

Subject: Canada-Ontario Community Housing Benefits 2024-2025

File Number: ACS2024-CSS-GEN-014

Report to Community Services Committee on 22 October 2024

and Council 30 October 2024

Submitted on October 16, 2024 by Clara Freire, General Manager, Community and Social Services

Contact Person: Kale Brown, Acting Director, Housing & Homelessness Services

613-580-2424 ext. 33014, kale.brown@ottawa.ca

Ward: Citywide

Objet : Initiative Canada-Ontario de logement communautaire 2024-2025

Numéro de dossier : ACS2024-CSS-GEN-014

Rapport présenté au Comité des services communautaires

Rapport soumis le 22 octobre 2024

et au Conseil le 30 octobre 2024

Soumis le 2024-10-16 par Clara Freire, Directrice générale, Services sociaux et communautaires

Personne ressource : Kale Brown, Directeur intérimaire, Services du logement et de la lutte contre l'itinérance

613-580-2424 ext. 33014, kale.brown@ottawa.ca

Quartier : À l'échelle de la ville

REPORT RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Community Services Committee recommend Council approve that the Director, Housing & Homelessness Services continue to administer the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit Program in accordance with the provincial guidelines, and the priorities as set out in this report.

RECOMMANDATION(S) DU RAPPORT

Que le Comité des services communautaires recommande au Conseil d'approuver que le directeur des Services du logement et de la lutte contre l'itinérance continue d'administrer le programme Allocation Canada-Ontario pour le logement conformément aux lignes directrices provinciales et aux priorités énoncées dans le présent rapport.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Assumption and Analysis

The Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) is a provincially administered PHB program that was established in 2019 as part of the National Housing Strategy. Portable housing benefits (PHB) allow households the flexibility to move anywhere in Ontario as their circumstances evolve. The COHB program assists low-income vulnerable households in Ottawa who meet certain priority groups.

The City of Ottawa has been allocated a total of \$11.8M since the initial 2020-2021 allocation. As outlined in the COHB report (Council Report [ACS2020-CSS-GEN-002](#)) dated February 26, 2020, as amended Motion 28/5, the first two years of the program targeted:

- Single women and female-led households with children
- Priority consideration for Indigenous women
- Households at risk of homelessness due to the termination of a PHB program

The Canada-Ontario Community Housing Benefits Report [ACS2022-CSS-GEN-008](#) dated April 27, 2022 (2022 COHB Report) amended these recommendations to include the following priority groups:

- Survivors of Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking
- Households with Children At-Risk of Homelessness and
- Households Experiencing Homelessness
- Seniors Aged 60+ and People with Disabilities
- Indigenous Persons

The revised COHB Program Guidelines issued by the Province, dated July 1, 2023, added young adults and survivors of gender-based violence as priority groups of the program. On September 18, 2023, the City of Ottawa received an additional COHB allocation of \$1.8M for 2023-24. This additional funding allocation was provided to address the increase in asylum claimants. A new target group of newcomers was added to the COHB program.

The Province has now announced the fifth year of the program (2024-25) and the City of Ottawa's allocation of \$2.2M. Staff estimate the funding will assist approximately 247 households, by providing on average a monthly subsidy of \$954 to assist with housing costs for permanent private market housing.

Staff are recommending that the priority group Households with Children At-Risk of Homelessness and Households Experiencing Homelessness be replaced with Households Experiencing or At-Risk of Homelessness, such that all households at risk of homeless can qualify for the benefit rather than only those with children. This updated priority aligns with the provincial wording and is consistent with City Council's strategic priority to create a clear path to eliminate chronic homelessness.

Based on the above, for 2024-2025, staff recommend allocating the benefits towards these updated priority groups:

- Survivors of Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking
- Households Experiencing or At-Risk of Homelessness
- Seniors Aged 60+ and People with Disabilities
- Indigenous Persons
- Survivors of Gender-Based Violence
- Young Adults
- Newcomers (including asylum claimants)

For 2025-2026 and onwards, recognizing the pressing need to reduce shelter system intake, minimize the length of stay in the shelters and maximize opportunities to move households into permanent housing when funding is available, staff recommend that the primary priority groups be:

- Survivors of Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking

- Households Experiencing or At-Risk of Homelessness, including:
 - Seniors Aged 60+ and People with Disabilities
 - Indigenous Persons
 - Young Adults
 - Newcomers
- Survivors of Gender-Based Violence

Staff will administer the program in accordance with provincial guidelines and the 2022 COHB Report, which includes eligibility requirements, selection and monthly benefit calculation. Staff will continue to monitor the household take up of housing benefit funds to ensure all funding is fully utilized and the number of households entered into the program are maximized.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with the report recommendations. The operating costs to support the households and administer the program are included in the administration funding, as per the Transfer Payment Agreement.

RÉSUMÉ

Hypothèse et analyse

L'Allocation Canada-Ontario pour le logement (ACOL) est un programme de prestations de logement transférables (PLT) administré par la province qui a été établi en 2019 dans le cadre de la Stratégie nationale sur le logement. Les PLT permettent aux ménages de déménager n'importe où en Ontario en fonction de l'évolution de leur situation. Le programme de l'ACOL aide les ménages vulnérables à faible revenu d'Ottawa qui correspondent à certains groupes prioritaires.

