

**Subject: Unsheltered Homelessness Outreach Model**

**File Number: ACS2026-CSS-GEN-003**

**Report to Community Services Committee on 24 February 2026**

**and Council 11 March 2026**

**Submitted on February 12, 2026 by Clara Freire, General Manager, Community and Social Services**

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**Ward: Citywide**

**Objet : Modèle de rapprochement pour les personnes en situation d'itinérance sans refuge**

**Numéro de dossier : ACS2026-CSS-GEN-003**

**Rapport présenté au Comité des services communautaires**

**Rapport soumis le 24 février 2026**

**et au Conseil le 11 mars 2026**

**Soumis le 2026-02-12 par Clara Freire, Directrice générale – Services sociaux et communautaires**

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**Quartier : À l'échelle de la ville**

## **REPORT RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**That the Community Services Committee recommend Council:**

- 1. Approve the outreach model outlined in the report below.**
- 2. Delegate authority to the General Manager, Community and Social Services to make operational adjustments to the model through evidence-based processes in the future.**
- 3. Direct the General Manager, Community and Social Services and Chief Financial Officer to identify sustainable funding sources for the outreach model, including in partnership with other levels of government.**

## **RECOMMANDATION(S) DU RAPPORT**

**Que le Comité des services communautaires recommande au Conseil :**

- 1. D'approuver le modèle de rapprochement décrit dans le rapport ci-dessous.**
- 2. De déléguer à la directrice générale, Services sociaux et communautaires, le pouvoir d'apporter des ajustements opérationnels au modèle en s'inspirant de processus fondés sur des données probantes.**
- 3. De charger la directrice générale, Services sociaux et communautaires, et le chef des finances de trouver des sources de financement durables pour le modèle de rapprochement, notamment en partenariat avec d'autres ordres de gouvernement.**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Since 2020, Ottawa has been facing a growing crisis of unsheltered homelessness compounded with mental health and substance use challenges. The number of unsheltered individuals rose from 72 in 2018 to a peak of 225 in 2020. In response to this increase and the pressures placed on individuals, communities, and service providers, in the fall of 2020, the City of Ottawa Housing & Homelessness Services convened a multi-departmental Unsheltered Task Force (UTF) to address and respond to the emerging needs of the unsheltered population.

Despite the efforts of the UTF and other sector partners, by 2024, the highest number of recorded unsheltered individuals reached 405, with encampments concentrated in

downtown neighbourhoods like Centretown, Lowertown, and Sandy Hill. Between 2021 and 2025, these areas of the city had a combined total of 725 reported encampments.

Compounding the unsheltered homelessness crisis is the toxic drug crisis the city is facing. In 2024, there were 941 overdose-related emergency department visits and 166 opioid-related deaths, with the highest rates in Lowertown West and East, Wateridge Village and Centretown West. There was a steady decline in overdose-related emergency department visits in 2024, but the number of confirmed opioid overdose emergency department (ED) visits has increased throughout 2025 with the most dramatic increase in Q3.

The impacts on the community of these concurrent crises have been significant. A 2025 population survey showed 41 per cent of downtown residents feel unsafe walking around after dark, and over 65 per cent of respondents feel their neighbourhood has worsened in the past two years, citing public drug use and discarded needles as key concerns.

Ottawa's outreach system, which has been developed incrementally through fragmented funding streams, currently lacks a coordinated framework and sustainable funding. The current focus on individual crisis response does not adequately address community-level impacts or systemic challenges. A systems-level coordinated approach is required to address the overlapping challenges associated with homelessness, substance use, and community safety, while supporting vulnerable populations and restoring public confidence in the outreach response.

To advance the current outreach model to an outreach system that responds to the evolving and emerging needs of all community members, the City and partners are moving from a program-by-program approach to a coordinated, system-level outreach model.

In 2025, the Community and Social Services Department led a co-design process with service providers, residents, businesses, and people with lived and living experience to create a model focused on housing readiness, equity, cultural safety, and community safety.

The redesigned approach to outreach is characterized by three main components: responding to the needs of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness, enhanced community engagement, and public space stewardship, and aligned resource allocation and performance measurement.

The enhanced model introduces centralized coordination with a single lead organization managing outreach services and an integrated data system for real-time case management and streamlined service pathways. The outreach interventions will be focused on preparing clients for entry into long-term housing, and structured public reporting and communication mechanisms will address concerns from residents and businesses and improve responsiveness. A performance measurement framework will track performance and issues to inform data-informed decision making, service planning, and resource allocation.

The model remains housing focused, driven towards moving clients into long-term housing. A key measure of success will be the number of clients housed through outreach interventions.

As part of this redesigned approach, the role of the Community Engagement Team (CET) will also evolve, shifting from frontline service delivery to a system coordination role focused on collaboration, contract management, public communication, data-informed decision making, and service alignment.

The governance of the coordinated outreach model will operate under a shared governance structure between the Community and Social Services Department (CSSD) and key components of the Ottawa Police Service's CORE initiatives. CSSD staff will continue collaborating with Market Safe and CORE programs to deliver a comprehensive set of skills, resources, and strategies to address public safety challenges.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

Depuis 2020, Ottawa est confrontée à une crise croissante de l'itinérance sans refuge, aggravée par des problèmes de santé mentale et de toxicomanie. Le nombre de personnes sans abri est passé de 72 en 2018 à un pic de 225 en 2020. En réponse à cette augmentation et aux pressions exercées sur les personnes, les communautés et les fournisseurs de services, à l'automne 2020, les Services du logement et de la lutte contre l'itinérance de la Ville d'Ottawa ont formé un Groupe de travail sur les personnes sans-abri (GTPSA) composé de représentants de plusieurs directions générales afin de répondre aux besoins émergents de cette population.

