



At over 100% capacity for years, The Ottawa Mission places sleeping mats on our chapel floor each night to shelter as many people as possible.

# STILL WAITING

Enough is enough.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2024, The Ottawa Mission issued our No More Waiting report concerning shocking levels of homelessness and food insecurity across our city, province and country.

In 2025, things are even worse:

- ↳ Homelessness in Canada has increased by 20% since 2018.
- ↳ Almost 23% of Canadians across 10 provinces are food insecure, including 2.1 million children.
- ↳ Over 80,000 Ontarians are homeless, a 25% increase since 2022. Without significant intervention, homelessness could triple within this province to almost 300,000 by 2035.
- ↳ Across Ontario, Toronto, Mississauga and Kingston have declared food insecurity emergencies.

While there have been recent investments in alleviating homelessness, they are insufficient to meet the overwhelming need. For example:

- ↳ While \$561 million is currently invested federally in homelessness, achieving a 50% reduction in chronic homelessness would require an additional \$3.5 billion per year.
- ↳ While Ontario has made investments in affordable housing, shelters and supportive housing, an estimated additional \$11 billion over 10 years and \$2 billion over eight years is needed to end chronic homelessness and ensure those living in encampments have stable housing.

Similarly, federal and provincial policies that ameliorate income security have been shown to also address food security, however, they are insufficient to meet the staggering need for food:

- ↳ Federally, while public old-age pensions have reduced the risk of food insecurity for recipients, they must be age 65 or older, leaving younger people exposed. Similarly, the Child Tax Benefit has reduced the risk of severe food insecurity for recipients, but it has not decreased their overall risk.
- ↳ Across jurisdictions within Canada, almost all income support rates are insufficient, with those dependent on disability and other supports living in deep poverty. In Ontario, despite recent enhancements, those relying on Ontario Disability Support and Ontario Works payments are living up to 60% below the poverty line, meaning they don't have enough income to meet their basic needs.
- ↳ Enhancements to minimum wage levels also provide increased protection against food insecurity, with higher minimum wage levels associated with reductions in food insecurity. However, Ontario minimum wage levels remain below what is required to meet basic needs.

## At the local level in Ottawa:

Homelessness has grown to almost 3,000 people, a 13% increase since 2021.

Of these people, an estimated 500+ are living on the street.

Certain populations, including people who are racialized, newcomers, Indigenous populations, gender and sexual minorities, those who have serious health conditions and those on low incomes, bear a disproportionate burden of homelessness.



**1 in 4**

Food insecurity has risen from one in seven to one in four households. Forty-six percent of those who were homeless stated that they needed support with food security.

The cost of healthy food and shelter is 20–25% higher than provincial Disability Support Payments.

### And most tragically:

In January 2025, an Indigenous man who lived on the streets in Ottawa was found in medical distress in bitterly cold weather; he later died in hospital.



Later that same month, a grandmother newcomer with untreated mental illness, who was homeless, died after being found outside.

## At The Ottawa Mission:

Our shelter has been at over 100% capacity for occupancy of shelter beds since 2017.

The only exception to this was during the pandemic when we closed some shelter beds to enhance social distancing from 2020–2023, with clients diverted to overflow shelters run by the City of Ottawa.

Since reopening these beds, we have returned to over 100% capacity, with dozens of clients sleeping on mats in our chapel floor or on chairs in our lounge.



For the past two years, The Mission has served over one million meals to those who live in our shelter and vulnerable community members.

Sadly, this year will be no different.

### The urgency and magnitude of homelessness and food insecurity across our city, province and country is the culmination of decades of policy failures by governments to:

- 1 Address the root causes of these problems**, including growing poverty and income erosion, the withdrawal of governments from the housing market, the loss of affordable housing, the inadequate supply of supportive housing for those with high needs, food inflation; and
- 2 Allocate sufficient and sustained resources at each level of government to ameliorate these causes.**

Until these two things happen, homelessness and food insecurity will get even worse.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### We call upon the government of Canada to:

- ↳ **Implement a Homelessness Prevention and Housing Benefit** to support up to 385,000 households at risk of homelessness and help over 50,000 people leave homelessness.
- ↳ **Create programs for non-profit housing providers** to support:
  - » the purchase of existing rental housing projects and hotels
  - » the facilitation of office-to-residential conversions
  - » the acquisition of vacant land for new builds
- ↳ **Enhance support to municipalities to provide assistance to refugees and asylum seekers** by implementing the *National Plan for Asylum with Dignity* by the *Canadian Council for Refugees*, which includes:
  - » Establishing reception centres in cities to orient arrivals and coordinate services.
  - » Providing federal funding for short term and transitional housing for refugee claimants.
  - » Making refugee claimants eligible for the support services offered to other newcomers.
  - » Ensuring that adequate legal aid coverage is available for refugee claimants.
  - » Streamlining the claims process and eliminating the backlog in the determination process.

### We call upon the City of Ottawa to:

- ↳ **Support measures to address food insecurity within the City's Poverty Reduction Strategy** appropriate to the need.
- ↳ **Support the expansion of not-for-profit housing in Ottawa** through:
  - » Supplying municipal land at no cost to not-for-profit housing providers and community land trusts.
  - » Revising zoning to support scaling up affordable housing.
  - » Changing the approval process for new not-for-profit housing.
- ↳ **Increase the annual budget of new affordable housing** by:
  - » Returning to the 2023 figure of \$30 million for investments in new affordable housing.
  - » Applying annual increases to this amount reflective of actual housing costs in Ottawa.

### We call upon the government of Ontario to:

- ↳ **Address the erosion of affordable housing across Ontario** by:
  - » Reintroducing rent controls to buildings erected after November 2018.
  - » Fully implementing Bill 97 to amend the *Residential Tenancies Act* and prohibit bad-faith renovations.
- ↳ **End chronic homelessness by implementing the recommendations of the 2025 report on homelessness by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario**, including:
  - » Investing \$11 billion over 10 years to create 75,000 new affordable and supportive housing units.
  - » Investing \$2 billion over eight years to ensure people in encampments are safely housed by increasing the capacity of support services and supportive, transitional and community housing.
- ↳ **Address inadequate incomes for vulnerable Ontarians** by:
  - » 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.
  - » Reviewing the UNESCO findings concerning the 2017–2019 Ontario basic income program, which showed positive impacts for participants, with a view to re-establishing this program.

Still waiting. Enough is enough. Lives are at stake.

*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

