

August 2023

Ontario's Homelessness Crisis

AMO Position

- Homelessness continues to be a social, economic and health crisis across Ontario.
- AMO is committed to working with all orders of government and community partners to prevent, reduce and ultimately end homelessness in Ontario.
- Urgent action is needed to move beyond crisis response and tackle the root causes of homelessness with solutions that address housing, income security, and health.
- The Government of Ontario should immediately:
 - increase social assistance rates and make good on promises to transform the social assistance system;
 - increase the supply of deeply affordable community housing;
 - continue to invest in community-based mental health and addictions services including supportive housing; and,
 - continue to increase base funding for the Homelessness Prevention Program to enhance the emergency shelter system.
- These provincial actions, in addition to federal enhancements to the National Housing Strategy, are critical to enabling a human-rights approach to housing and encampments at the local level.

Overview

- The homelessness crisis is taking a devastating toll on people and communities, undermining a healthy and prosperous Ontario. Homelessness imposes unnecessary costs on our institutions, community agencies, economy, health system and government. There is a price to inaction.
- Homelessness is complex. It intersects with the mental health and addictions crisis, income insecurity, and a lack of affordable and supportive housing. As homelessness has become more visible, more people are recognizing that it must be addressed. There is growing momentum for governments to commit to ending homelessness.
- Homelessness disproportionately impacts Indigenous people. Ending chronic homelessness will require a specific focus on the needs of Indigenous people and collaboration with Indigenous partners.
- The rise of encampments is a symptom of the worsening crisis. Governments need sufficient funding and resources to provide meaningful alternatives that respect the human rights of encampment residents.

Key Facts

- Community organizations, think tanks and industry experts have quantified the systemic challenges contributing to the homelessness crisis across Ontario:
 - Despite recent increases social assistance program rates, in real terms, rates have never been lower.¹
 - In Ontario, 45% of tenant households spend 30% or more of their total income on shelter. This is the highest rate across the country. By 2025, about 160,000 households will spend greater than 50% of their income on rent².
 - Food-bank use in Ontario has skyrocketed, increasing 42% over the past 3 years alone. One-third of these visitors were using food banks for the first time³.
- There is not enough deeply affordable community housing. Canada – including Ontario – lags significantly behind other OECD countries when it comes to the supply of social housing. A recent report from Scotiabank calls for Canada to double its social housing to begin to close this gap.⁴
 - 200,000 Ontarians are waiting years for access to social housing. At least 99,000 new units would be required to meet this need.⁵
- In the 2023 Budget, the provincial government added an additional \$202 million each year to the Homelessness Prevention Program and Indigenous Supportive Housing Program. It also increased community-based mental health and addiction supports budget by \$425 million over the next three years. A good start but more is needed to address the crisis.
- Due to global events, increasing numbers of asylum seekers are turning to municipal shelter systems when they arrive in Ontario. The federal government will be providing an additional \$210 million to fund interim housing for those seeking refugee status. It is much needed at this critical time, but it is a stop-gap measure. Ongoing funding is needed as there is no sign that the flow of people seeking asylum in Ontario will slow down anytime soon.

Other resources and reports

- [2023 AMO Pre-Budget Submission: Building Ontario Together](#)
- [AMO's Call to Action on Housing and Homelessness](#)
- [AMO Homelessness Symposium](#)
- [Cost of Homelessness Infographic – Homeless Hub \(2018\)](#)
- For more information on AMO positions on homelessness, please see [AMO's Housing and Homelessness Resource Page](#)

For more information:

Brian Lambie, AMO Media Contact, 416-729-5425, lambie@redbrick.ca

¹ [Income Security Advocacy Centre 2023](#)

² [Financial Accountability Office of Ontario – Housing and Homelessness Programs in Ontario 2021](#)

³ [Feed Ontario – The Hunger Report 2022](#)

⁴ [R. Young. 2023. Canadian Housing Affordability Hurts: A Doubling of Social Housing Stock Could help Those in Greatest Need](#)

⁵ [Cooperative Housing Federation – Ontario and the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, Vote4Housing 2022](#)