Malgré les efforts déployés par le GTPSA et d'autres partenaires du secteur, en 2024, la Ville a enregistré le nombre le plus élevé de personnes sans abri, soit 405, les campements étant principalement concentrés dans les quartiers centraux du centre-

ville, de la Basse-Ville et de Sandy Hill. Entre 2021 et 2025, ces quartiers de la Ville ont rapporté un total combiné de 725 campements.

La crise de l'itinérance sans refuge est exacerbée par celle des drogues toxiques à laquelle la Ville est confrontée. En 2024, on a dénombré 941 visites aux urgences liées à des surdoses et 166 décès liés aux opioïdes, les taux les plus élevés étant enregistrés dans la Basse-Ville Ouest et Est, le Village des Riverains et le centre-ville Ouest. Le nombre de visites aux urgences liées à des surdoses a diminué de façon constante en 2024, mais le nombre de visites confirmées aux urgences liées à des surdoses d'opioïdes a augmenté tout au long de l'année 2025, avec une augmentation particulièrement marquée au troisième trimestre.

Ces crises simultanées ont eu des répercussions importantes sur la communauté. Une enquête menée auprès de la population en 2025 a révélé que 41 % des résidents du centre-ville ne se sentent pas en sécurité lorsqu'ils se promènent après la tombée de la nuit, et plus de 65 % des répondants estiment que leur quartier s'est détérioré au cours des deux dernières années, évoquant la consommation de drogues en public et les seringues usagées comme principales préoccupations.

Le système de rapprochement d'Ottawa, qui s'est développé progressivement grâce à des sources de financement fragmentées, souffre de l'absence d'un cadre coordonné et d'un financement durable. La priorité que l'on accorde actuellement aux interventions visant chacune de ces crises ne permet pas de traiter de manière adéquate les répercussions au niveau communautaire ou les défis systémiques. Il importe d'adopter une approche globale coordonnée pour relever des défis qui se recoupent en matière d'itinérance, de consommation de substances et de sécurité communautaire, tout en soutenant les populations vulnérables et en rétablissant la confiance du public dans les capacités d'intervention de la Ville.

Afin de faire évoluer le modèle actuel vers un système de rapprochement qui répond de manière plus efficace aux besoins changeants et émergents de tous les membres de la communauté, la Ville et ses partenaires passent d'une approche par programme à un modèle coordonné au niveau du système.

En 2025, la Direction générale des services sociaux et communautaires a dirigé un processus de conception conjointe avec les fournisseurs de services, les résidents, les entreprises et les personnes ayant vécu ou vivant l'itinérance afin de créer un modèle axé sur la préparation au logement, l'équité, la sécurité culturelle et la sécurité communautaire.

La nouvelle approche en matière de rapprochement se caractérise par trois éléments principaux : répondre aux besoins des personnes sans abri, renforcer l'engagement communautaire et la gestion des espaces publics, et harmoniser l'allocation des ressources et la mesure des performances.

Le modèle amélioré introduit une coordination centralisée reposant sur une seule organisation responsable de gérer les services de rapprochement et un système de données intégré pour la gestion des cas en temps réel et la simplification des trajectoires de service. Les interventions de rapprochement seront axées sur la préparation des clients à l'accès à un logement à long terme, et des mécanismes structurés de communication et de déclaration au public permettront de répondre aux préoccupations des résidents et des entreprises et d'améliorer la réactivité de la Ville. Grâce à un cadre de mesure du rendement, la Ville effectuera un suivi des résultats et des problèmes afin d'étayer la prise de décisions, la planification des services et l'allocation des ressources, en fonction de données probantes.

Le modèle reste axé sur le logement et vise à aider les clients à accéder à un logement à long terme. Le nombre de clients logés grâce aux interventions de rapprochement constituera un indicateur de réussite clé.

Dans le cadre de cette nouvelle approche, le rôle de l'Équipe d'engagement communautaire (EEC) évoluera également, passant de la prestation de services de première ligne à un rôle de coordination du système axé sur la collaboration, la gestion des contrats, la communication publique, la prise de décisions étayées par des données probantes et l'harmonisation des services.

La gestion du modèle de rapprochement coordonné fonctionnera dans le cadre d'une structure de gouvernance partagée entre la Direction générale des services sociaux et communautaires (DGSSC) et les principaux éléments des initiatives d'approche, d'intervention et de mobilisation communautaires (CORE) du Service de police d'Ottawa. Le personnel de la DGSSC continuera de collaborer avec les programmes Marché sûr et CORE afin de fournir un ensemble complet de compétences, de ressources et de stratégies pour relever les défis en matière de sécurité publique.

## **BACKGROUND**

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the compounded impacts of the lack of affordable housing options in Ottawa, including the high cost of rent, Ottawa began seeing a sustained presence of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness or in encampments in 2020 that has continued over the years. The number of unsheltered

individuals increased from 72 identified in the 2018 Point in Time (PiT) Count, to 225 in 2020 to a high of 405 in 2024, with most unsheltered homelessness concentrated in the downtown core.

