that **“the City of Ottawa has not been able to achieve its goals for new affordable housing units in recent years; this is mainly due to a lack of funding from all levels of government and capacity challenges in the housing development sector.”**¹²⁹

While HAF funding for Ottawa and other municipalities is welcome, federal support for asylum seekers has been insufficient to meet the overwhelming need. For example:

In July 2023, more than 3,000 asylum seekers were using the shelter system daily in Toronto.¹³⁰

In response to requests from the City of Toronto, the federal government provided \$97 million under the Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP). In November 2023, the federal government offered the city of Toronto an additional \$5 million to create space for asylum seekers over the winter (juxtaposed against the city's 5,000 asylum seekers currently in need of housing and its own spending over \$200 million so far). As of November 13, asylum seekers occupied 3,900 spaces in the city's shelter system, with an additional 1,212 asylum seekers supported outside of the system — a 50% increase from the number six months prior.¹³¹ After further appeals by the City of Toronto, the federal government pledged an additional \$143 million under the IHAP as part of an additional \$362 million in IHAP funding that will be distributed across Canada. The new funding will reimburse Toronto for costs incurred in 2023 and the first quarter of 2024.¹³²

In Ottawa, many of the asylum seekers turning to The Mission for help report receiving no government support and being forced to turn to the shelter for basic necessities, since many organizations that deal with asylum seekers are also at overcapacity.¹³³ On February 16, 2024, Ottawa Mayor Mark Sutcliffe posted on “X” that the majority of individuals within Ottawa's shelter system are in fact new arrivals to Canada, noting on his recent tour of a temporary shelter, 100% of those clients are seeking asylum, and that **“we could fill our entire shelter system with new arrivals.”** Mayor Sutcliffe also noted that the city had helped almost 700 people exit the shelter system and move into housing over the past seven months. However, while the city is committed to helping asylum seekers, the number is growing quickly and the city does not have the resources to accomplish this on its own. The Mayor appealed to the federal government for support to assist asylum seekers in Ottawa.^{134,135}

In addition to the impact on emergency shelter capacity, meals and the clothing room, Ottawa Mission housing workers, who normally work to find housing for people to move out of the shelter, are now busy trying to help these arrivals navigate the process of registering as refugees. Given the extraordinary strain this has placed on the shelter and other service providers in Ottawa, on November 2, 2023, The Mission wrote to the Minister of Housing Sean Fraser and the Minister of Immigration, Citizen and Refugees Marc Miller concerning the situation. In a follow-up meeting with Minister Fraser's staff on January 26 and a response from Minister Miller's office received the following day, a distinction was made between refugee claimants identified as such in their country of origin or a safe third country as opposed to asylum seekers who arrive in Canada and then claim refugee status; the position of the federal government is that the former are a federal responsibility while the latter are a provincial responsibility. The federal government created IHAP funding in 2017 to help municipalities with settlement costs for asylum seekers, with \$26 million dispersed to the City of Ottawa since that time. Possible responses to ameliorate the situation such as the federal government creating refugee welcoming centres to help navigate the process of seeking asylum were discussed. Mission staff noted to the Minister's staff that, regardless of whether refugee claimants are identified outside of Canada or claim asylum once they arrive here, they turn to The Mission and other service providers within the homelessness continuum for support, and, as numbers have risen, the strain on not-for-profit community agencies increases exponentially. Thus far, as of the time of writing (March–April 2024), regardless of the additional funding afforded to Toronto and the appeal by Mayor Sutcliffe, no further IHAP funding has been announced for Ottawa.

In terms of food security, in its 2023 budget, the federal government included a one-time grocery rebate ranging from \$234 for single people with no children to \$628 for singles and couples with four children.¹³⁶ **It should be noted that that a family of four had an estimated annual spend of up to \$16,288.41 for food, an increase of up to \$1,065.60 over the total annual cost in 2023.**¹³⁷

The federal government has also been developing a grocery code of conduct to support fairness and transparency in the grocery sector and enhance information for Canadians concerning food prices. The code, which will be voluntary, has been paused due to dissent from two major grocers.¹³⁸ On February 6, 2024, the federal government announced an additional \$5 million to help investigate rising grocery prices by independent advocacy groups.¹³⁹ In mid-February, the federal government stated that it would not hesitate to impose legislation to impose a mandatory grocery code of conduct if all major food retailers did not support a voluntary one.¹⁴⁰

