

Subject: Pathways to Housing: Ottawa’s Family Homelessness Strategy

File Number: ACS2026-CSS-GEN-009

Report to Community Services Committee on 28 April 2026

and Council 13 May 2026

Submitted on April 17, 2026 by Clara Freire, General Manager, Community and Social Services

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Ward: Citywide

Objet : La voie vers le logement : Stratégie pour les familles en situation d’itinérance d’Ottawa

Numéro de dossier : ACS2026-CSS-GEN-009

Rapport présenté au Comité des services communautaires

Rapport soumis le 28 avril 2026

et au Conseil le 13 mai 2026

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Quartier : À l’échelle de la ville

REPORT RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Community Services Committee recommend Council:

- 1. Receive for information purposes “Pathways to Housing: Ottawa’s Family Homelessness Strategy” attached to this report as Document 1.**

- 2. Approve the implementation of a Housing-Focused Family Transitional Housing System including the adoption of a system mandate, diversion criteria and requirements for families to actively and meaningfully participate in a housing search and accept their first appropriate offer of housing, as outlined in this report.**
- 3. Delegate authority to the Director, Housing and Homelessness Services and Director, Housing Solutions, Real Estate and Investments Services to implement the policy outlined in the report which sets a target of 20 per cent of 2+ bedroom units in affordable housing subject to new capital contribution agreements with the City of Ottawa, being first offered to families experiencing homelessness, subject to any updated direction or recommendations arising from the forthcoming Action Ottawa review.**

RECOMMANDATION(S) DU RAPPORT

Que le Comité des services communautaires recommande au Conseil de :

- 1. Prendre acte du document 1 ci-joint, *La voie vers le logement : Stratégie pour les familles en situation d'itinérance d'Ottawa*.**
- 2. Approuver la mise en œuvre d'un système de logements de transition pour les familles axé sur le logement, y compris adopter un mandat de système, des critères de réorientation et des exigences pour que les familles participent activement et concrètement à la recherche d'un logement et acceptent la première offre appropriée, comme l'explique le rapport.**
- 3. Déléguer au directeur des Services du logement et de la lutte contre l'itinérance et à la directrice des Services des solutions de logement, de l'immobilier et des investissements le pouvoir de mettre en œuvre la mesure décrite dans le présent rapport qui consiste à établir une cible de 20 pour cent de logements à deux chambres ou plus dans les projets de logements abordables assujettis aux nouveaux accords de contribution de la Ville d'Ottawa, ces logements devant d'abord être offerts aux familles en situation d'itinérance, sous réserve de toute nouvelle directive ou recommandation issue de l'examen à venir d'Action Ottawa.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City has been providing emergency accommodation for families experiencing homelessness since the 1980s and since then, the context has shifted significantly. This

report outlines work underway to modernize the Family Transitional Housing System (FTHS) so that it better reflects current realities and increases long-term housing outcomes, in alignment with the objectives of the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan. It aims to help families find the shortest path to appropriate, long-term housing to mitigate the negative impacts of extended experiences of homelessness on children and families.

As of March 1, 2026, there were over 660 families experiencing homelessness, including over 1,220 children. While transitional housing and offsite services can provide short-term safety and stability, the experience of homelessness places significant strain on children, caregivers, and the family unit as a whole.

Extended stays in the FTHS also put a significant strain on financial resources. In 2025, the City spent \$29.3M to support families in hotel and motel placements.

With the exception of a decrease at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City has seen increasing demand in the FTHS for many years. While inflow has remained persistently high, it is a decrease in outflow that is mainly driving the increase in system pressure. Outflow, or families exiting the FTHS into housing, decreased by 41 per cent in 2025 compared to the previous year. The three main factors driving this reduction are:

- Reduced availability of housing benefits due to decreases in senior level government funding;
- Limited Social Housing (Rent-Geared-to-Income) offers due to the low and static number of units available relative to demand, and high level of households with provincial priority statuses which take priority over families experiencing homelessness; and
- Lack of a dedicated pathway into affordable housing, which has increasing wait times and requires housing benefits to make it deeply affordable to families with very low incomes.

Ottawa's Family Homelessness Strategy, attached as Appendix A, combined with the policy changes recommended herein, will help families find the shortest path to appropriate, long-term housing. It encompasses four pillars outlined below.

Pillar 1: Homelessness Prevention services to help in-situ households at imminent risk of eviction, including:

- \$2.04M in funding to service agencies that supported a combined 1,854 households (singles and families) in 2025 with tenant rights education and funding of tenant legal defense supports, including paralegals.
- Supporting 3,146 households (singles and families), through the issuance of \$4.7M in emergency funding towards utility and rental arrears.
- Issuing short term bridge funding benefits to 179 families, representing 583 individuals, since the program inception in 2025, to help them stabilize in their housing.

Pillar 2: Shifting to a Housing-Focused FTHS including:

- Service delivery model changes including streamlining homelessness assessment and intake to further support diversion and earlier identification of housing needs; shifting to housing-focused case management; integrating services to better address barriers to long-term housing; strengthening referrals to support stable, long-term housing tenancies.
- Creating over 300 units of sustainable, transitional housing system capacity for families through initiatives including the leasing of 1 Corkstown Road and purchase of 377 O'Connor Street, and the conversion of office space to residential units at the YMCA Ottawa.

Pillar 3: Increasing Housing Options for Families to facilitate exits from homelessness, including:

- 990 units of affordable housing currently in varying stages of development.
- Housing benefits, with 277 families, representing 936 individuals, moving from homelessness to long-term housing in 2025, with 67 per cent of these families moving into social housing, or with the assistance of a housing benefit.
- A large family benefit for households with 7+ members, which has housed 48 families, representing 341 people.

Pillar 4: Enhanced System Coordination will include cross-sector collaboration and planning through the Housing and Homelessness Leadership Table (HHLT) and a new Family System Sub-Committee, continued work on a data strategy, and alignment with the forthcoming 3-year Gender Based Violence (GBV) - Violence Against Women (VAW) Action Plan.

In order to maximize the positive impact of the work that is underway, this report recommends two policy changes outlined below.

1. **Implementation of a Housing-Focused FTHS** to ensure alignment across the system and affirm a clear and consistent housing-focused approach across all service providers. This includes adoption of a clearly defined mandate and diversion criteria as well as the requirement for families to actively and meaningfully participate in a housing search, and accept their first offer of appropriate, long-term housing. This supports Pillar Two of the Family Homelessness Strategy.
2. **Prioritization of families experiencing homelessness for a target of 20 per cent of 2+ bedroom units in affordable housing developments under new agreements**, in order to shorten wait times and ensure coordination between the housing and homelessness sectors. These offers would be facilitated by a sub-list maintained through the City's Family Transitional Housing and Offsite Services (FTHOS) unit and made to families for whom the offer is considered an appropriate offer of housing. This supports Pillar Three of the Strategy.

The components of this Strategy have been informed by input from front-line staff and community partners who serve families at-risk-of or experiencing homelessness. Partners engaged include representatives from the GBV sector, Community Health and Resource Centres, Indigenous serving agencies, newcomer-serving agencies, Affordable Housing providers, and Ottawa Public Health.

Of note, Intimate Partner Violence/Domestic Violence (IPV/DV) emergency and second stage shelters operate independently of the FTHS and are funded and governed directly by the province. However, the FTHS acts as an overflow mechanism for IPV/DV emergency and second stage shelters when they are at capacity. Families fleeing violence are initially exempt from any aspects of the Strategy that may create barriers to accessing safe shelter, in a way which ensures continued safety and confidentiality for those families.

The Family Homelessness Strategy is to be delivered within current resources. However, the success of the Strategy is highly contingent on the continued availability of pathways out of homelessness for families. Most significant amongst those is the availability of housing benefits.

Housing benefits fall primarily under the responsibility of senior levels of government.

The Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) has been the main program for many years, and it is a federal-provincial co-funded program under the National Housing Strategy. Each year, funding must account for the onboarding of new clients, as well as the continued support of all existing clients, which have an approximately 90 per cent retention rate. This means the base budget for the program must increase every year.