In fall 2020, in response to the increased prevalence of unsheltered homelessness, the City convened a multi-departmental Unsheltered Task Force (UTF) to respond to the emerging needs of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The UTF consists of 92 multidisciplinary groups with representation from relevant City departments and external partners. Key partners include Housing and Homelessness Services, Bylaw Services, Public Works and Environment Services, community outreach providers, Ottawa Police Service, and the National Capital Commission working together to address the immediate, short-term, and long-term needs of unsheltered individuals through a coordinated approach.

In 2025, the Salvation Army Outreach team and Housing Outreach Team assisted clients into housing 141 times. These housing placements included moves from unsheltered homelessness into housing, clients being relocated from one residence to another, or repatriations to their hometown or previous home.

Despite sustained efforts by the UTF and other sector partners, Ottawa has continued to see a steady increase in the number of unsheltered individuals and reported encampments. Encampments are defined as organized groupings of tents or makeshift shelters where unsheltered individuals reside together. Between 2021 and 2025, Centretown, Lowertown, and Sandy Hill had the highest number of reported encampments, totaling 725 across the three neighbourhoods.

This rise in unsheltered homelessness and reported encampments has coincided with a steady increase in opioid and toxic drug use and related deaths in Ottawa. In recent years, there has also been a shift in the mode of drug use from injection to inhalation, and there is a trend of increased deaths connected to inhalation use. Through the Province, between January 2021 and September 2025, the three Consumption and Treatment Services and the Supervised Consumption Site in Ottawa had over 410,000 visits. The closure of two of these sites in 2025 leaves a gap in services that will place additional pressures on the two remaining sites and the surrounding communities.

According to the [Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health Community dashboard](#) in 2024 there were 941 overdose related emergency department visits and 166 opioid related deaths—well above pre-pandemic levels. While overdose related emergency department (ED) visits declined in 2024, the number of confirmed opioid overdose ED visits has increased throughout 2025 with the most dramatic increase in Q3. The highest rates of overdose related ED visits were in Lowertown West, Sandy Hill, West Centretown, and Lowertown East, with the highest rates of opioid toxicity deaths in Lowertown West, Lowertown East, Wateridge Village, and West Centretown. Additionally, according to The State of Mental Health in Canada 2024 report released by the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario saw a dramatic increase in mental health and addictions-related harms and long wait times for counseling and other mental health services continue to be a problem.

While the effects of unsheltered homelessness, mental health illness, and harms that can be caused by drug use are felt at the individual level for those in crisis, the broader community is also substantially impacted. In January 2025, residents of the ByWard Market, Lowertown, and Sandy Hill responded to a population survey regarding quality of life. People who live downtown are more likely to feel unsafe walking in their communities after dark (41 per cent) compared to residents of other areas in Ottawa (16 per cent). While half (50.9 per cent) reported their quality of life in Ottawa to be 'Very good' or 'Good', the majority (65.8 per cent) believed their neighborhood had become a worse place to live compared to two years ago. Public drug use, loitering, public defecation, and improperly discarded needles were the leading reasons respondents cited for worsening conditions.

The complex intersection of increasing unsheltered homelessness, an increase in mental-health illness, harms that can be caused by drug use and toxic drug supply continues to cause wellness and safety concerns for all individuals in the Ottawa community, particularly in the neighborhoods highlighted above in the downtown core.

This issue is not unique to Ottawa. A January 2026 report released by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) shows that the majority of Service Managers across the province reported having an increased number of encampments and a high number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in their communities in 2025. Many Service Managers reported that enforcement activities primarily affect the location and visibility of encampments rather than resolving the issue. Provincial data indicates that enforcement is used increasingly to try to manage pressures that originate across multiple systems.

The City of Ottawa's approach to addressing encampments is primarily supportive, and enforcement is only considered a last resort option. Outreach teams are housing-focused and use a street-level relationship-building approach to address the needs of the unsheltered population. Between January 1, 2025, and December 31, 2025, a total of 545 encampments were reported across Ottawa. Of these, 462 were resolved without the need for a formal dismantling process.

### **Outreach services in Ottawa**

Ottawa's outreach strategy to support people who are unsheltered is built on low-barrier, harm reduction and Housing First principles. The strategy aims to connect people living unsheltered to safe spaces, health care, and long-term housing. However, the current municipal funding framework for outreach services and programs does not share common goals, outcome measures, or approaches to service delivery. Outreach service providers continue to work diligently to support and house individuals experiencing homelessness – in 2025, 141 individuals were housed – but there is an opportunity to streamline and better coordinate the approach. As pressures in the system continue to increase, the City requires a systems-level approach to more effectively respond to the needs across all communities.

Challenges of the current structure stem from how the outreach system developed. It has been built incrementally over the years through multiple municipal, provincial and federal funding streams, each with its own reporting structures, priorities, and accountability requirements. Each new funding source was an opportunity to inject needed funding into the response, but short funding deadlines did not allow time for the development of a holistic framework.

One time funding has also made it challenging to plan sustainable approaches, leading to gaps in service and the inability to plan and coordinate effectively. Historically, outreach services have been designed with a strong client-focused approach, emphasizing individual support and crisis response. While essential, this approach does not address the broader community or impacts at a neighbourhood level. As a result, the needs for all community members are not being met, and the structure is unable to respond effectively to the full range of issues affecting clients and the surrounding community.