The federal government has also been working to formulate a national school breakfast program first promised in 2019 as part of its food policy, and on April 1, 2024, announced that it would allocate \$200 million per year for five years starting in its 2024 budget to launch a national school food program.¹⁴¹ Canada is the only G-7 country without such a program, which would be an essential tool to combat hunger in children when about one in four are food insecure and one in three rely on food banks.¹⁴² **A national universal school food program would provide several benefits, including financial relief for families and improved educational and health outcomes for children.**¹⁴³ This is essential in an era of continuing high food inflation, prolonged economic insecurity and high numbers of children relying on food banks and at risk of incurring the negative health effects of food insecurity. Having said this, given that this program will help an estimated 400,000 children, and 1.8 million children live in food insecure households, new measures are urgently needed to address factors that cause food insecurity, especially for vulnerable populations at high risk of poverty and other factors.

The provincial role in homelessness and food insecurity.

Changes to housing, income and employment support policies have had a significant impact on homelessness and food insecurity in Ontario.

In 1995 the newly elected provincial government cut social assistance by 21.6% for those without disabilities (Ontario Works, or OW). Although the provincial government changed in 2003, rates were not raised. In 2018, the new government boosted rates by 1.5%, and in 2023, it also raised the *Ontario Disability Support Program* (ODSP) benefit rate by 6.5%.^{144, 145} While the province recently increased social assistance rates, independent analysis reveals that OW and ODSP rates remain profoundly inadequate to provide for basic needs. **Social assistance rates for both single unattached individuals and households with children remain thousands of dollars below the poverty line.** Total annual welfare incomes in 2022 ranged from \$10,253 for unattached singles considered employable to \$33,368 for couples with two children. The income of unattached singles with a disability was \$15,871 and that of single parents with one child was \$23,102. (These levels include provincial and federal tax credits.) When compared to the official poverty line of \$27,631 and the deep poverty line of \$20,723 for Ontario for singles, the gross inadequacy of these income support levels is stark. (Welfare payments to households with children as compared to the official and deep poverty lines reveal similar gaps.)¹⁴⁶

Income derived through employment has also not kept pace with inflation. While Ontario's minimum wage was increased to \$16.55 on October 1, 2023, as noted above, a living wage for the province would need to be far higher to afford basic necessities, particularly in Ottawa, which has seen the highest increases in rental and food inflation.¹⁴⁷

Salaries, wages and incomes are not increasing as fast as housing costs in general.

— “ —
Diana Mok,
associate professor at
Western University, quoted in
“How housing affordability's
'crisis levels' damage the economy,”
CBC News, June 19, 2023

In 2017, Ontario unveiled a pilot basic income program in which recipients received up to \$1,415 per month and those with health conditions received up to \$1,915 (as compared to social assistance payments of \$721 to \$1,151 a month). An independent analysis of the pilot found positive impacts in physical health, mental health, and well-being for both participants and others in their households as well as improvements in economic and employment prospects. Although the program was scheduled to run for three years, it was discontinued after 18 months in 2019 after the government changed in 2018.¹⁴⁸

In 2023, Senator Kim Pate put forward a private bill concerning a basic income program. Newfoundland and Labrador is moving toward implementing a basic income program through a targeted basic income pilot program and Prince Edward Island has been operating a targeted program since 2021.^{149, 150}

As the federal government retreated from housing, in 1998 responsibility for social housing was devolved to municipalities in Ontario, but without sufficient resources for them to carry these responsibilities out. In addition, the impact of regulatory changes in Ontario such as the abolition of rent control for newer units is evident in the difference in rent increases for units built before 2018 versus those built after at about 17%, or over \$300.¹⁵¹ The *Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario* has reported that there has been a 294% increase in landlord applications to evict tenants for renovations or conversions at the province's Landlord and Tenant Board since 2015–16. The ACTO has stated that this is sometimes used by landlords to evict existing tenants so they can rent units at much higher rates. Applying rent controls to all buildings regardless of when they were erected would mitigate the incentive some landlords may have to evict existing tenants.¹⁵² While the provincial government announced measures in 2023 concerning renovations, the province should also clarify if municipal bylaws in Ontario concerning renovations are allowed under the *Residential Tenancies Act*, 2006 (RTA).