Despite this requirement, the City has been receiving declining levels of benefits in recent years. Ottawa's 2025-26 COHB allocation was fully allocated by the end of February 2026. Staff are now allocating housing benefits under an approved \$7.1M municipal spending cap but expect the funding will be fully committed by Q3 2026.

Service Managers across Ontario are in a similar situation with having to implement innovative, municipally-funded housing allowance programs as a response to unpredictable COHB cycles and allocations, as well as the uncertain future of the National Housing Strategy. City staff continue working with other service managers on strategy alignment and joint funding and policy advocacy.

Further updates and subsequent reports on the Family Homeless Strategy would be brought forward to Community and Social Services Committee if there are changes to the intent and direction of the Strategy, or if significant municipal financial impacts are anticipated.

RÉSUMÉ

La Ville fournit de l'hébergement d'urgence aux familles en situation d'itinérance depuis les années 1980, mais le contexte a beaucoup changé depuis. Ce rapport décrit le travail en cours pour moderniser le système de logements de transition pour les familles (SLTF) pour qu'il reflète mieux les réalités actuelles et améliore la situation à long terme, conformément aux objectifs du Plan décennal de logement et de lutte contre l'itinérance. Il s'agit d'aider les familles à trouver la voie la plus rapide vers un logement stable et approprié afin d'atténuer les conséquences négatives de l'itinérance prolongée chez les enfants et les familles.

Au 1^{er} mars 2026, plus de 660 familles étaient en situation d'itinérance, dont plus de 1 220 enfants. Si les logements de transition et les services d'hébergement externes peuvent offrir sécurité et stabilité à court terme, l'expérience de l'itinérance peut être fort éprouvante pour les enfants et leurs tuteurs et pour toute l'unité familiale.

Les séjours prolongés dans le SLTF exercent aussi une pression importante sur les ressources financières. En 2025, la Ville a dépensé 29,3 millions de dollars pour loger des familles dans des hôtels et motels.

À l'exception d'un creux au début de la pandémie de COVID-19, la Ville constate une hausse de la demande dans le SLTF depuis de nombreuses années. Bien que le volume élevé des entrées se maintienne, c'est la baisse des sorties qui explique surtout cette pression croissante sur le système. Les sorties, soit les familles qui quittent le SLTF pour un logement, ont diminué de 41 pour cent en 2025 par rapport à l'année précédente. Les trois principaux facteurs de cette baisse sont :

- la disponibilité moindre des prestations de logement en raison de la diminution du financement des ordres supérieurs de gouvernement;
- l'offre limitée de logements sociaux (à loyer indexé sur le revenu) à cause du nombre faible et statique de logements disponibles par rapport à la demande, et du grand nombre de ménages ayant un statut prioritaire au provincial, qui passent avant les familles en situation d'itinérance;
- l'absence d'une voie pour le logement abordable, un secteur où le temps d'attente va croissant et qui nécessite des prestations pour offrir une réelle abordabilité aux familles à très faible revenu.

La Stratégie pour les familles en situation d'itinérance d'Ottawa (annexe A), combinée aux changements recommandés ici, aidera les familles à trouver la voie la plus rapide vers un logement stable et approprié. Elle s'appuie sur les quatre piliers ci-dessous.

Pilier 1 : Services de prévention de l'itinérance pour aider les ménages établis à risque imminent d'éviction

- 2,04 millions de dollars pour les organismes de services qui ont soutenu un total de 1 854 ménages (personnes seules et familles) en 2025 grâce à de l'information sur les droits des locataires et au financement de ressources pour la défense des locataires, y compris des parajuristes.
- 3 146 ménages (personnes seules et familles) soutenus grâce à une enveloppe de financement d'urgence de 4,7 millions de dollars pour les arriérés de loyer et de services publics.

- Remise de prestations provisoires à court terme à 179 familles, pour un total de 583 personnes, depuis la création du programme en 2025, pour les aider à stabiliser leur situation de logement.

Pilier 2 : Transition vers un SLTF axé sur le logement

- Modification du modèle de prestation de services, notamment par la simplification de l'évaluation et de l'admission dans le volet de l'itinérance pour mieux soutenir la réorientation et la détermination rapide des besoins de logement; par la transition vers une gestion des cas axée sur le logement; par l'intégration des services pour éliminer des obstacles au logement stable; par le renforcement des aiguillages pour favoriser l'occupation d'un logement stable à long terme.
- Création de plus de 300 logements de transition durables pour les familles par des initiatives comme la location du 1, chemin Corkstown et l'achat du 377, rue O'Connor, et la conversion d'espaces de bureaux en unités d'habitation au YMCA d'Ottawa.

Pilier 3 : Multiplication des options de logement pour les familles afin de faciliter la sortie de l'itinérance

- 990 logements abordables actuellement à divers stades de création.
- Prestations de logement ayant bénéficié à 277 familles, soit 936 personnes, qui sont passées de l'itinérance à un logement stable en 2025; 67 pour cent de ces familles ont emménagé dans des logements sociaux, ou ont reçu des prestations de logement.
- Prestation pour les ménages de 7 personnes ou plus, versée à 48 familles, pour un total de 341 personnes.

Pilier 4 : Coordination améliorée du système grâce à une collaboration et une planification intersectorielles par la table de leadership sur le logement et l'itinérance (TLLI), à l'avenue d'un sous-comité des systèmes familiaux, à la poursuite du travail sur une stratégie de données, et à une harmonisation avec le Plan d'action triennal sur la violence fondée sur le genre et la violence faite aux femmes (VFG-VFF).

Pour maximiser les retombées positives du travail en cours, ce rapport recommande deux mesures de changement :

1. **Mise en œuvre d'un SLTF axé sur le logement** pour assurer l'harmonisation dans l'ensemble du système et établir une approche claire et uniforme axée sur le logement pour l'ensemble des fournisseurs de services. Cela implique d'adopter un mandat clairement défini et des critères de réorientation et d'exiger que les familles participent activement et concrètement à la recherche d'un logement et acceptent la première offre de logement stable approprié. Cette recommandation appuie le deuxième pilier de la Stratégie pour les familles en situation d'itinérance.
2. **Priorisation des familles en situation d'itinérance, pour une cible de 20 pour cent de logements à deux chambres ou plus dans les projets de logement abordable assujettis aux nouveaux accords**, afin de réduire l'attente et d'assurer la coordination entre les secteurs du logement et de l'itinérance. Les offres proviendraient d'une sous-liste tenue par l'Unité des logements de transition pour les familles et des services dans les établissements externes de la Ville. Elles seraient présentées aux familles pour qui elles seraient jugées appropriées. Cette recommandation appuie le troisième pilier de la Stratégie.

Les éléments de cette stratégie ont été orientés par les commentaires du personnel de première ligne et des partenaires communautaires qui servent les familles à risque ou en situation d'itinérance. Les partenaires mobilisés comprennent des représentants du secteur de la violence fondée sur le genre (VFG), de centres de ressources et de santé communautaires, d'organismes servant les Autochtones, d'organismes servant les nouveaux arrivants, de fournisseur de logements abordables et de Santé publique Ottawa.

Il convient de noter que les refuges et les maisons d'hébergement transitoire pour les victimes de violence familiale ou de violence entre partenaires intimes fonctionnent indépendamment du système de logements de transition pour les familles (SLTF), puisqu'ils sont financés et régis directement par la province. Cependant, le SLTF vient absorber les débordements lorsque les refuges et les maisons d'hébergement transitoire pour les victimes de violence atteignent leur capacité maximale. Les familles fuyant la violence sont initialement exemptées des aspects de la Stratégie qui pourraient les empêcher d'accéder à un refuge sûr, d'une façon qui garantit leur sécurité et leur confidentialité.

La Stratégie pour les familles en situation d'itinérance doit être exécutée dans les limites des ressources actuelles. Toutefois, sa réussite dépend grandement de l'offre

continue de voies permettant aux familles de sortir de l'itinérance, en particulier les prestations de logement.