As indicated above, downtown Ottawa has been experiencing unprecedented pressures marked by declining economic activity and growing safety and security concerns. To respond effectively, the City needs a coordinated strategy that addresses the complex

needs of unsheltered individuals while restoring public confidence in the City's response to chronic and systemic challenges affecting these communities.

In fall 2024, Bloomberg Associates, a philanthropic consulting firm, began to support the City of Ottawa with the design process for an enhanced outreach service model. The project team began collating best practices provincially, nationally and internationally through an environmental scan. Bloomberg Associates continued to inform on opportunities and alignment with other key city initiatives to support a more holistic approach. While working to update the model, additional funding became available to address some of the broad challenges communities in Ottawa were facing.

In November 2024, the Community Safety and Well-Being Office secured \$7.6 million over three years from the Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General for piloting the delivery of the Unsheltered Homeless Outreach Model, an enhanced coordinated outreach project in the downtown core. This model was one component within a broader series of proposals jointly submitted by the City of Ottawa and the Ottawa Police Service and informed by a service gap analysis that involved the participation of people experiencing homelessness, current outreach teams, business owners, residents and Indigenous community members and organizations. These proposals were advanced through the Public Safety envelope as part of the Ottawa-Ontario Agreement, reflecting a collaborative effort to enhance community safety and coordinate access to health and social services through outreach supports for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in downtown Ottawa.

In year one (April 2024 to March 2025), funding for coordinated and expanded outreach services was allocated through existing contracts under established policies to address urgent community needs while planning for future years. Enhancements included 24/7 coverage to bridge service gaps, leveraging community-based health and social workers, and implementing evidence-based peer support interventions. Initiatives such as plain-clothed paramedics with the Mental Well-Being Response Team in the ByWard Market aimed to improve response times. These efforts were built on the City's Community Engagement Team to strengthen service coordination and foster relationships with residents and businesses. Continued learning from year one and ongoing engagement has informed a new outreach service model for Ottawa that will complement other municipal strategies like the ByWard Market revitalization and downtown revitalization efforts.

Through the City's Strategic Plan for 2023-2026, the City has committed to revitalizing downtown Ottawa by increasing economic activity, boosting tourism, expanding housing

options, and making downtown a safer, more vibrant, and attractive place for residents, businesses, and visitors. The unsheltered homelessness outreach model supports the safety and social pillar of the City's downtown revitalization strategy with a dual focus on physical and economic transformation, as well as the social conditions that fundamentally shape the downtown experience for everyone.

## **DISCUSSION**

Research published in the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) 2026 report [Municipalities Under Pressure-one year later](#) reveals that Ontario's homelessness crisis continues to worsen.

Nearly 85,000 Ontarians were known to be homeless in 2025, an increase of almost 8 per cent in just one year and nearly 50 per cent since 2021. An estimated 45,000 people were experiencing chronic homelessness, representing 53 per cent of all known homelessness in Ontario. Growth in chronic homelessness, in part, reflects the limited availability of appropriate and affordable housing, with many people cycling through shelters, temporary accommodations, and other emergency responses because there are few options to exit into stable housing. In 2025, Ontario's community housing (rent-geared-to-income) waitlist reached an estimated 300,000 households, with an average wait time of 65 months.

Recommendations from the 2025 AMO report include an investment of \$11 billion over 10 years to expand supportive, transitional, and community housing and to strengthen prevention programs and a further \$2 billion over 8 years to address the growing challenge of encampments across the province. The AMO report clearly recommends that both the provincial and federal governments undertake substantial, sustained actions to expand affordable housing, strengthen mental health and addiction services, and enhance income-support programs to address the increasing number of individuals experiencing homelessness. Outreach plays a crucial role in operationalizing these actions by connecting individuals to housing options, supports, and prevention programs, ensuring that the increased investments translate into meaningful outcomes for those experiencing homelessness.

To address the escalating pressures related to rising levels of unsheltered homelessness in Ottawa, the impact of the toxic drug crisis, opportunities for improved coordination for outreach delivery identified by individuals with lived and living experience, and increasing community concerns, the City and community partners are

shifting from a program-by-program outreach response to a more coordinated, system-level outreach model.

In 2025, the Community and Social Services Department worked collaboratively with outreach providers, residents, people with lived and living experience, community groups, businesses, Ottawa Police Services, and Ottawa Public Health. Together, they developed a coordinated outreach response through a co-design process that included reviewing opportunities to enhance coordination, responsiveness, collaboration and efficiency of outreach services in Ottawa. This consultation process informed the proposed model outlined in this report.

These engagement sessions and conversations brought forward critical details on the successes and gaps with the current response and identified needs for the updated model. The enhanced model will utilize a collaborative, multi-partner approach, strengthening and streamlining connections with community partners and other key collaborators to enhance situational awareness, coordinate responses, improve information sharing, and streamline interventions while ensuring appropriate responses for people based on need. The model remains housing focused, driven towards moving people into long-term housing. Key measures of success will be the number of people housed through outreach interventions and the model's direct contribution to improving safety-related conditions and enhancing the overall sense of safety in public spaces.