In its 2021 report of homelessness services, the Auditor General of Ontario found that:

- ↳ The province does not have an overarching and coordinated strategy to prevent and reduce homelessness.
- ↳ Ontario's lack of action to support people transitioning from correctional and health-care facilities and the child welfare system is a contributing factor to the number of people who are homeless.
- ↳ Lack of housing affordability is a roadblock to reducing homelessness.
- ↳ The Ministry does not evaluate the effectiveness of programs and services provided with provincial funding to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- ↳ Since 2013, the Ministry's funding methodology for its largest homelessness program (the Homelessness Prevention Initiative) has been primarily based on historical spending, rather than local need.¹⁵³
- ↳ The Ministry requires that all municipalities begin maintaining a list of people experiencing homelessness and their related needs (*By-Name List*) by the end of 2021, but this new list does not guarantee that the people most in need will receive housing first.¹⁵⁴

In its November 2023 follow-up report, the Auditor General found that the province had fully implemented 37% of the actions recommended in its 2021 Annual Report and made progress in implementing an additional 23%. However, the Ministry has made little progress on 40% of these actions.¹⁵⁵



Preparing warm and nutritious meals for food truck clients at the Gloucester Emergency Food Cupboard, December 2023.



Clients wait outside the Mission's food truck at the Gloucester Emergency Food Cupboard, December 2023.

HOW TO END HOMELESSNESS AND FOOD INSECURITY

The increasing numbers of Canadians who face housing precarity and food insecurity is evidence of the retreat by governments from ensuring that housing and food are seen as a human right and not-for-profit commodities.

All levels of governments have an essential role to play in addressing catastrophic levels of homelessness and food insecurity.

We call upon the government of Canada to:

- ↳ **Immediately end the distinction between refugee claimants identified outside of Canada and those who claim asylum after they arrive in Canada by:**
 - » Establishing accessible welcome centres to provide information and other supports to new arrivals on how to claim refugee status in Canada as well as longer-term supports to support a path to full participation in Canadian life.
 - » Flow additional IHAP funds to Ottawa and other communities currently dealing with significant numbers of new arrivals.
- ↳ **Implement a *Homelessness Prevention and Housing Benefit (HPHB)*, which would:**
 - » Provide immediate rental relief to up to 385,000 households at imminent risk of homelessness.
 - » Help over 50,000 people leave homelessness.
 - » Reduce pressure on Canada's overwhelmed homelessness systems.
- ↳ **Implement all recommendations from the federal advocate through launching a *National Encampments Response Plan* by August 31 to save lives, including:**
 - » Ending the forced eviction of encampments.
 - » Working with all governments and providing support to municipalities.
 - » Respecting the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples and upholding human rights.
 - » Offering people permanent housing options as rapidly as possible.
 - » Addressing the root causes of encampments, including prioritizing the elimination of chronic homelessness.
- ↳ **Implement the recommendations from the Auditor General of Canada's 2022 report on the *National Housing Strategy*, including:**
 - » Assessing the impact of its programs on vulnerable populations.
 - » Collecting and analyzing data concerning the NHS in a timely manner.
 - » Clarifying accountability for the strategy.
- ↳ **Move forward with immediate measures to address food inflation and insecurity by:**
 - » Implementing a grocer's code of conduct similar to United Kingdom, Ireland and Australia to ensure transparency and fairness in food prices.
 - » Implementing 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 recommendations from the Auditor General's 2021 *Value for Money* audit of homelessness services, including:**
 - » Implementing a strategy to prevent and reduce homelessness and coordinate homelessness programs.
 - » Improving data collection concerning homelessness services and their quality.
 - » Ensuring that each individual's level of need is taken into consideration when deciding their housing.
- ↳ **Address the erosion of affordable housing in Ottawa and across Ontario by:**
 - » Reintroducing rent controls to buildings erected after November 2018.
 - » Increasing the *Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit* to support more rent supplements for low income renters and remove the end date for the program of March 31, 2029 to encourage more potential recipients to accept it.¹⁵⁶
 - » Clarifying the *Residential Tenancies Act* to support the development and implementation of municipal bylaws to prohibit bad faith renovations.
- ↳ **Address inadequate incomes for vulnerable Ontarians by:**
 - » Significantly increasing social assistance rates to enable vulnerable Ontarians to live with dignity and security.
 - » Increasing the provincial minimum wage to enable minimum wage earners to meet their expenses without having to work multiple positions.