La ville d'Ottawa a reçu un total de 11,8 millions de dollars depuis l'allocation initiale de 2020-2021. Tel qu'il est indiqué dans le rapport sur l'ACOL (rapport du Conseil [ACS2020-CSS-GEN-002](#)) daté du 26 février 2020, tel que modifié par la motion 28/5, les deux premières années du programme ciblaient :

- les femmes célibataires et les ménages monoparentaux dirigés par une femme;
- en accordant la priorité aux femmes autochtones;

- les ménages à risque d'itinérance en raison de la fin d'un programme de PLT.

Le rapport sur l'ACOL [ACS2022-CSS-GEN-008](#) daté du 27 avril 2022 (rapport sur l'ACOL de 2022) a modifié ces recommandations afin d'inclure les groupes prioritaires suivants:

- Survivants de violence familiale ou de traite de personnes
- Ménages avec enfants à risque d'itinérance
- Ménages en situation d'itinérance
- Aînés de 60 ans et plus et personnes handicapées
- Autochtones

Les lignes directrices révisées du programme de l'ACOL publiées par la province, datées du 1^{er} juillet 2023, ont ajouté les jeunes adultes et les survivants de la violence sexiste en tant que groupes prioritaires du programme. Le 18 septembre 2023, la Ville d'Ottawa a reçu un montant supplémentaire pour l'ACOL de 1,8 million de dollars pour 2023-2024. Ce financement supplémentaire visait à faire face à l'augmentation du nombre de demandeurs d'asile. Le nouveau groupe cible des nouveaux arrivants a été ajouté au programme de l'ACOL.

La province a maintenant annoncé la cinquième année du programme (2024-2025) et l'affectation de 2,2 millions de dollars par la Ville d'Ottawa. Le personnel estime que le financement aidera environ 247 ménages en leur accordant en moyenne une subvention mensuelle de 954 \$ qui aidera à assumer les coûts de leur logement permanent sur le marché privé.

Le personnel recommande que le groupe prioritaire « ménages avec enfants à risque d'itinérance et ménages en situation d'itinérance » soit remplacé par « ménages en situation d'itinérance ou à risque d'itinérance », de sorte que tous les ménages à risque d'itinérance puissent bénéficier de l'allocation, et non plus seulement ceux ayant des enfants. Cette priorité actualisée s'aligne sur le libellé provincial et est conforme à la priorité stratégique du Conseil municipal de créer une voie claire pour éliminer l'itinérance chronique.

Compte tenu de ce qui précède, le personnel recommande d'attribuer les allocations aux groupes prioritaires mis à jour suivants pour 2024-2025 :

- Survivants de violence familiale ou de traite de personnes

- Ménages en situation d'itinérance ou à risque d'itinérance
- Aînés de 60 ans et plus et personnes handicapées
- Autochtones
- Survivants de la violence sexiste
- Jeunes adultes
- Nouveaux arrivants (y compris les demandeurs d'asile)

Pour 2025-2026 et les années suivantes, reconnaissant le besoin pressant de réduire le nombre de prises en charge dans le réseau des refuges, de minimiser la durée du séjour dans les refuges et d'optimiser les possibilités de transférer les ménages dans des logements permanents lorsque le financement est disponible, le personnel recommande que les principaux groupes prioritaires soient les suivants:

- Survivants de violence familiale ou de traite de personnes
- Ménages en situation d'itinérance ou à risque d'itinérance, notamment:
 - Aînés de 60 ans et plus et personnes handicapées
 - Autochtones
 - Jeunes adultes
 - Nouveaux arrivants
- Survivants de la violence sexiste

Le personnel administrera le programme conformément aux lignes directrices provinciales et au rapport sur l'ACOL de 2022, qui comprend les conditions d'admissibilité, la sélection et le calcul des prestations mensuelles. Le personnel continuera de vérifier le nombre de ménages qui reçoivent des prestations de logement afin de veiller à ce que tous les fonds soient utilisés et que le nombre de ménages inscrits au programme est optimisé.

Implications financières

Les recommandations du rapport n'ont pas de répercussions financières. Les coûts de fonctionnement pour soutenir les ménages et administrer le programme sont inclus

dans le financement de l'administration, conformément à l'accord de paiement de transfert.

BACKGROUND

The Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) is a jointly funded, provincially delivered federal-provincial portable housing allowance program that was first introduced in 2019. The purpose of the program is to increase the affordability of rental housing by providing an income-tested PHB directly to eligible households in need that are on, or are eligible to be on, the social housing waiting list.

On December 20, 2019, the Province released the parameters for the first two years of the COHB. As outlined in the 2020 COHB Report ([ACS2020-CSS-GEN-002](#)) dated February 26, 2020, the City of Ottawa focused the funding allocations on single women and female-led households with children and Indigenous women within the provincial priority groups.