This approach will also enhance responsiveness to community concerns and greater trust by establishing more structured, consistent and accessible engagement with residents and businesses, supporting timely identification of issues with more coordinated and effective municipal responses.

The redesigned approach to outreach is characterized by three main components, each with corresponding strategies:

1. Responding to the needs of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness:
  - Strategy 1.1: Redesign and launch a more coordinated, responsive street outreach model to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness.
  - Strategy 1.2: Disburse additional resources to service providers to meet the scale of need.
  - Strategy 1.3: Rescope the Community Engagement Team (CET) to become the coordinating body for the updated outreach approach, strengthening

alignment across City departments and partner agencies to reduce service gaps. CET will serve as the liaison for businesses and residents, addressing community concerns and facilitating communication and issue remediation while supporting the safety and well-being of unsheltered individuals and surrounding neighbourhoods.

2. Enhanced community engagement and public space stewardship:

- Strategy 2.1: Create a simple and reliable point of first contact to call for relevant requests and complaints.
- Strategy 2.2: Develop a robust community engagement and communications plan for intaking and tracking issues and enhanced information sharing.
- Strategy 2.3: Maintain alignment with economic development and public realm plans and other municipal strategies.

3. Aligned resource allocation and performance measurement.

- Strategy 3.1: Develop internal coordination across City departments and between all levels of government, and with community partners and providers of outreach services. Efforts will be aligned with a broader, long-term plan for health and housing to be developed in partnership with Ottawa Public Health.
- Strategy 3.2: Create a unified data tracking plan to stay apprised of areas of greatest need and program impacts.
- Strategy 3.3: Conduct an internal funding allocation review to align funding allocations to address service gaps, avoid overlap, and maximize resources.

These new strategies are designed to strengthen service delivery, enhance data collection, improve public reporting, and promote improved coordination across the sector through a systems-level approach. Each of the three components and their associated strategies are outlined in detail below.

1. Coordinated service delivery through a single lead provider
2. Integrated intake and case management through one data system
3. Centralized dispatch through single point of entry
4. Performance measurement and public reporting framework

## 5. Shared governance model between CSSD and the Ottawa Police Service's CORE Initiatives

### **Program design and delivery**

Street outreach plays a crucial role in contributing to meaningful outcomes at the individual level by delivering critical social and material supports to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, while connecting them to service and treatment pathways. These supports provide people with a better chance at accessing long-term housing and improved health outcomes. Outreach program design focused on availability of outreach at all hours of the day, and the provision of resources matched to people's individual goals and challenges is important to supporting unsheltered individuals in a sustainable way. A key tenet of the new outreach model is the creation of a more coordinated and responsive approach to outreach that is explicitly housing focused and ensures equitable access to services.

To support streamlined coordination of services, a single lead provider will coordinate outreach teams, peers, and embedded health supports across the city. The lead provider will utilize one integrated data system to support real-time data-entry for case management, warm transfers and the continuity of services beyond outreach (emergency shelters, day programs, transitional/supportive housing). Intake will be centralized to ensure timely triage and consistent service pathways. By standardizing roles, tools, and performance measurement frameworks, the model will replace a program-by-program response with system-level coordination. Any sharing of personal information will be done in accordance with privacy legislation.

Leading up to the implementation of this new outreach model, the City undertook steps to increase capacity within the system by allocating additional resources to service providers to stabilize and expand their outreach services. Recent investments have allowed for coordinated and expanded outreach and paramedic services, extended operating hours of drop-in programs, increased peer supports, increased needle pick-up, and improved access to basic amenities like public washrooms. These interventions have bridged the immediate needs and gaps while the coordinated model was developed and implemented.

As part of this redesigned approach, the role of the municipal Community Engagement Team (CET) will also evolve, shifting from frontline outreach service delivery to a system coordination role focused on community coordination, contract management, and service alignment. The redesigned approach will integrate a stronger focus on

community development, systematic data collection, and data informed decision-making to guide service planning and resource allocation. This includes building the City's capacity to analyze trends, measure outcomes, and communicate progress to the public through accessible dashboards and other transparent reporting tools.

The CET will continue to play a key role in responding to community concerns through ongoing engagement with businesses, housed residents, and neighborhood partners. By rescoping the CET's role within the system, the City will be better positioned to coordinate responses with both internal and external partners and maintain alignment with economic development and public realm plans and other municipal strategies. This updated mandate is designed to strengthen accountability for end-to-end outreach coordination, improve alignment between City departments and external agencies, and reinforce cultural safety and trauma-informed practices as foundational principles in the planning and delivery of outreach services.

### **Public Space Stewardship**

An effective outreach program also supports the broader goal of ensuring public spaces remain welcoming and safe for the community, visitors, and business owners. One mechanism to achieve this is the creation of a simple public reporting mechanism that improves transparency around the ongoing efforts to address the homelessness crisis.

A key component of the new outreach model is a simpler and more reliable mechanism for residents, businesses, and clients to report concerns and have a clearer understanding of actions and outcomes. CSSD will implement and operate a centralized dispatch system for outreach services. A dedicated team of CSSD staff, trained in trauma-informed care, will take on an enhanced assessment function. Residents and service providers will be able to reach this dedicated team by calling 3-1-1. These dedicated staff will provide structured support and triage for calls involving encampments, homelessness, unsheltered homelessness, and related community issues to strengthen system coordination and response consistency. CSSD is currently piloting this new approach by responding to calls for single individuals requiring shelter placement. Throughout the month of January 2026, City staff have responded to 103 calls for single individuals seeking placement with 99 individuals supported with placement into a community shelter. The next phase will expand to include calls related to encampments, followed by dispatching outreach services once the new model is fully implemented by Q4 2026.