Les prestations de logement sont principalement du ressort des ordres supérieurs de gouvernement. L'Allocation Canada-Ontario pour le logement (ACOL), principal programme depuis de nombreuses années, est cofinancée par le fédéral et le provincial dans le cadre de la Stratégie nationale sur le logement. Année après année, le financement doit couvrir l'accueil de nouveaux clients et le soutien continu de tous les clients existants, dont le taux de rétention est d'environ 90 pour cent. Cela signifie que le budget de base pour le programme doit augmenter chaque année.

Or, malgré ces besoins, la Ville reçoit de moins en moins de prestations ces dernières années. Le montant de l'ACOL accordé à Ottawa pour 2025-2026 était entièrement versé à la fin de février 2026. Le personnel verse maintenant des prestations de logement à partir d'un budget municipal plafonné à 7,1 millions de dollars, qui devrait être épuisé d'ici le troisième trimestre de 2026.

Les autres gestionnaires de services en Ontario sont dans une situation semblable, où ils doivent mettre en place de nouveaux programmes municipaux de prestations de logement en réponse aux cycles et allocations imprévisibles de l'ACOL et face à l'avenir incertain de la Stratégie nationale sur le logement. Le personnel de la Ville continue de travailler avec d'autres gestionnaires de services pour harmoniser les stratégies et défendre nos intérêts communs en matière de financement et de stratégie.

D'autres mises à jour et rapports sur la Stratégie pour les familles en situation d'itinérance seront présentés au Comité des services sociaux et communautaires si des changements sont apportés à l'intention et à la direction de la Stratégie, ou si des conséquences financières importantes sont à prévoir pour la Ville.

BACKGROUND

The City has been providing emergency accommodation for families experiencing homelessness since the 1980s and since then, the context has shifted significantly. This report presents a plan to modernize the Family Transitional Housing System so that it better reflects current realities and increases long-term housing outcomes, in alignment with the objectives of the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan.

Pathways to Housing: Ottawa's Family Homelessness Strategy, is attached as Appendix A. Two policy recommendations for Council approval are detailed in this report, to support the implementation of the Family Homelessness Strategy.

Strategic Direction

Updating the City's approach to family homelessness is aligned with the strategic direction of Housing and Homelessness Services. This direction is guided by two primary Council approved documents; the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan and the Housing Long-Range Financial Plan. These documents have provided a framework for the development of the Family Homelessness Strategy.

- **Ten-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan:** In April 2026, Council approved the [2026-2035 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan](#) (ACS2026-CSS-GEN-006). The plan has three core goals: Everyone has a home, people get the support they need, and we work together. The goals and objectives within the 10-Year Plan provide a guiding framework under which the Family Homelessness Strategy will operate. Each pillar within this Strategy links to relevant objectives and outcomes within the 10-Year Plan.
- **Long-Range Financial Plan (LRFP):** The Housing Services Long Range Financial Plan 2025-2030 Update ([ACS2024-FCS-FIN-0011](#)) was approved by Council in November 2024. In addition to outlining capital funding supports required to create new affordable and supportive housing units, the LRFP also speaks to operating requirements for services to transition people experiencing homelessness to housing, and to achieve housing stability and long-term housing retention. The LRFP also recognizes that the City is limited in its' ability to address many of the systemic gaps outlined in this report, and highlights how all three levels of government must work together to address current funding pressures. An updated Housing LRFP will be completed during the next Term of Council to align with the 2026-2035 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan.

In addition to the 10-Year Plan and the LRFP, there have been several key Council approved directions in recent years that have advanced key pieces of work related to the Family Homelessness Strategy. These include:

- **2025 Update to Municipal Housing Allowance Programs and the Home for Good Housing Allowance Program:** This report ([ACS2025-CSS-GEN-006](#)), approved by Council in April 2025, described the state of housing benefits, including provincial funding received to support the program. Given a shortfall of senior level funding for the program, and delayed release of 2025-2026 allocations, Council approved the implementation a \$7.1 million spending cap above the approved municipal budget for housing allowance benefits. This cap

covers the continuation of existing benefits while enabling staff to issue approximately 25 new benefits each month, supporting continued outflow from the emergency shelter system.

- **Acquisitions of Transitional Housing for Families:** Council has approved two acquisitions to build the permanent, dedicated capacity of the FTHS. In November 2023, [a long-term lease for 1 Corkstown Road](#) was approved. The site was a former retirement residence, that is now providing 128 units of transitional housing for families. Most recently, in March 2026, Council approved the [purchase of 377 O'Connor](#), a former hotel and long-stay apartment, with 128 units. The site is anticipated to be operational as soon as Q3 2026.

The Integrated Transition to Housing Strategy, first approved by Council in July 2023 ([ACS2023-CSS-GEN-006](#)) and subsequently closed out in November 2025 ([ACS2025-CSS-GEN-014](#)), focused on single adults, and sets a precedent of successfully evolving homelessness services to better meet the needs of residents.

What is the Family Transitional Housing System (FTHS)?

Ottawa's FTHS is made up of transitional housing services operated by the City of Ottawa, Catholic Centre for Immigrants Ottawa (CCI), historically - the YMCA of the National Capital Region (YMCA), and offsite services (motels/hotels). Transitional housing is stable, temporary accommodations, with supports while families transition to long-term housing. Offsite services are used when there is no capacity at the transitional housing sites and provide case management services to families in hotel and motel locations. Currently, the FTHS is far over-capacity, and approximately 76 per cent of clients are placed with offsite services.

The City of Ottawa is the largest operator of family homelessness services, providing support to over 90 per cent of all families within the system through the Family Transitional Housing and Offsite Services (FTHOS) unit. CCI Ottawa operates transitional housing programs that focus on newcomer families. The YMCA previously operated transitional housing for families as well but is currently serving only singles.

When a household requests services, City staff conduct a centralized homelessness assessment during which a family's situation is reviewed and appropriate referrals are made. This may include placement in a transitional housing program, in which case, families are placed with whichever service provider is most appropriate and where space is available. It may also include diversion supports or referrals to other

specialized services such as Gender Based Violence (GBV) services.

All families placed within the FTTHS are assigned a case worker who provides ongoing support. However, due to hotel operations, it can be difficult to provide consistent in person case management supports at offsite locations. There are often fewer programs and supports available to clients offsite due to lack of common space to provide such programming or meet with support workers. Offsite services also often lack adequate cooking facilities which can lead to food insecurity, and additional stress for families. Furthermore, they are subject to the business' willingness to rent the room to the City which can lead to clients being moved between sites and causing instability for the family. Unfortunately, the current demand for services has caused a heavy reliance on these offsite services.

Historically, due to inadequate system capacity, including through offsite services, there was a list of families awaiting placement. This is used as a last resort, and families on the placement list were able to stay with family and friends until a placement option became available. The number of families on the placement list rose to almost 100 families but has recently been reduced to zero through the addition of newly available offsite capacity.

Of note, Intimate Partner Violence/Domestic Violence (IPV/DV) emergency and second stage shelters operate independently of the FTTHS and are funded and governed directly by the province. However, the FTTHS acts as an overflow mechanism for the IPV/DV emergency and second stage shelters when they are at capacity.

Current State

With the exception of a decrease in demand for services at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City has seen increasing demand in the FTTHS for many years. In January 2023, the system served an average of 377 families per night and by March 1, 2026, that number increased by 76 per cent to 664 families.

These 664 families are made up of 2,212 individuals, the majority, or 55 per cent, are children. In addition to the increasing number of families accessing services, the current length of stay for families is also long, with the average stay being 327 days (approx. 11 months).

Notably, while inflow into the FTTHS in 2025 remained high, it decreased by about 31 per cent compared to 2024. Despite this decrease in inflow, the number of families accessing services continued to grow due to a sharp reduction in outflow. In 2025, 41

per cent fewer households exited the FTTHS into housing compared to 2024. This decline is due to several factors that are outlined later in the report, including fewer social housing offers for families, limited availability of portable housing benefits, and a lack of meaningful pathways into affordable housing.

The reduction in outflow without a matching reduction in inflow has led to the high level of demand that is currently being experienced.