We call upon the municipal government to:

- ↳ **Implement the recommendations from the March 2024 City of Ottawa's Auditor General's report that are within the purview of the City,¹⁵⁷ including:**
 - » Addressing governance issues concerning the City's renewed *10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan* through a formalized governance structure to oversee the affordable housing portfolio.
 - » Formalize and operationalize the land strategy for affordable housing to maximize surplus land for affordable housing development or contribution.
 - » Adopting a clear and consistent definition of affordable housing for use across the City, in communication and reporting.
 - » Ensuring that all commitments and targets/outcomes are reflected in the annual *10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan* update reports.
 - » Developing a quarterly dashboard that includes key affordable housing indicators for timely transparency and decision-making.

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.

CONCLUSION

In recent weeks, the federal and Ontario governments have made several announcements concerning housing and food insecurity. For example:

↳ The government of Ontario delivered its annual budget and made some additional commitments concerning housing and homelessness support in Ottawa. **The province has pledged \$2 billion in infrastructure to support housing province-wide, \$156 million for supportive housing and mental health, \$120 million for shelters and homelessness supports in Ottawa, and \$37.5 million for the progress made towards Ottawa's 2023 target to build new homes.**^{158, 159, 160} While these announcements are welcome, there was no commitment by the province to reintroduce rent controls for properties built after November 2018, which is a factor in surging renovations and demovictions rates, which, in turn, contributes to the rapid loss of affordable housing in Ottawa and across the province. In addition, levels for social assistance and the provincial minimum wage remain below what people can live on. It is also unclear if the provincial commitment concerning emergency shelters and homelessness in Ottawa will proceed without further IHAP funds from Ottawa to support shelters, who are dealing with unprecedented numbers of asylum seekers.

↳ **At the federal level, in addition to the announcement of HAF funds for Ottawa and the creation of a national school food program, the government announced \$6 billion for a *Canada Housing Infrastructure Fund*,**¹⁶¹ \$1.5B rental protection fund meant to preserve rent prices,¹⁶² and a renter's bill of rights.¹⁶³ While these new announcements are also welcome, new housing units will take years to build, and further measures are needed to lift people out of homelessness and housing precarity now. And, as noted above, there are no additional IHAP funds for Ottawa to help with costs concerning newcomers.

Against this backdrop, it is worth noting that according to a recent IPSOS poll, 24% of Canadians expect to need to access charitable services to meet essential needs within the next six months. Forty-two percent are under age 35. Of the 20% of Canadians who are currently using charitable services to meet essential needs, 69% indicate that this is the first time they have had to access charitable services for food, shelter, and other essential supports. Fifty-four percent attribute their need to having to turn to charitable supports to the rising cost of living, while other reasons include:

- ↳ **a physical or mental health issue** (23% each)
- ↳ **lost employment** (19%)
- ↳ **providing caregiver support** (17%)
- ↳ **domestic violence** (10%)
- ↳ **addiction** (9%)
- ↳ **and other reasons** (4%)¹⁶⁴

Canadians are facing unprecedented levels of housing precarity, homelessness, food insecurity and hunger as a result of poverty, the erosion of affordable housing and food inflation. In Ottawa, homelessness and hunger are worsening daily despite the capital's relatively high average household income.

The Ottawa Mission, the community's oldest and largest homeless shelter, urges all governments to work together to ensure that safe, appropriate and affordable housing and nutritious food are human rights for all Canadians and not a luxury only for those who can afford them.