The tenets of community safety and public space stewardship embedded in the new outreach model are directly tied to the City's broader goal of creating a vibrant downtown. The outreach model aligns with economic development and public realm plans, including the objectives of the downtown/ByWard Market revitalization work and place-based commitments outlined in the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan refresh. By addressing social conditions in parallel with public realm investments, the City aims to restore confidence in public spaces, support local business activity and tourism, and ensure solutions are responsive to the distinct needs of areas like the ByWard Market, Centretown, Lowertown, and Sandy Hill.

In September 2025, Community Services Committee approved [motion CSC 2025-18-01](#) directing staff to provide a written summary of the current response to addressing encampments. The City's current encampment response plan prioritizes housing-focused outreach, trauma-informed care, and meaningful engagement, aiming to reduce encampments by 35 per cent and improve housing outcomes through initiatives funded by municipal, provincial, and federal sources. System-level improvements made through the new outreach model will improve reporting and tracking of encampments across the City through implementation of the centralized dispatch and tracking system, making the process more transparent and responsive to individual and community needs

### **Organizational coordination: Aligned resource allocation and measurement**

Delivering on the new outreach model will require strong internal coordination across departments and between all levels of government, and with community partners and providers of outreach services. Efforts will be aligned with a broader, long-term plan for health and housing to be developed in partnership with Ottawa Public Health, that will seek to address the systemic gaps in the system. These gaps have contributed to the fragmented delivery of services and once addressed will ensure a more effective and equitable system moving forward.

In Q1 2026, CSSD will initiate a Request for Offer (RFO) to commission a single agency responsible for coordinating and delivering outreach services. Outreach services will be aligned under a single lead contract holder with clear roles and performance expectations. CSSD will collaborate with Indigenous Outreach Service Providers to ensure that Indigenous-led services remain distinct, culturally sensitive, and meaningfully connected to the new model.

A performance measurement framework is being developed to provide structure, clarity, and accountability for the project. By establishing clear metrics and regular review

cycles, this framework will enable City staff and partners to monitor progress, identify gaps, and make timely adjustments to the program using data-driven insights and feedback.

Three priorities have been defined for measuring the outreach model's performance:

1. Implement public reporting to convey information about responses to community challenges downtown

A public reporting framework will be developed to establish a process for generating routine reports on activity and performance and communicating progress to the public through accessible dashboards and other transparent reporting tools. These reports will contain information about operations, progress, and challenges to support continuous improvement of services and adapt them to emergent community needs. Implementing the public reporting framework will require coordinating and standardizing data collection efforts across service delivery providers.

2. Increase the number of unsheltered people who are document-ready for case management

Increasing the number of unsheltered individuals who are document-ready for case management will be achieved by building a coordinated network of outreach providers offering both general and specialized services, such as counseling and first aid. Progress will be measured through indicators like the percentage of clients document-ready within 90 days, alongside outputs such as warm transfers to mental health supports and the provision of harm reduction supplies.

3. Improve data collection to support continuous improvement of social services

Improving data collection to promote continuous service improvement will involve documenting client-level data and tracking encampment status through the centralized data system.

Key metrics include the percentage of encampments that self-resolve, consent rates for housing services, and completion of client needs assessments that are connected to coordinated access for services, so they are prioritized within the homelessness supports systems. Outputs will detail encampment characteristics and client complexity levels, ensuring decisions are informed by accurate, timely data.

The governance of coordinated outreach will align under a shared governance model between the City's Community and Social Services Department and the key

components of the Ottawa Police Service's CORE Initiatives, including Neighborhood Operations Center (NOC), Hot Spots, Focused Enforcement, the Integrated Community Situation Table and the Community Advisory Board. CSSD Staff will continue to work together with the Ottawa Police Service's Market Safe and CORE initiatives to bring a holistic set of skills, resources, and approaches to the public safety challenges in the area and facilitate the diversion of police resources to more appropriate calls and focused efforts.

### **Program sustainability and funding**

In 2025, \$6 million in funding received from all three levels of government was allocated by the City to the sector to support and stabilize outreach services. Investments included the expansion of operating hours for outreach-related services, more peer outreach support, enhanced needle and drug paraphernalia pick up, and improved access to public washrooms.

Additional one-time funding opportunities have further enhanced key outreach work for people who are unsheltered. This funding was related to the impacts of the toxic drug supply, links to public safety and opportunities to support revitalization with existing municipal contributions supporting the Community Engagement Team, and service coordination efforts.

As part of the new outreach model the City will undertake a competitive process to allocate up to \$6 million in funding for the redesigned outreach model that will include Indigenous-led outreach services. Funding will be allocated through various funding envelopes from municipal, provincial and federal budgets that are under the purview of Community and Social Services. Specifically, this will include funding from Housing Infrastructure and Communities Canada, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Solicitor General of Ontario, and municipal homelessness funding and community safety and well-being funding. The availability of this funding is contingent upon confirmation of contributions from other levels of government. Combining these funding envelopes into a coordinated outreach strategy will support the implementation and evaluation of the updated model for one year.