Key Drivers of Family Homelessness

According to Ottawa's 2024 point-in-time count, when asked "what challenges have you experienced while trying to find housing", the most common responses for families experiencing homelessness were:

- low income (58 per cent)
- rents too high (56 per cent)
- no income assistance (25 per cent); and
- lack of support (20 percent).

These affordability challenges are despite the fact that almost half (46 per cent) of family respondents have completed post-secondary education or higher.

Multiple, interacting factors are driving the family homelessness pressures in Ottawa. While the factors that impact inflow are generally economic and social factors, many factors that impact the increasing lengths of stay and reduced outflow could be addressed by the proposed policy changes. Factors impacting persistently high inflow include:

- High cost of living and rent, which erodes household financial resilience;
- Low vacancy rates, making it challenging for families to find available housing;
- Inter-city migration by families relocating from other municipalities;
- Increased arrival of newcomers who require housing supports and targeted settlement services, which may not be readily accessible or available; and
- Lack of IPV/DV emergency and second stage shelter capacity despite GBV being one of the leading causes of homelessness for families. These shelters, which falls entirely within provincial jurisdiction, are under-resourced and

regularly at capacity. The FTHS provides overflow capacity to IPV/DV emergency and second stage shelters, increasing pressures on the FTHS.

Factors impacting increased length of stay and reduced outflow are outlined below.

Reduced availability of housing benefits

Housing benefits are a monthly subsidy provided to low-income households to assist with housing costs and are a primary pathway for families to exit homelessness. However, the City does not currently have the resources to provide all families within the FTHS with housing benefits. This is due in large part to the limited Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) funding received over the past two years.

The COHB is a provincially administered but federal-provincial co-funded portable housing benefit program that was established in 2019 as part of the National Housing Strategy. Beginning in 2023, the gradual reduction in COHB funding has increasingly challenged the City's ability to support households in need, as shown below.

Year	Total Funds Received	New Households to be Supported
2023-2024	\$4.3M	382
2024-2025	\$2.2M	247
2025-2026	\$2.08	205

In the program's fifth year (2024-25), the City's allocation had its first significant decrease, and all funding was fully utilized by February 2025.

To bridge the gap between the 2024-2025 COHB allocation, and the delayed release of the 2025-2026 COHB allocation in September 2025, Council approved a municipal spending cap of \$7.1M which enabled the offer 25 new housing benefits system-wide per month, as well as sustaining existing legacy benefit programs.

Through that time, municipal housing benefits were provided to 59 families experiencing homelessness. Despite this effort, these lower-than-anticipated allocations have resulted in a significant decrease in the number of households that have exited the FTHS utilizing a portable housing benefit since the beginning of 2025.

The City's 2025-26 COHB allocation was fully allocated by the end of February 2026.

Staff are now allocating housing benefits under the approved \$7.1M Municipal spending cap but expect the funding will be fully committed by Q3 2026. As of March 2026, there were 204 families in the FTHS who were awaiting invitations for a portable housing benefit.

Housing benefits fall primarily under the responsibility of senior levels of government, since the municipality does not have the resources to support an ongoing program growth. Housing benefits are an expense that grows exponentially. The programs have an approximately 90 per cent success rate or client housing retention rate. Each year, a funding stream must account for the onboarding of new clients, as well as the continued support of all existing clients, meaning the base budget for the program must increase every year.

In early March 2026, the City of Ottawa, in partnership with the City of Toronto hosted a meeting of large Service Managers to discuss the current state of housing allowances across Ontario municipalities. Other municipalities are in a similar situation with having to implement innovative, municipally-funded, housing allowance programs in the face of unpredictable COHB cycles and allocations, as well as the overall uncertainty of the future of the National Housing Strategy. Overall, the current status of COHB has resulted in municipal budget pressures across Ontario municipalities and this trend is certain to continue without additional funding for housing allowances from upper levels of government.

City staff continue to work with other Service Managers on strategy alignment and joint advocacy for timely, sustained and sufficient levels of housing benefits to meet local needs.

Limited Social Housing offers for families

The demand for social housing, including Rent Geared to Income (RGI) units, is very high. As of the end of 2025, there were 16,347 households on the Social Housing Registry waitlist, including 5,984 households with dependents. The average wait time for a unit was between 5 and 8 years for a household on the chronological waitlist, depending on household composition.

Although Ottawa has a Local Priority Access Status (LPAS) for people experiencing homelessness, the number of units relative to demand is still low. There are currently 530 households with dependents with a homelessness priority on the waitlist including 167 households added in 2025 alone. Even for those with this priority, 2025 average

wait times range from 1.5 years for a two-bedroom unit, to 3 years for a four-bedroom unit. This is due in part to the fact that social housing is the most deeply affordable of all housing options, making it the preference of many households experiencing homelessness. Families may prefer to remain in the FTHS until an RGI unit becomes available, above all other housing options, leading to increased demand for these limited units.

Efforts to reduce the wait list are being undertaken. In June 2025, a new software system was implemented that increased the Social Housing Registry's success at identifying and rehousing households who are considered "overhoused". This is a positive outcome, as people who are in units that are larger than their occupancy needs are prioritized for smaller units when they become available, ultimately freeing up larger units and ensuring households are housed according to their occupancy needs. However, the provincial overhoused priority takes precedent over Ottawa's LPAS priorities. As a result, about a third fewer families receive social housing offers each month than before this new system came into effect. Since this change, an average of 3 families per month are offered social housing units compared to an average of 10 families experiencing homelessness per month before the implementation of the new system.

Investments in RGI housing peaked in the 1970s, and upper levels of government stopped funding the construction of RGI housing in the 1990s. As a result, no new units have been built for decades, and the demand for these units far exceeded the supply, which remains fixed in an ever-growing city. In place of RGI housing, the focus is now on the construction of affordable housing.

Of note, affordable housing differs from RGI housing in the way rent is determined, affecting the depth of affordability, and is also offered through a distinct waitlist. There is also no operating funding provided for affordable housing developments and projects are intended to be self-sustaining based on rent structures.

Lack of a dedicated pathway into affordable housing

The development of new affordable housing is a major component of the City's housing response. In 2025, over \$39.3M was invested in capital spending for mixed unit affordable housing (excludes housing for older adults and supportive housing), supporting approximately 990 affordable units in varying stages of development.

However, there is no clear or direct pathway for families experiencing homelessness to access these units. These units are generally filled through the chronological affordable

housing waitlist. Most families experiencing homelessness are not on this waitlist, as it is a different waitlist than the mandatory waitlist for social housing. If families do join the affordable housing waitlist, there is no priority given to those experiencing homelessness (although specific affordable housing projects may have individualized commitments to offering a certain number of units to certain populations, which may or may not include people experiencing homelessness). Any household in Ottawa, so long as they meet the income threshold, may sign up to be on this waitlist.

Most newly developed affordable housing is not built to the level of affordability that is required for many families experiencing homelessness. Affordable housing rental rates are often set at the average market rent, or slightly below average market rent, and are not affordable to people with low or very low incomes, including those in receipt of social assistance. For this reason, households who are experiencing homelessness often need a housing benefit or rent subsidy to move into these units.

Without a dedicated pathway from homelessness into purpose-built and publicly-funded affordable housing, one of Ottawa's key housing resources cannot be fully leveraged to reduce homelessness in our community.

Impacts

The increasing number of families being served nightly, as well as the increasing lengths of stay have impacts on both children and families, as well as the financial resources of the City.

Impacts on Children and Families

As of March 1, 2026, there were 1,224 children (age 0-17) within Ottawa's FTTHS. Of these children, over 503 (41 per cent) children are under the age of 6.

Families enter homelessness for many reasons often because of circumstances beyond their control. While transitional housing can provide short-term safety and stability, the experience of homelessness places significant strain on children, caregivers, and the family unit.

The early years of a child's life are foundational. Stability, routine, and safe environments support healthy brain development, emotional regulation, and a strong sense of security. When families must remain in the FTTHS for extended periods, children can experience disruptions to daily routines, frequent moves, changes in schooling or childcare, and more limited opportunities for play and to form social connections. These disruptions—along with the stress parents face in trying to meet

their children's needs under challenging conditions can affect children's physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.

