

## **Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa Welcomes New Tools within Provincial Long-Term Affordable Strategy and Calls for Quick Action**

Monday, March 14, 2016 – Ottawa’s Alliance to End Homelessness welcomes the Province of Ontario’s renewed Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy – and is calling for quick action to introduce important new tools announced this morning. These tools will help to increase the availability of affordable housing and to reduce homelessness in Ottawa.

“Today’s announcement includes welcome news that Ontario is moving forward with proposed legislation enabling municipalities, including the City of Ottawa, to require inclusion of affordable housing within new residential developments,” notes Mike Bulthuis, Executive Director, Alliance to End Homelessness. “This is something for which the Alliance and our members have been advocating for years. We look forward to working with the City of Ottawa, the Province of Ontario and private sector partners to develop a framework that addresses local housing needs, responds to Ottawa’s housing market and builds inclusive, mixed-income neighbourhoods for all.”

In addition to inclusionary zoning, the strategy announced today includes a number of tools – including new portable housing benefits and housing allowances; operational and capital funding for supportive housing; enhancements to homelessness funding through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI); and support for innovative approaches. “With new investment expected through the federal budget to be tabled on March 22, we are pleased to hear Ontario Minister Ted McMeekin note that initiatives within the provincial strategy can each be scaled up in partnership with federal investments,” notes Christine MacIntosh, Chair, Alliance to End Homelessness.

The strategy will move us forward if backed by meaningful investment and effective legislation. Last year, in response to a report commissioned by the Province, the government committed to prioritizing Aboriginal, youth and chronic homelessness, as well as homelessness following stays in provincial hospital and jails. The Alliance welcomes news of the development of an Indigenous Housing Strategy, to be developed in partnership with Indigenous communities – including those here in Ottawa.

While welcoming modest increases to the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support programs in the 2016 provincial budget, the Alliance echoes the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, recommending that “social assistance rates [be] increased in all provinces [including Ontario] to levels that allow a decent living for beneficiaries and their families so as to ensure an effective income safety net.” Moving forward, in addition to a basic income pilot announced in the Provincial budget in 2016, meaningful increases to social assistance need to be regarded as a core component of a strategy to improve housing outcomes.

In 2014, 6,520 different individuals in Ottawa stayed in an emergency shelter at some point during the year, while the average length of stay increased from 73 days (in 2013) to 77 days (in 2014), pointing to an acute shortage of affordable housing options. Additionally, many families and individuals, including youth, experience homelessness without accessing shelters, staying with family and friends while not having a home of their own. Ontario's strategy, including efforts to enumerate the homeless population, needs to address the fullness of homelessness and housing instability.

In Ottawa, over 10,000 households are on Ottawa's wait list for affordable housing, and 1/5 of all renters are spending more than 50% of their income on rent and utilities. Now is the time to ensure that these households, and the many across Ontario, are able to find affordable housing and the supports they need to live independently and successfully.

*The Alliance to End Homelessness is a non-partisan, non-profit organization working in partnership in Ottawa to inspire local action, to generate knowledge and to inform our community-wide effort to achieve an end to homelessness in our community. We represent over 50 Ottawa-based service providing organizations working to strengthen residents' housing outcomes. Together, our vision is of an inclusive community, where everyone has an affordable, appropriate home.*

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