Ongoing funding of this strategy will require renewed commitments from senior levels of government beyond year one. Staff will continue to pursue long-term funding to provide funding stability for the model and reduce reliance on one-time funding sources. To ensure continuity and strengthen the program's future viability, Council is asked to direct the General Manager of CSSD to work with the General Manager of Finance and

Corporate Services to identify and pursue ongoing, sustainable funding opportunities while City staff continue to manage program delivery and actively seek additional funding streams while this work is underway.

### **Alignment with municipal strategies**

The outreach model is one of many City and community strategies that are in place to support the unsheltered population, businesses, and residents in Ottawa. These strategies work together to address different aspects of the complex social challenges in downtown Ottawa, and the ByWard Market, including homelessness, harms that can occur with substance use and community safety.

As part of the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, the proposed outreach model aligns with initiatives such as the Downtown Revitalization Strategy by promoting integrated, multi-sector collaboration and streamlined service delivery. Through coordinated outreach, data-driven approaches, and housing-focused solutions, the model seeks to support the individuals facing the most complex barriers to housing, while contributing to a safer, more vibrant, and inclusive downtown.

The improved outreach model will play a meaningful role in the revitalization of the ByWard Market by supporting the City's broader goal of creating welcoming, accessible, and people-oriented public spaces. As the ByWard Market undergoes major public realm enhancements, stronger outreach services will help ensure these spaces are comfortable and safe for everyone who uses them. This includes working collaboratively with the Byward Market District Authority to align efforts.

In addition, the outreach model complements specialized programs like the Overdose Prevention and Response Strategy, ANCHOR crisis response, and the Ottawa Police Service CORE Strategy by advancing person-centered, health-oriented interventions that reduce reliance on traditional law enforcement for social issues. Together, these strategies support a holistic approach to downtown revitalization, while ensuring vulnerable populations receive comprehensive, coordinated care and support.

This work directly supports the City of Ottawa's 2022–2026 Term of Council Priorities, particularly commitments to community safety, housing, and economic vitality, and aligns with the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan by prioritizing housing-focused outreach and integrated supports for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness.

## **Next steps**

The enhanced outreach model represents meaningful progress, but it is not a solution on its own. The challenges facing people living unsheltered and the impacts felt by surrounding communities require sustained commitment, broader systems change, and continued collaboration. Building on recent initiatives to address the toxic drug crisis, including measures led by the province in its central role in delivery and funding of health services, social services and law enforcement, the City of Ottawa, through its Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan, identified an opportunity for federal support for new and innovative solutions to the evolving toxic drug crisis and its broader impacts of community health and safety.

Recent federal investments include \$650 thousand to support coordinated efforts by the City, Ottawa Public Health, and local social and health service providers to address the substance use health crisis in Ottawa's downtown core, delivered through a partnership with the Canadian Centre for Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA). This project will review current systems, data, and partnerships, including country-wide comparables, and identify short-term actions to improve results within existing resources. The goal is to create a framework that helps the City and its partners respond more effectively to this complex and unpredictable crisis, that can then be replicated by other jurisdictions across the country.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Unsheltered Homelessness Outreach Model will be implemented within existing budgets. This will require renewed commitments from senior levels of government beyond year one.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

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

## **CONSULTATION**

The development of the Unsheltered Homelessness Outreach Model was informed by extensive engagement with partners and community members to ensure a coordinated, inclusive, and evidence-based approach.

## **Consultation with front-line service providers**

In 2024, City staff facilitated a consultation session with community partners, during which front-line workers participated in roundtable discussions to identify opportunities and gaps within the current outreach system

## **Co-design with service providers**

In spring 2025, co-design sessions were held with outreach service providers to identify client-level and system-level challenges. Key issues included fragmented services, lack of cultural appropriateness, and limited integration with health supports. Providers also highlighted sector strengths such as dedicated staff and peer outreach capacity.

## **Engagement with businesses and residents**

As part of the Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan refresh in summer 2025, businesses and residents were engaged through online surveys and meetings. Feedback focused on improving safety, enhancing coordination, and addressing community concerns related to homelessness and public space stewardship ([What We Learned](#) ).

## **Engagement with people with lived and living experience (PWLE)**

Between August and October 2025, targeted sessions were conducted with individuals experiencing homelessness, including youth, Indigenous peoples, and those facing mental health and substance use challenges. Participants identified systemic barriers such as staff turnover, administrative hurdles, and unsafe shelter environments. Recommendations emphasized trauma-informed, culturally responsive approaches, improved communication, and increased investment in Indigenous-led programs.

## **Engagement with key partners**

Throughout the co-design process, the City has actively engaged and consulted with key partners, including Ottawa Police Services, Ottawa Public Health, and other relevant municipal and community agencies. Their input has informed the design, operational considerations, and coordination mechanisms, ensuring the model reflects shared priorities, aligns with existing systems, and supports a collaborative, integrated response.

## **Specialized expertise and guidance**

In fall 2024, Bloomberg Associates, a philanthropic consulting firm, began to support the City of Ottawa with the design process and strategy development for an enhanced outreach service. The project team began collating best practices provincially, nationally and internationally through an environmental scan. Bloomberg Associates continued to inform on opportunities and alignment with other key city initiatives to support a more holistic approach as well as provide ongoing strategic advisory guidance.