Families in the FTHS often face barriers in meeting basic needs. Access to nutritious food, separate space for sleep, privacy, and opportunities for recreation can be limited. Many families staying in hotel or motel settings must rely on microwaves or crockpots for meals as they lack access to kitchens. These conditions can create ongoing stress for both children and caregivers, especially when paired with uncertainty about how long they will remain in temporary accommodations.

Research shows that young children experiencing homelessness are more likely to face developmental delays and emotional or behavioral challenges—often connected to instability, stress, and unmet needs. School-aged children may experience anxiety, trouble concentrating, or changes in behaviour as they navigate the instability surrounding them. Importantly, these impacts are not inevitable. They reflect the pressures created by homelessness itself, not the strengths or abilities of the children and families affected.

Parents and caregivers also carry a significant emotional load during periods of homelessness. Many describe feelings of exhaustion, worry, and isolation as they work to maintain routines, support their children, and navigate complex service systems. These stresses can strain parent-child relationships, not because of a lack of love or commitment, but because families are operating under immense pressure and with limited resources.

Taken together, it is clear that the FTHS should be used only when absolutely necessary and that time spent should be as brief as possible. When families are rehoused quickly in appropriate, permanent housing, children and caregivers have the best chance to heal, rebuild stability, and thrive.

Financial Impacts

The cost of providing FTHS services is also high. In 2025, the City spent \$29.3M on hotel and motel costs alone.

The cost of supporting a family experiencing homelessness per night ranges depending on their location (in transitional housing vs. offsite services), as well as based on the size and composition of the family. The average cost of service for any family with up to four people in 2025, was \$69,000 yearly or \$5,800 per month. Typically, households of this size can be accommodated in a single room whether it be in transitional housing

or offsite services. A larger family may require additional rooms which increases the costs of support.

These costs are related to the provision of emergency accommodations only and it is not possible to redirect these funds to prevention or housing efforts as the families currently being supported need to continue to be supported.

DISCUSSION

The development of Pathways to Housing: Ottawa's Family Homelessness Strategy, attached as Appendix A, and the Council recommendations, have been informed by past initiatives, data and trend analysis, best practices from current research and from other communities, input from front-line staff and community partners who serve families at-risk-of or experiencing homelessness, and public health experts. Partners engaged include representatives from the GBV sector, Community Health and Resource Centres, Indigenous serving agencies, newcomer-serving agencies, Affordable Housing providers, and Ottawa Public Health.

As described above, the Strategy aligns to the goals, objectives and guiding principles of the Refreshed 10-Year Housing & Homelessness Plan 2026-2035, as well as [Ottawa's Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing Standards](#).

Strategy Limitations and Exceptions

Scope Limitations

This report outlines only programs that are City-led or City-funded as a part of the Family Homelessness Strategy, with an acknowledgement that there are many efforts within the Ottawa community that support homelessness prevention and housing support for families that may not be represented within this report.

Resource Limitations

The recommendations proposed in this report are achievable within existing resources and are designed to make the most effective use of current funding and capacity. However, the municipality can only do so much. Without additional investment from senior levels of government in resources that help families exit homelessness, such as increased access to portable housing benefits, it is expected that the number of families leaving the FTTHS will remain limited. As a result, the backlog of families waiting for appropriate housing may continue to grow and the impact of the approach proposed in this report will be limited the available housing supports.

Should additional funding become available in the future, initiatives that are outlined in this Strategy will be expanded, especially those related to homelessness prevention and expanding housing options available to families.

Provincial and Federal Context Limitations

Many of the challenges outlined in this report are not unique to Ottawa. Other large municipalities in Ontario report experiencing many of the same trends and budgetary pressures. A large number of these drivers are provincial or nation-wide trends to which the City does not have the ability to unilaterally respond.

Further, City services and initiatives are delivered within the context of provincial and federal program policies. There remain multiple opportunities to evolve and enhance these supports in ways which are more client centric and responsive to local needs. Examples include allowing households to maintain their priority for RGI housing if they accept a housing benefit to encourage uptake, or aligning Average Market Rents (AMRs) used in housing benefit programs with affordable housing AMRs, and structuring programs to be responsive to the needs of households with very low incomes. Further long-term commitments for flexible funding at adequate levels is required for the City to be able to evolve the system to better address the needs of families experiencing homelessness.

Families Fleeing Violence Exceptions

In recognition that Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is one of the leading causes of family homelessness, the City of Ottawa endeavors to provide all available resources, including rapid referrals to GBV specific services, to individuals fleeing an abusive situation, whether the abuse is physical, sexual, financial, or emotional. This Strategy recognizes that for many people experiencing abuse, removing themselves from the abusive situation may be the first of many challenges. It is imperative that staff remain sensitive and supportive to individuals experiencing abuse throughout the journey to remove themselves from abusive situations. Staff treat individuals experiencing abuse in a respectful, non-judgmental and trauma and violence informed manner, and provide the resources to which they are entitled.

The safety and confidentiality of families takes priority over policy changes recommended as part of this Strategy. Families fleeing violence are initially exempt from any aspects of the Strategy that could, when reasonably applied, create barriers to accessing safe shelter. Decisions will be implemented in a way that ensures the continued safety and confidentiality for families.

In all cases, any policies and procedures implemented would be subject to managerial discretion to account for specific circumstances of families.

Pathways to Housing: Ottawa's Family Homelessness Strategy

The Family Homelessness Strategy, attached as Appendix A, outlines an approach in line with Goal 2.2 of the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan to “ensure experiences of homelessness are brief, sheltered and nonrecurring”. It aims to help families find the shortest path to appropriate, long-term housing in order to mitigate the negative impacts of extended experiences of homelessness on children and their families.

The Strategy is organized around four pillars, which reflect the primary areas of focus within the family homelessness sector. These include homelessness prevention, housing-focused FTHS, increased housing options for families and enhanced systems coordination. Each pillar includes an overview of existing activities and highlights key initiatives currently underway to strengthen the City's response to family homelessness.

While much of the work underlined as part of the Strategy pertains to sustained, ongoing supports, more notable shifts are underway related to the Housing-Focused FTHS. As described in the Strategy:

- The Service delivery model will evolve to put a housing focus at the forefront of operations. It will include changes within system processes and case management services that support diversion, integrate services to better address barriers to long-term housing and strengthen referrals to support stable, long-term housing tenancies.
- City and community partners continue to maximize opportunities to create permanent transitional housing capacity, to better meet the needs of clients and create cost efficiencies by reducing the reliance on offsite hotel and motel placements.

These changes, in partnership with the recommended policy changes below are anticipated to shift system pressures, and drive progress towards the goals of the Family Homelessness Strategy.

Report Recommendations

The following recommendations are being proposed to support the realization of the Family Homelessness Strategy. These recommended policy changes fall within the pillars of the Strategy, specifically:

- Recommendation Two supports Pillar Two: Housing-Focused Transitional Housing System
- Recommendation Three supports Pillar Three: Increased Housing Options for Families

These changes are required to maximize the positive impacts of the work being done currently to support families experiencing homelessness.

Recommendation: Implementation of a Housing-Focused Family Transitional Housing System with Mandatory Requirements

This recommendation aligns with the work described under Pillar Two: Housing-Focused Transitional Housing System. The Housing-Focused program has four components outlined for Council approval including:

- System mandate;
- Diversion criteria;
- Mandatory requirement for active and meaningful participation in housing search; and
- Mandatory requirement to accept first appropriate offer of housing.

These provisions would apply to all service providers within the FTHS, either City operated or funded. This does not include IPV/DV emergency and second stage shelters. In all cases, any policies and procedures implemented would be subject to managerial discretion to account for specific circumstances of families.

Families will need to continue to meet ongoing eligibility for transitional housing services as outlined herein. People will be supported and only discharged if they are ineligible for the program or not adhering to program guidelines, and do not have any valid offers of long-term housing. Families who become ineligible or are not adhering to program guidelines would be supported through a prolonged, client-focused discharge process developed in accordance with the [Ottawa Transitional Housing Program Standards](#).

