

Universal Periodic Review – Canada - 2013

Submission on behalf of: **The Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa**
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa is a non-profit organization, incorporated in 2010 after working as a coalition since 1995 and its member organizations are the main providers of assistance to homeless individuals and family members in Ottawa, the national capital of Canada.

The Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa remains deeply concerned about the progress in ending homelessness. Canada has not yet complied with its commitments to recognise the right to adequate housing. People in our community continue to suffer because Canada lacks a national housing plan. Although Canada ratified the right to adequate housing under the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) in 1976 and then stated in 2009 it would intensify its efforts, the incidence of homelessness in our community has not improved.

Canada's wealth is more than adequate to ensure that every woman, man, youth and child residing in Canada has secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing as part of a standard of living that will provide healthy physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual and social development and a good quality of life. And yet, Canada has failed to enact federal legislation on a national housing strategy which would recognise adequate housing as a right.

1. THE ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS OTTAWA is a non-profit organization, incorporated in 2010 after working as a coalition since 1995 and its 40 member organizations are the main providers of assistance to homeless individuals and family members in Ottawa and to those at risk of becoming homeless in the national capital of Canada. The Mandate of The Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its member organizations by providing opportunities to generate ideas and solutions, strengthening partnerships between member organizations and delivering effective, consistent messages in the community.

A high value is placed on research and evaluation and reports in The Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa and recommendations are published; and non-partisan advocacy is undertaken for increased services and supports for those who are homeless or "at risk" of homelessness. The organizations of our members provide housing and a variety of services and supports to people who are homeless. Member organizations are emergency shelters, community health centres, agencies that provide mental health and addiction services and organizations that provide affordable housing or seek to create it. There are also individual members. The organizations of our members provide assistance, housing and a variety of services and supports to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless; they are emergency shelters, community health centres, agencies that provide mental health and addiction services and organizations that provide affordable housing or seek to create it.

There are also individual members.

2. **BILL C-400, THE *SECURE, ADEQUATE, ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING ACT* WILL BE DEBATED ON OCTOBER 17, 2012** in the Canadian Parliament. The Bill was introduced by the official opposition and will require the Minister responsible to consult with the provincial ministers of the Crown responsible for municipal affairs and housing and with representatives of municipalities and Aboriginal communities to design a national housing strategy that will end homelessness and ensure the accessibility of adequate housing for those most in need.

In the previous session of Parliament, the Government of Canada voted against a similar Bill (C-304) which was at its third reading just prior to the most recent election. Now this Government has a majority in Parliament and the Universal Periodic Review is especially timely and important.

3. **THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ADEQUATELY FUNDED NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY REMAINS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT.** The Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa recommends that an amount equal to 1% of the GDP be allocated to federal investments in affordable housing and that the federal government act to protect Canada's 600,000 units of existing social housing. It calls for the reinvestment of funds released by expiring social housing operating agreements rather than allocating these monies to other federal expenditures. Acknowledging that creating better affordable housing outcomes is slow work, the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa also sees the necessity of strengthening the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) due to end in March 2014. In reality the federal investment decreased in Ottawa decreased by 2% in 2011. Yet again limited community resources will be diverted to advocating for a renewal of these HPS monies.

At the same time provincial expenditures in Ontario for the development of new affordable housing, for evolving homelessness programs and for sufficient health resources are also constrained because of the lack of an overall direction in the national government, a seemingly disengaged approach and inadequate funding obligations.

4. **IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL IN 2011, THERE WERE A TOTAL OF 7,299 INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILY MEMBERS WHO WERE HOMELESS.** These are the people who stayed in an emergency shelter. In this community only 70 to 100 individuals live on the street. The 2011 Census shows Ottawa's population as 883,391. There were 841 homeless families that included 1,499 children and 1,137 adults; 401 youth; 1,087 single women; and 3,223 single men. The average length of stay in a shelter in 2011 was 67 days. Families stayed a much more onerous 82 days on average, mainly due to the lack of appropriate housing stock.

Data gathered for the *Report Card on Ending Homelessness in Ottawa* produced annually by the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa show that overall since 2004, there are more people using emergency shelters in Ottawa. There were 660 more people using shelters in 2011 compared to 2004. This represents about a 10% growth in shelter users over the 8-year period. Among the different subgroups groups making up the population, the number of single men has actually gone down by 100 or 3% since 2004. In contrast, there have been increases among the youth, single women, and families. Families have shown the largest increase among these subgroups with 200 more families homeless in 2011 than in 2004.

Overall, average length of stays in emergency shelters for users over the course of a year per have increased from 49 days to over 67 days, representing a 37% growth in length of stay since 2004. This increase has been steady and incremental since 2006 with all groups except among youth

where there was a modest drop in 2010 when compared to 2009. Families show the steepest trend climb and they have the longest average stay, averaging in 2011 a length of shelter stay of 82 days.

There has been a steady increase in the number of times shelter beds were used since 2006 with the 2011 number at 491,808, the highest yet. The increase since 2004 is in the order of 170,000 more beds being used representing a 53% increase. The rise in shelter bed use over the 8-year period is the result of the combination of more people using shelters for longer periods of time each year.

5. **THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO OFFER A LIMITED RESPONSE TO HELP END HOMELESSNESS** in the Ottawa community with consequences for our ability to offer sufficient services and affordable housing to assist homeless people. The City of Ottawa delivers HPS funding which unfortunately has not been increased since 1999.

The potential definitely exists to end homelessness. In 2011, 6,756 households in Ottawa were helped by 24 homelessness programs such as *Housing Loss Prevention* and *Housing Search and Stabilization*. HPS funded large and small capital projects to bolster the physical infrastructure of the homelessness service system and a Community Capacity Building Training Program provided specialized training for front-line staff.

6. **THE REALITY ON THE COMMUNITY LEVEL TELLS A CLEAR STORY.** Innovative and exciting projects can happen even when much more is needed. One capital project built 42-units of supportive housing for chronically homeless women; in mid-2011 Cornerstone Housing for Women opened this project thanks to funding from all three orders of government and a successful fundraising campaign. The tenants have permanent supportive housing and supports for health care, activities of daily living and life skills.

In 2011, a combination of federal, provincial and municipal housing funds created 203 affordable housing units: 6 units on Crichton Street; 69 seniors units at Eastern Christian Co-op; 58 units at OCISO's Presland Project and 28 units of Aboriginal Housing at Gignul Non-profit Housing, in addition to Cornerstone Housing for Women 42 units. A further 536 households received housing assistance to pay rent in existing housing stock. These are positive additions even if the amount is insufficient to meet the need.

Current HPS funding for support and service programs and capital expenditures and other joint affordable housing programs are truly inadequate when weighed against the 7,299 homeless individuals and family members in 2011. A consistent message in each of the eight report cards released by the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa is that homelessness is first and foremost a problem that is the result of poverty and a lack of affordable housing in our city. The 8-year trends show more people staying in our shelters for longer periods of time.

7. **OUR RECOMMENDATION:** The Government of Canada has not fulfilled or intensified its commitments under the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *ICESCR* and other Conventions that recognize the right to adequate housing. Our expectation is that the United Nations Human Rights Committee will endeavor to ensure that the Government of Canada meets its human rights obligations. In spite of innovative and effective community responses and assistance, the incidence of homelessness has not decreased since 2004. Eight years of data demonstrate beyond a doubt the terrible consequences of ignoring the right to adequate housing for the homeless people in our community while our national government delays in developing an adequately funded national housing strategy.