## **ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS**

All actions that arise from the Unsheltered Homelessness outreach Model will adhere to accessibility legislative framework that includes the *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, 191/11(IASR)* of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA). Additionally, as per its accessibility Policy, the City of Ottawa is committed to providing equal treatment to people with disabilities with respect to the use and benefit of City services, programs and goods in a manner that respects their dignity and that is equitable in relation to the broader public.

Due to the intersectionality of persons with disabilities and those living in poverty, and the increasing proportion of the population that identifies as having a disability in Ontario, the City ensured that persons with disabilities were consulted during the creation of this plan. The City is further committed to ensuring that initiatives undertaken as a result of this report are done so in consultation with the community of persons with disabilities as appropriate, and in alignment with the Duty to Accommodate under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.

## **DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY IMPLICATIONS**

This report seeks delegated authority for the General Manager, Community and Social Services to make operational adjustments to the model through evidence-based processes in the future.

The following existing authorities, as set out under the Delegation of Authority By-law No. 2025-69, will be exercised as needed to implement the report recommendations:

Schedule D: Community and Social Services Department – Section 8 and 9 – Housing and Homelessness Services and Section 11 – Community Safety, Well-Being, Policy and Analytics Service.

This exercise of delegated authority shall be reported to the appropriate Standing Committee at least once in the calendar year.

## **ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS**

The Unsheltered Homelessness Outreach Model aligns with the City's Downtown Revitalization Strategy, which aims to increase economic activity, boost tourism, and make downtown safer and more vibrant. The Unsheltered Homelessness Outreach Model supports this by improving social conditions and public safety, which indirectly contributes to economic revitalization.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Unsheltered Homelessness Outreach Model addresses critical public health challenges in Ottawa's downtown core, where unsheltered homelessness intersects with rising mental health and substance use issues. The closure of key harm reduction services has increased overdose risks, unsafe drug use, and strain on emergency services, with overdose-related emergency department visits and deaths remaining above pre-pandemic levels. By integrating harm reduction, mental health, and physical health supports into outreach, the Unsheltered Homelessness Outreach Model aims to reduce emergency response demand, prevent overdoses, and improve overall community well-being through trauma-informed, culturally appropriate interventions.

## **INDIGENOUS, GENDER AND EQUITY IMPLICATIONS**

### **Indigenous Policy Considerations**

Indigenous partners were engaged early in the design process to ensure the model incorporates culturally appropriate interventions and aims to strengthen Indigenous-led outreach services.

The outreach objectives include promoting culturally appropriate and inclusive service delivery, with expanded Indigenous outreach and tailored relocation support for Indigenous individuals experiencing homelessness. The report identifies the risk of perpetuating harm if Indigenous voices are not meaningfully included. This is mitigated through:

- Incorporation of Indigenous knowledge systems.
- Respect for cultural protocols.

- Ongoing collaboration with Indigenous service providers.

Indigenous participants in lived experience consultations highlighted the need for:

- Trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches.
- Increased investment in Indigenous-led programs.
- Enhanced medical and housing supports tailored to Indigenous communities.

### **Gender and Equity Implications**

The outreach model is designed to address systemic inequities in access to housing, health, and social services for equity-deserving groups, including women, gender-diverse individuals, racialized communities, 2SLGBTQIAA+ people, youth, older adults, and newcomers. Engagement sessions revealed barriers such as:

- Unsafe shelter environments for women and youth.
- Lack of culturally appropriate services for racialized and Indigenous communities.
- Administrative hurdles (e.g., ID requirements, banking access) disproportionately impacting marginalized groups.

The outreach model incorporates trauma-informed, client-centered approaches and prioritizes culturally responsive interventions. Expanded Indigenous outreach and services tailored to diverse communities aim to reduce inequities and improve safety.

Youth participants highlighted challenges like aging out of services and inadequate wraparound supports. Women and gender-diverse individuals emphasized the need for safe spaces and gender-sensitive programming.

The unsheltered homelessness outreach model aligns with the City's equity objectives by:

- Promoting fair access to housing and health supports.
- Building trust through peer support and consistent engagement. Integrating equity considerations into governance and performance measurement frameworks.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

A stable and long-term funding commitment from senior levels of government is essential to effectively manage risk and support durable community outcomes. Municipal efforts alone cannot address the scale or complexity of the challenges at hand, particularly when many of the underlying issues stem from gaps in health and addiction services—areas that fall squarely within provincial responsibility. Without sustained provincial investment in treatment, prevention, and wraparound supports, municipalities are left managing symptoms rather than solutions. Ensuring consistent funding streams, paired with strengthened provincial health and addiction services, is critical to reducing systemic pressures and enabling safer, more resilient communities.

## **TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

This report has a direct impact on the 2023-2026 Term of Council Priority:

- A city that has affordable housing and is more livable for all

## **DISPOSITION**

The Community and Social Services Department (CSSD) will implement the report recommendations, including advancing the coordinated outreach model and undertaking all operational tasks outlined in this report. CSSD will advise community partners, outreach service providers, and other partners of the approved actions and next steps. As elements of the model require communication to the public, CSSD, working with Public Information and Media Relations and other relevant departments, will develop and execute a communication plan to ensure residents, businesses, and community organizations are informed of service changes and new engagement mechanisms. Legal Services will be consulted as needed throughout implementation to ensure compliance with applicable legislation and agreements.