The [Ottawa Transitional Housing Program Standards](#), approved by Council in February 2021, further supplement this report, and outline responsibilities of program participants and Transitional Housing program providers.

System Mandate

Currently, a mandate for the FTHS is not clearly defined in the [Ottawa Transitional Housing Program Standards](#) which apply to all service providers in the FTHS and indicates that “providers are expected to serve clients who require temporary emergency accommodation and who meet their City-established service mandate”.

Establishing a service mandate will ensure alignment across the family system and affirm a clear and consistent housing-focused approach across all service providers. It will position the entire system under one established direction and guide the development of operational procedures and policies moving forward, as well as clearly communicate to clients and public the roles and responsibilities of the FTHS.

Ottawa's Family Transitional Housing System (FTHS) emphasizes homelessness prevention and diversion.

The FTHS will support clients to explore all safe, alternative options before accessing temporary accommodations, and help families find the shortest path to appropriate, long-term housing.

To ensure that families quickly secure stable housing and do not return to homelessness, Ottawa's FTHS will coordinate its' resources, work together, and leverage every housing asset at its' disposal.

** Families fleeing violence are initially exempt from any aspects of the Strategy that should not be reasonably applied and/or that creates barriers to accessing safe shelter, in a way which ensures the continued safety and confidentiality for those families.*

FTHS Diversion Criteria

Similarly, formalized diversion criteria would support this mandate and establish clear and consistent eligibility for services, outlining who may be supported through alternative mechanisms upon presentation for service. The diversion criteria will ensure alignment with other related program requirements and, in some cases, substantiate current practices with official policies.

The changes will help staff support clients to explore all safe and appropriate alternatives to placement in the FTHS, while ensuring the capacity exists to serve those in greatest need in our community.

There are two components of the diversion criteria: Income and Assets, and Canada-wide Repatriation. These may be applied upon request for placement in the FTHS, or at

any point during the family's stay.

Diversion Criteria*	Households are not eligible for service if:	The System will:
Income & Assets	<p>The household's assets exceed the current Ontario Works (OW) asset limits.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>The household's income exceeds that which is allowable under Rent Geared to Income (RGI) housing and housing benefits programs.</p>	Work with households to leverage available resources to secure safe, appropriate accommodations.
Canada-wide Repatriation	<p>The household can receive shelter or transitional housing services in their originating community anywhere across Canada.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>The household can return to available accommodations, in their originating community in Ottawa or Canada-wide, even if temporarily.</p>	Work with households to confirm the safety and availability of these accommodations and make referrals to support services to address barriers, including the cost of transportation if applicable.

** Families fleeing violence are initially exempt from any aspects of the Strategy that should not be reasonably applied and/or that creates barriers to accessing safe shelter, in a way which ensures the continued safety and confidentiality for those families.*

Like the FTHS, the OW program is considered an emergency support program. For consistency of approach, it is recommended that the FTHS align with this emergency support programs' established asset limit.

The current OW asset limit is \$10,000 for a single applicant or \$15,000 for an applicant plus spouse, plus \$500 for every additional dependent. The asset limit would also adopt the [OW directives about assets which are exempt](#), including but not limited to the first motor vehicle, personal belongings such as clothes and furniture, and Registered

Education Savings Plans (RESPs).

It is also recommended that in order to receive services from the FTTHS, a household's income cannot exceed the income limits of rent support programs that are available primarily, in policy or in practice, to households experiencing homelessness (RGI or housing benefits programs). Currently, the RGI program income limits range based on number of bedrooms required, spanning from \$74,000 for a 2-bedroom unit to \$94,500 for a four or more-bedroom unit. Under this policy, staff would follow OW directives to determine how household income is calculated, and what income exemptions are considered.

The intent of setting this income limit is to quickly identify households that would be ineligible for any housing supports that could be offered through the FTTHS and create an alternative plan to prevent an extended stay. It would also ensure families are utilizing all means available to avoid entry into the shelter system.

These asset and income limits would be applied to all households, regardless of their source of income. The large majority of families currently being served are expected to fall within these limits and remain eligible for service. In particular, per the 2024 Point-in-Time Count, 74 per cent of families experiencing homelessness are in receipt of OW and therefore should be within these limits. Any clients deemed ineligible due to these changes would be helped to secure alternative arrangements in accordance with a support-based discharge plan.

Repatriation within Canada is an existing practice, which is currently addressing the increasing number of families coming from other municipalities as well as families who voluntarily leave viable housing in order to access FTTHS services and priority for RGI housing (e.g. signing an N11). Including it as an aspect of the diversion policy would reinforce the priority on supporting families to retain appropriate units where possible and divert households back to inter-city or inter-provincial shelter and transitional housing options available to them within Canada. This will help maintain capacity locally to meet needs, and for families, it encourages maintenance of connections to their support networks—family, friends, healthcare providers, and social services, school continuity for children, and prevents losing eligibility or priority for local programs, including housing.

FTTHS staff work with other service providers across Ontario and interprovincially to coordinate repatriation. Families are provided with financial support to return to their place of origin if they do not have the means available and may be provided with

temporary accommodation on a time-limited basis until they can secure transportation.

Requirement for Active and Meaningful Participation in a Housing-Focused Program

Upon intake in the FTHS, staff and clients sign agreements that communicate the providers responsibilities to support a client, a client's responsibilities while accessing services including working towards long-term housing. Clients may have language interpreters present when these agreements are reviewed and signed, and service providers will continue to work with clients to ensure their understanding of all FTHS policies and procedures.

In accordance with this recommendation, these agreements will be updated to include new mandatory clauses, alongside existing provisions as outlined below to better define active and meaningful participation.

- Applying to the Centralized Waitlist for Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) Units
- Maintaining eligibility for Housing Programs and Supports including RGI and Housing Benefits
- Maintain eligibility for emergency assistance or housing benefits for accommodation related requests administered through Employment and Social Services (ESS) to eligible recipients of Ontario Works (OW), Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Essential Health and Social Support (EHSS);
- Applying for a portable housing benefit
- Agreeing to be matched to affordable housing units if appropriate and/or subject to approval and implementation of Recommendation Three of this report
- Exploring other housing opportunities for which the household is eligible
- Taking steps to address current barriers to housing, which could include but are not limited to broad supports such as applying for childcare subsidies, taking English or French as a Second Language Courses, active employment search, et cetera, in accordance with their agreed upon Service Plan.
- In cases of families fleeing violence, engagement in safety planning efforts.

Staff will further update the Rights and Responsibilities and Housing Search Agreement

as housing opportunities evolve or new opportunities become available, and in keeping with the intent of the Strategy.

Staff are likewise responsible for supporting clients in these activities by:

- Supporting the household to obtain necessary documentation and complete necessary applications;
- Offering guidance and resources to support with managing income and expenses, housing search, and all other housing-focused activities; and
- Making referrals to appropriate social and community support services.

Requirement to Accept the First Appropriate Housing Offer

Effective January 1st, 2020, the Provincial Housing Services Act established the Single Offer Rule for RGI housing. This means that since 2020, applicants have been eligible to receive one valid offer of RGI housing. If an applicant refuses this offer, they are removed from the Centralized Waiting List.

Under this recommendation, Staff are proposing that this same principle be applied across all appropriate housing offers that are available to families. A mandatory requirement for clients to accept their first appropriate housing offer would strengthen the housing-focused nature of services, helping families find the shortest path to appropriate, long-term housing while discouraging extended waits for specific housing options to become available.

A variety of housing may be considered under this provision including:

- RGI
- Portable Housing Benefit paired with a Below-Market-Rent, Average-Market-Rent or private market unit
- Offer of BMR, AMR or Private Market that is deemed appropriate.
- Other offer of housing for which the Household qualifies (e.g. youth master leasing)
- Units from which the household intends to relocate from or vacate, in alignment with the repatriation policy

As other resources and options become available, they will be considered for suitability

for families experiencing homelessness.