The Canada-Ontario Community Housing Benefits Report [ACS2022-CSS-GEN-008](#) dated April 27, 2022 (2022 COHB Report) amended these recommendations to the following priority groups:

- Survivors of Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking
- Households with Children At-Risk of Homelessness and Households Experiencing Homelessness
- Seniors Aged 60+ and People with Disabilities
- Indigenous Persons

The revised COHB Program Guidelines, dated July 1, 2023, added young adults and survivors of gender-based violence as priority groups of the program.

On September 18, 2023, the City of Ottawa received an additional COHB allocation of \$1.8M for 2023-24. This additional funding allocation was provided to address the increase in asylum claimants. A new target group of newcomers was added to the COHB program.

The City has fully allocated the COHB allocations in all previous years of the COHB program.

DISCUSSION

This report is being brought forward to seek approval for the Director, Housing & Homelessness Services to continue to administer the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit Program in accordance with the provincial guidelines, and the priorities as set out in this report.

The Province has now announced the fifth year of the program (2024-25) and the City of Ottawa's allocation of \$2.2M. Staff estimate the funding will assist approximately 247 households, by providing on average a monthly subsidy of \$954 to assist with housing costs for permanent private market housing. The PHB is also portable anywhere in Ontario if households choose to move later on, which provides the household with far more flexibility as their circumstances evolve.

As the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit Program is intended for vulnerable populations and since household demand far exceeds housing benefit funding, the City, as Service Manager, is responsible to identify potential households, within the provincial priority groups and among those who meet the eligibility criteria, to apply for the housing benefit.

The City's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan (the "10-Year Plan") includes the objective of preventing the occurrence of homelessness. Rising rents, low minimum wage and low social assistance rates, mean more people are struggling to afford their rents and are at risk of housing loss.

In 2024-2025, staff recommend allocating the benefits towards these updated priority groups:

- Survivors of Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking
- Households Experiencing or At-Risk of Homelessness
- Seniors Aged 60+ and People with Disabilities
- Indigenous Persons
- Survivors of Gender-Based Violence
- Young Adults
- Newcomers

Beginning 2025-2026 and onwards, staff recommend that the primary priority groups be:

- Survivors of Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking
- Survivors of Gender-Based Violence
- Households Experiencing or At-Risk of Homelessness, including:
 - Seniors Aged 60+ and People with Disabilities
 - Indigenous Persons
 - Young Adults
 - Newcomers

Staff are recommending this change in priorities because of the pressing need to reduce shelter system intake, minimize the length of stay in the shelters and, maximize opportunities to move households into permanent housing when funding is available. Further, the updated priorities will broaden eligibility for the program, allowing staff to respond to emerging needs.

Housing & Homelessness Services will seek new council approval in future years if there are significant changes to the funding allocations, pressures such that the priorities should be modified, or program guidelines.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with the report recommendations. The operating costs to support the households and administer the program are included in the administration funding, as per the Transfer Payment Agreement.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to the implementation of the report recommendations.

COMMENTS BY THE WARD COUNCILLOR(S)

There are no comments by the Ward Councillors as this is a City-Wide Report.

CONSULTATION

There was no opportunity for consultation associated with this Report.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

All requirements under the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) will meet both Provincial and Municipal accessibility regulations and policies, including the *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation* O.Reg. 191/11 under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (2005), as well as the City of Ottawa Accessibility Policy and the Accessible Formats and Communication Supports Procedure.

Additionally, the COHB provides numerous positive accessibility impacts as the program not only directly benefits seniors and people with disabilities as an existing priority group the program has targeted since 2022, but also has identified new priority groups including survivors of gender-based violence, young adults and newcomers, all of whom may share intersectional identities that could also include persons with disabilities.

DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY IMPLICATIONS

Staff are requesting delegated authority as follows:

That the Director, Housing & Homelessness Services be delegated authority to enter into necessary agreements and submit required reports or plans, including reports on a quarterly and annual basis, to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, for the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit Program (COHB) and administer the program in accordance with the provincial guidelines, and the priorities as set out in this report.

INDIGENOUS, GENDER AND EQUITY IMPLICATIONS

Prioritizing Indigenous peoples to apply for the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit contributes to reconciliation by closing gaps in economic outcomes and increasing housing stability. Indigenous community members are disproportionately represented in shelter systems compared to the general population of Ottawa. 32% of people who are homeless in Ottawa are Indigenous. Indigenous people make up 5% of the Ottawa population.

For survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking, resources such as the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit play a vital role in helping them rebuild their lives free from violence. These housing supports allow survivors to secure housing that meets their needs. Given that housing unaffordability and insecurity disproportionately affect those trying to escape abusive situations, and that they often face significant discrimination in the private rental market, programs like this are essential in providing stability and a path to safety.

TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES

Council has deemed “A city that has affordable housing and is more liveable for all” as one of four priorities in the 2023-2026 Term of Council Priorities report. The Canada Ontario Housing Benefit will contribute to the increase in affordable housing options for residents in the City of Ottawa.

DISPOSITION

The Canada-Ontario Community Housing Benefit will be used to advance the objectives of the updated 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan by promoting housing stability and rental affordability for our residents and reducing the number of households on the Centralized Wait List who are waiting for affordable housing.