- 1 Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. INTERVIEW — Tim Richter speaks to Bryn Griffiths about tent fires, December 19, 2023. CAEH's estimate of the number of homelessness people in Canada before the pandemic was 235,000..
- 2 HC3.1. Homeless Population. OECD Affordable Housing Database — Social Policy Division — Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs. Only Germany, Luxembourg, New Zealand and component parts of the United Kingdom have higher rates of homelessness.
- 3 Office of the Federal Housing Advocate. Upholding dignity and human rights: the Federal Housing Advocate's review of homeless encampments, Final report, February 2024.
- 4 City of Ottawa. 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan 2020–2030, July 2020.
- 5 Open Ottawa. Housing Services — Yearly HIFIS data. This represented an increase of 1960 people (29%) since 2014 when the City of Ottawa's first 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan was introduced.
- 6 CBC. The Sunday Magazine. "The federal government used to build social housing. Then it stopped. How is that going?," August 27, 2023.
- 7 Office of the Auditor General for the City of Ottawa. Audit of Affordable Housing, March 2024.
- 8 City of Ottawa. Ottawa's 2018 Point in Time Count.
- 9 CBC News. "New task force to look for shelter amid nightmarish winter projections," October 27, 2023.
- 10 CTV News Ottawa. "Fires at homeless encampments in Ottawa doubled in 2023," January 5, 2024.
- 11 Canadian Income Survey (CIS) 2021.
- 12 PROOF. Household Food Insecurity in Canada 2022, 2023.
- 13 This does not include children in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, and the Yukon, where food insecurity is much higher. 1.2 million children (69%), were in moderately or severely food-insecure households. Ibid.
- 14 In Ottawa-Gatineau, the median household after-tax income in 2020 was \$84,000, an increase of 11.3% from 2015. Among major selected metropolitan areas, only Toronto and Calgary reported higher after-tax incomes at \$85,000 and \$87,000 respectively, while Edmonton was tied with Ottawa. Median incomes declined in Calgary and Edmonton from 2015 by 5.4% and 3.4% respectively, while Toronto's median income rose by 14.1% during the same time period. Statistics Canada. After-tax income grew in Vancouver, Montréal and Toronto and decreased in Calgary, Edmonton, and St. John's. The Daily, July 13, 2022.
- 15 Ottawa Public Health. 2023 Nutritious Food Basket and Food Insecurity in Ottawa: Monitoring Food Affordability in Ottawa, October 2023.
- 16 Ottawa Food Bank. Unravelling Threads: Ottawa's Food Security Crisis, November 2023.
- 17 The Ottawa Mission. Impact Report 2022–2023.
- 18 At The Ottawa Mission, during the night, before anyone is turned anyone away, Frontline staff try to refer them to one of the other shelters if there is availability there. These staff also inform those seeking help of other locations they can sit in such as Center 507. We also encourage these clients to contact 311, so the City may refer them somewhere.
- 19 Ottawa Citizen. "City of Ottawa working around the clock to bring homeless inside during frigid times," January 19, 2024.
- 20 The Ottawa Mission. Impact Report 2022–2023, op.cit.
- 21 In November 2022 the number of winter coats provided to clients was 70; in November 2023, this jumped to 133. The number of pairs of winter boots rose from 61 to 129. This increase has meant that The Mission has had to purchase a significant number of new coats and boots to provide for clients.
- 22 Food Banks Canada. Hunger Count 2023, November 2023.
- 23 Feed Ontario. Hunger Report 2023: Why Ontarians Can't Get Ahead, November 26, 2023.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Spring & Rosol (2022) "Pay the rent or feed the kids": A scoping review of the housing-food insecurity nexus in Canada. DOI: 10.31235/osf.io/wd87b.
- 26 Government of Canada. (2020, Feb 18). Household food insecurity in Canada: Overview.
- 27 PROOF 2022, op.cit.
- 28 Tarasuk, V., Fafard St-Germain, A. A., & Loopstra, R. (2019). The Relationship Between Food Banks and Food Insecurity: Insights from Canada. *Voluntas*.
- 29 Only about one-fifth of all food insecure households access food banks. Ibid.
- 30 City of Ottawa. 2021 Homelessness Point-in-Time Count, April 2022.
- 31 Ottawa's 2018 Point in Time Count, op.cit.
- 32 Canada lost approximately 3.4 million jobs at the onset of the pandemic. Statistics Canada. Employment growth in Canada and the United States during the recovery from COVID-19, December 22, 2023.
- 33 While employment in Canada has returned to pre-pandemic levels, employment losses disproportionate affected racialized, Indigenous and migrant workers. OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19). "The unequal impact of COVID-19: A spotlight on frontline workers, migrants and racial/ethnic minorities," March 17, 2022.

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The current pandemic has demonstrated the consequences of Canada's housing crisis, and the urgency to progressively realize the human right to housing. This is particularly true for the wide range of those who are disproportionately represented in homeless populations.

The country must do a better job at providing safe, supportive and affordable housing to Canadians.



Recovery for All. Proposals to Strengthen the National Housing Strategy and End Homelessness. Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, 2020

I am on disability and the food truck helps with dinner once a week for my family.

There has been an increase in the cost of groceries so this service helps. I have not used a food bank in two years, but now with the rising cost of food I have needed to start using free food services again.



CHANTAL,
food truck client, 2021

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