For the purpose of this recommendation, it is proposed that an appropriate housing offer be defined using the same criteria as a valid offer of housing for an RGI unit. Adopting this definition would apply consistency across policies, such that clients would understand an appropriate housing offer is the same regardless of the type of housing they are offered.

Per Service Manager Directive 25-02 (effective September 1, 2025), an offer is considered valid when it:

- Is an appropriately sized unit
- Has an appropriate mandate (e.g. the unit is not intended for another population, such as seniors)
- Meets special requirements such as accessibility and extenuating circumstances which are well documented and available for review. In cases of families fleeing violence, any consideration related to safety concerns would be considered a special requirement, so long as they had been previously disclosed.

In keeping with the affordability parameters of the RGI Housing program, the offer of housing would also need to align with thirty percent (30 per cent) of a household's monthly gross income or the fixed shelter amount if they are in receipt of Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). One of the ways that this could be achieved is through housing benefits.

The following shall not be considered valid reasons for refusing an offer or reasons why an offer was not valid:

- Availability of on-site parking
- Special requirements that were not previously disclosed and documented as part of a household's service plan

Any reasons other than those indicated above would not be considered an acceptable reason for a family to deny an offer of housing, subject to managerial discretion.

Recommendation: Provide a Priority to Families Experiencing Homelessness for Affordable Housing

This recommendation falls within Pillar Three: Increasing Housing Options for Families

of the Family Homelessness Strategy.

Establishing a clear pathway into purpose-built affordable housing could help address one of the significant barriers to securing stable housing - the difficulty of finding and securing a suitable unit. It is also in keeping with the proposed mandate's commitment for the FTHS to leverage every housing asset at its' disposal.

There is a limit to the rents that a housing benefit will cover, so when clients are exiting the FTHS using these benefits, there is a need for any private market units that clients rent to fall at or below average market rent. For households who are approved for housing benefits, it can be challenging to find a unit in the private market, making rapid exits from homelessness into stable housing difficult. CMHC has reported Ottawa's 2025 purpose-built rental market vacancy rate to be 3 per cent, with an average 2-bedroom unit being rented for \$1926. There is especially high demand for low-rent units. Units in the lowest rent quartile have low and stable vacancy rates below 1 per cent.

Wait times for affordable housing, are currently an average of 3.7 years, but vary based on unit size. As of December 31, 2025, there were 3,401 households on the Affordable Housing Waitlist, including 1,256 households with dependents (i.e. families). This Strategy is recommending that a priority be added to shorten that wait for families experiencing homelessness over the long-term. Specifically, it is recommended that a target of 20 per cent of 2+ bedroom units be offered to families experiencing homelessness, and that those offers be facilitated by a sub-list maintained through the City's FTHOS unit.

Target of 20 per cent of 2+ Bedroom Units To be Offered to Families Experiencing Homelessness

The policy intent is to ensure that affordable units funded through the City are connected to efforts to support low-income families experiencing homelessness. The percentage of 20 per cent of units was identified in keeping with the long-standing ratio of 1 in 5 offers for RGI Housing being directed towards households with a local priority access status.

To allow flexibility to navigate different funding opportunities and restrictions, as well as shifts in needs, this report recommends that Council delegate authority to the Director, Housing and Homelessness Services and the Director, Housing Solutions, Real Estate and Investments Services to negotiate any necessary adjustments to staff developed affordable housing guidelines, request for offers/proposals, purchase and sale

agreements, and contribution agreements to give effect to this intent.

Should there be no families experiencing homelessness for whom the unit being offered is considered appropriate, the requirement would be temporarily by-passed.

This policy would be applicable to new funding agreements signed. However, staff will approach community housing providers with developments currently under construction to discuss the opportunity to voluntarily apply this target. The requirement could similarly be discussed for filling units that become vacant.

The requirement to prioritize families experiencing homelessness would be subject to any updated direction or recommendations arising from the forthcoming Action Ottawa review, anticipated to be brought forward for Council approval in 2027.

Units to be Filled Through a Sub-List Maintained by the City's FTHOS Unit

It is recommended that the City's FTHOS unit maintain a list of eligible families experiencing homelessness to be matched to affordable housing units. This would support a coordinated access approach, which brings consistency, equity, and efficiency to the process by which people experiencing homelessness access services and housing-related resources. A strong coordinated access system includes a Housing First approach, streamlined service delivery across different types of service providers, and real-time data.

This would function as a sub-list to the Affordable Housing Waitlist and is recommended over each family individually applying to the Affordable Housing waitlist for the following reasons.

1. The majority of clients being supported by the FTTHS cannot afford the rents in affordable housing. Greater coordination is required to ensure alignment between the timing of an offer of a housing benefit to make the rent deeply affordable and the timing of an affordable housing offer.
2. Many aspects of applying for housing supports (e.g. applying to the Centralized Waitlist, applying for portable housing benefits) are administratively burdensome for families experiencing homelessness. This approach will reduce the burden on households, allowing them and their case workers to focus on the actions the household must address themselves.
3. It is common that it takes providers a while to fill units because of the number of calls they need to make before reaching a household that has

the financial means to accept an offer. There are concerns about increasing the administrative burden for providers given this proposal would be adding 600+ families to the waitlist. The proposed process would fall to the City and not create additional administrative work for providers.

4. Affordable Housing is not funded to provide support to tenants, so there are no associated supports, even light supports on site for residents. While the majority of families are completely independent, the proposed process would allow case workers to identify a family that may need extra supports to avoid an unsuccessful tenancy.

Households must have an active application with the Registry to ensure they meet basic eligibility criteria to be considered for affordable housing, and their RGI Housing application can be used to fulfill this requirement.

In order to build the operational process and procedures to support this approach, staff will leverage the experience, tools and lessons learned from the current By-Name List which is used to connect single adults experiencing homelessness to housing supports such as housing-based case management.

Offers for Affordable Housing units will be made in chronological order to families for whom the offer is appropriate (as defined within this Strategy, above) and who have a reasonable expectation of a successful tenancy, subject to managerial discretion to account for specific circumstances of families.

The City's FTHOS unit will work with all providers within the system to ensure all families experiencing homelessness have access through this process.

Risks and Implications

Affordable housing providers in the Affordable Housing Working Group were engaged to inform this policy's development and provide feedback on potential implications. While providers are aligned in the need to address housing needs of families experiencing homelessness, potential risks and limitations for the proposal were identified. These shaped the recommendations above, as described, however additional considerations were identified:

- Affordable Housing providers operate under lean operating budgets which leaves little room for absorbing revenue losses from vacancies or arrears,
- The concentration of households in receipt of portable housing benefits

heightens the risk of delayed initial rent payments or clients falling into arrears if their housing benefit is not successfully renewed; and

- Adding another administrative requirement to an already lengthy process to fill available units.

Staff and community partners will work on mitigation strategies to address these concerns on an ongoing basis, which may include advocacy to upper levels of governments around funding parameters or requirements for affordable housing developments.

Lastly, it is important to clarify the magnitude of the potential benefit of this proposal. The priority will not be creating new, additional units, but rather ensuring that some newly available and municipally funded units are used to serve families experiencing homelessness. To increase the overall impact of the priority, there also needs to be consideration of incentivizing the development of more family sized units. Higher percentages of small units (i.e. bachelor and one-bedroom units) result in more financially viable development projects that are funded more easily. Requirements that will make it more challenging to fill vacant family-sized units in new builds may have the unintended adverse impact of reducing the number of larger units built. Staff will consider the needs of the family sector, as well as the broader system, to inform request for proposals, within the constraints of upper-level government capital funding requirements, and to inform the Municipal Affordable Housing Capital Strategy.

Funding Context and Implications

A significant portion of the funding for homelessness and housing services is reliant on other levels of government. Housing and Homelessness Services receives federal, provincial, and municipal funding through a variety of programs. It is standard process under most programs that funding commitments are made on a two-to-three-year basis and often aligned to election cycles.

There have been no funding updates for the primary provincial and federal funding programs applicable to this Strategy since the status reported in the [Integrated Transition to Housing Strategy Close Out Report](#) and approved by Council in November 2025.

