



PREVENTING GROWTH IN HOMELESSNESS

Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa: Update, February 2020

ISSUE:

While efforts to reduce existing homelessness are important, it is critical to also slow the flow of new entrants into homelessness. Why are existing prevention efforts not having a greater impact in reducing these flows into homelessness? The Alliance strongly believes that through a thoughtful and coordinated approach, the growth in homelessness can be reduced.

ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS OTTAWA UPDATES

In 2018, the City of Ottawa began an annual reporting process to monitor progress in delivering the 2014-2024 Plan on Housing and Homelessness. The Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa (ATEHO) provides review and commentary on the progress as documented by the City to highlight opportunities to reform and improve outcomes of the homeless serving system.

Reflecting on the worsening homelessness situation as reported by the City in April 2018, the ATEHO has outlined a new path forward. This path is designed to stimulate thinking about different ways to respond to persisting homelessness through recommendations in four specific areas:

- Rental Housing Affordability;
- Community Planning;
- Systems Level Approach; and
- Homelessness Prevention

The ATEHO will issue four updates that will provide commentary on the implementation of the 10-Year Plan. These updates will also contain recommendations to the City on potential solutions to ending and preventing homelessness.

NEED TO RETHINK AND REFOCUS THE APPROACH

Building on the ATEHO's recommendations in 2018, more effective strategies are needed to prevent homelessness. The ATEHO urges the City of Ottawa to integrate the following recommendations to the 10 Year Plan on Housing and Homelessness:

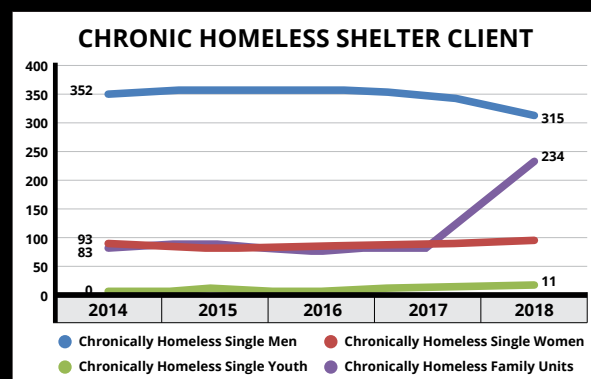
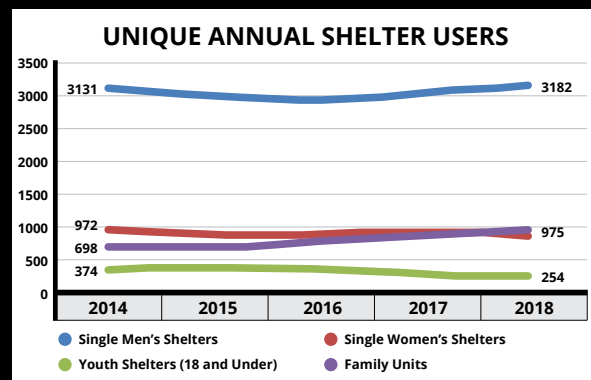
- 1 Review and carefully assess current prevention programming, spending levels and associated outcomes, and realign or revise investment to be more effective.
- 2 Design and implement a coordinated system planning approach to preventing homelessness, bringing to the table all related City departments and other levels of government, including housing, health, emergency services, education, child protective services, policing, corrections, and social services.
- 3 Use a variety of rapid-response interventions to prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless. Interventions may include landlord-tenant mediation, housing search, counselling, rent banks providing temporary allowances to assist with short-term rent and utility costs, and improved planning for discharge from health, correctional services and children's care.
- 4 Examine the circumstances in which successful shelter diversion and prevention has occurred and expand such efforts, using all available methods to assist families and individuals to obtain and retain housing.
- 5 Devote particular emphasis to identifying barriers and solutions to preventing homelessness among families, working with immigration, education and related sectors.
- 6 Building on the top reasons for housing loss reported by the City (addictions, unable to pay rent or mortgage, incarceration, and unsafe housing conditions), intensify efforts to provide targeted supports to those at risk of homelessness, in conjunction with health, social services, criminal justice, and property standards.



BACKGROUND

The City has reported on progress both over the first five years of the 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan (2014 to 2018) and the incremental change in 2018. As was the case last year, the data reveals that despite the title “progress report”, minimal progress is being made. This indicates that we need to implement more aggressive actions to achieving City targets.

- The total number of people using an overnight emergency shelter in Ottawa continued to increase (up 6.5% to a record high of 7,937 unique individuals).
- In particular, there has been a steady upward increase in family homelessness over the past five years (10.6% increase in family units experiencing homelessness in the past year).
- On the other hand, youth homelessness in Ottawa has seen a small but constant decrease over the past five years (decline of 12.6% in the past year).
- Homelessness for single men (1.4% increase) and women (5.5% increase) have both increased in 2018 at a greater rate than the overall population increase in Ottawa (1.2%).
- Chronic homelessness remains almost unchanged and has become significantly worse for families.



INVESTMENTS ARE INSUFFICIENT

This lack of progress is not without effort. In 2018, the City reported:

- Individuals were diverted 1,612 times from emergency shelters. Diversion was defined by the City as a strategy that identifies alternatives to the shelter system such as alternate housing and connecting people to resources that help people secure housing.
- Spending \$3.5 million annually in direct services to prevent people from losing their housing and becoming homeless.
- Spending \$8 million in practical financial assistance to enable households to find and keep housing, assisting 1,946 households.
- Expanding the number of housing allowances and rent supplements (mainly as part of the Housing First program). Of the total 753 households

assisted since the start of Housing First in 2015, almost half (367) were allocated in 2018 alone.

- Continued investment in constructing new affordable and supportive housing, adding a further 78 supportive and 42 affordable units in 2018.

However, in order to enhance future efforts to prevent homelessness, more analysis is needed to understand who was diverted from emergency shelters, how they were successfully prevented from becoming homeless, and if they return to homelessness. The City must also explore how the investments made in homelessness prevention are translating into outcomes to better understand how to target investments in the sector. Although new units were added in 2018, these investments are insufficient in making meaningful progress toward targets.



**ALLIANCE TO END
HOMELESSNESS
OTTAWA**



@ATEH_OTT



endhomelessnessottawa



endhomelessnessottawa.ca