Of note from that report, some of the funding pressures that exist and would be of particular relevance to this report are:

- For the past 3 years, Ottawa has been receiving \$40M per year through

Ottawa-Ontario New Deal funding to cover extraordinary shelter costs for non-newcomer shelter services. This funding ended in March 2026 and at the time of this report's development, the City had not received confirmation of an extension.

- The City received an allocation of \$112M of Interim Housing Allowance Program (IHAP) funding from Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada to support shelter services for asylum claimants between January 2025 and March 2027. This funding covers both services for singles and families. Notably, the new program directives increase municipal contributions through a new scaled, cost-shared model. The cost share component will not result in new budget pressures for the City, as staff have planned to cover these costs through existing funding.
- As noted above, a primary mechanism that families are able to use to exit the FTTHS is through the use of portable housing benefits, however Ottawa's allocations of the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) have been insufficient to meet the need. The City will require timely, sustained and sufficient levels of housing benefits to sustain system outflow.

Staff continue to negotiate with the federal and provincial governments to ensure our response strategy is sufficiently resourced. As part of this work, staff are also working with other impacted municipalities such as Toronto, on a joint funding and policy advocacy approach and strategy alignment. Although there are risks that adequate funding may not be allocated from senior levels of government, staff are developing scenario-based responses to ensure continuity of core service offerings in the FTTHS.

Should there be municipal budget impacts due to federal or provincial funding changes, additional reports would be brought to Council as required. Conversely, should additional funding become available that can support the priorities of this Strategy, staff would implement in line with the direction and intent of the Strategy.

Recognizing the current funding environment, this Strategy focuses primarily on no-cost policy changes. The changes proposed are intended to reduce overall system demand and pressures to the point that services can be managed at the current and anticipated funding levels. The Strategy also reflects the City's efforts to shift from the provision of services in overflow locations at hotels and motels with nightly rates, to leveraging more cost-effective City or partner owned assets through the purchase of 377 O'Connor for family transitional housing, for instance.

Next Steps and Implementation

The policy changes recommended in this report would become effective immediately upon Council approval and would be broadly implemented following the development of operational processes and procedures.

The City will continue to work inter- and cross-departmentally, including with the City's FTHOS unit, Strategic Initiatives Department, and Ottawa Public Health, as well as with community partners to develop and implement processes and procedures to support these policies, as well as move forward the work outlined in the Strategy.

Further updates and subsequent reports on the Family Homeless Strategy would be brought forward to Community Services Committee if there are changes to the intent and direction of the Strategy, or if significant municipal financial impacts are anticipated.

More broadly, the 2026-2035 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan was approved by Council in March 2026. The Housing Long Range Financial Plan will be updated in accordance with the refreshed plan and presented during the next term of Council. The plan will provide costing for the required funding levels to implement and sustain the Strategy outlined in the report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications at this time as the initiatives outlined in this report are funded by existing operating and capital budgets or are policy changes with no budgetary impacts. Should additional municipal funding be required, staff will bring forward recommendations and reports to Committee and Council for consideration.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

CONSULTATION

The City worked with front line staff and community partners who serve families at-risk-of or experiencing homelessness to gather feedback on opportunities to update, improve, and prioritize aspects of Ottawa's family homelessness approach, which informed the development and refinement of this Strategy. These subject matter experts included representatives from the FTHS, GBV sector, Community Health and Resource Centres, Indigenous serving agencies, newcomer-serving agencies, Affordable Housing providers, and Ottawa Public Health.

Further, the Strategy was developed within the framework of the 2026-2035 10-Year Housing and Homelessness plan which undertook an extensive engagement plan, which included opportunities for input from the public, sector leaders and people with lived and living experience.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

The City of Ottawa is committed to ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities. The development of the Family Homelessness Strategy is guided by a legislated accessibility framework that includes the City's Accessibility Policy, the *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation*, O.Reg. 191/11 of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, 2005, the City of Ottawa Accessibility Design Standards, as well as the Ontario Building Code.

The City's Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) has been highly engaged in various projects related to housing and homelessness support programs and strategies. The AAC highlighted the aging population and need for more accessible affordable units, as well as improved access to shelter beds that can accommodate diverse disabilities. Due to the higher proportion of individuals with disabilities facing poverty and homelessness, accounting for varying needs of families facing these challenges is increasingly important.

DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY IMPLICATIONS

This report is requesting Delegated Authority be granted to Director, Housing and Homelessness Services and Director, Housing Solutions, Real Estate and Investments Services to implement the policy intent of Recommendation Three: Provide a Priority to Families Experiencing Homelessness for Affordable Housing. This delegated authority is required to navigate the variance in current and future funding program requirements and respond to specific case-by-case project requirements. The use of this Delegated Authority would be reported to the appropriate Standing Committee at least once in each calendar year.

It is anticipated that the Delegated Authority, as per the [Delegation of Authority By-law](#), that will be used to implement the Family Homelessness Strategy, includes:

1. Schedule D, Section 1 (2) The General Manager, Community and Social Services, may approve, amend and rescind departmental policies and procedures.

2. Schedule D, Section 8 (2) The Director, Housing and Homelessness Services, after consultation with the Director, Housing Solutions and Investment Services where appropriate, is delegated the authority to perform the provincially designated role of Services Systems Manager, Homelessness and Housing.

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

INDIGENOUS, GENDER AND EQUITY IMPLICATIONS

The development of the Family Homelessness Strategy was informed by representatives of organizations serving equity-denied groups including Indigenous serving agencies, newcomer serving agencies and the Gender Based Violence Sector, and this collaboration will continue to guide the implementation of the Strategy to ensure equity considerations are embedded throughout.

Further, HHLT has committed to developing its own equity, diversity, and inclusion framework tailored to the unique challenges within the housing and homelessness sector. This framework will further inform the implementation of the Family Homelessness Strategy.

Indigenous Policy Considerations

The City continues to acknowledge the distinct realities of Indigenous community members experiencing housing precarity and homelessness, influenced by the interconnectivity of colonization, the Indian Residential School system, the Sixties Scoop and other child apprehension practices, intergenerational trauma and ongoing impacts of colonialism, displacement, and systemic discrimination embedded in policy and practices. The City also recognizes the Indigenous community's unique approaches to applying an Indigenous worldview, teachings and Indigenous practices that can provide solutions to homelessness and housing, while also creating and maintaining Ottawa as a city of belonging for all.

The Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition (OAC), who represent eight Indigenous service organizations in Ottawa, including two housing providers, developed an urban [Indigenous Housing and Homelessness Strategy which was presented to the Planning and Housing Committee](#) in October 2024. The Family Homelessness Strategy will progress in parallel with Indigenous Housing and Homelessness Strategy, which includes two key projects related to supporting families, including the development of transitional housing for Inuit women and their children and a Family Healing Centre.

Gender and Equity Implications

Female-led households are overrepresented in the FTHS. More specifically, 13 per cent of families list their reason for service as fleeing violence and 69 per cent of families being served are single-led parent households. In both of these cases, the households are predominately female-led.

The Family Homeless Strategy recognizes the unique circumstances of households fleeing violence and that the safety and confidentiality of families takes priority over policy changes recommended as part of this Strategy. Families fleeing violence are initially exempt from any aspects of the Strategy that should not be reasonably applied, and/or that creates barriers to accessing safe shelter, in a way which ensures the continued safety and confidentiality for those families. The Strategy further commits to enhancing systems coordination with the GBV sector through the 3-year GBV-VAW action plan.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are risk implications, which have been identified and explained in this report and are being managed by the appropriate staff.

TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES

Community and Social Services remains committed to the strategic priority “A city that has affordable housing and is more livable for all”. The work in this report strives to promote and address safety, social and physical well-being for families at risk of and experiencing homelessness.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendix A- Pathways to Housing: Ottawa’s Family Homelessness Strategy.

DISPOSITION

Housing & Homelessness Services will engage cross-departmentally, with the Strategic Initiatives Department, the HHLT and with community partners with subject matter expertise to coordinate the implementation of the initiatives identified in this report and attached Strategy.