

Appendix A

Pathways to Housing: Ottawa's Family Homelessness Strategy

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The City of Ottawa has been providing emergency accommodation for families experiencing homelessness since the 1980s, and since then, the context has shifted significantly. This Strategy outlines work underway to modernize the Family Transitional Housing System (FTHS) so that it better reflects current realities and increases long-term housing outcomes.

The approach is in line with Goal 2.2 of the [10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan 2026-2035](#) 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 also adopts the guiding principles of the 10-Year Housing & Homelessness Plan including:

- Accountability
- Collaborative partnerships
- Equity and inclusion
- Focused and coordinated
- People-centred
- Proactive and resilient

These are aligned with the guiding principles of [Ottawa's Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing Standards](#).

2.0 CONTEXT

As of March 1, 2026, there were 664 families, including 1,224 children, being served between City and community partner run transitional housing sites, and offsite services

serving families in hotels and motels. This is a 76 per cent increase over 2023 demand, and is being driven primarily by a 41 per cent decrease in outflow (families moving from homelessness to long-term housing) over 2024. Factors contributing to the reduction in outflow include:

- 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 relative to demand, and high number of households with provincial priority statuses which take priority over families experiencing homelessness; and
- Lack of a dedicated pathway into affordable housing which prioritizes families experiencing homelessness for offers of units, and coordinates to ensure the offer is paired with a housing benefit to make rents affordable to those with very low incomes.

Given these factors, the length of stay for families has also increased by 93% in the past two years to an average of 230 days, or approximately 7.5 months.

Extended experiences of homelessness create instability, stress and barriers to meeting basic needs which have negative impacts on the physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing of children and families.

The level of demand currently being experienced is also placing significant pressure on public resources. In 2025, the City spent \$29.3M on hotel and motel placements alone, and these costs were strictly for providing emergency accommodations which did not account for any prevention or housing supports.

3.0 FAMILY HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

The context above, in particular the human and financial cost of the mounting demand, illustrates the need for a modernized approach to family homelessness that better reflects the current realities and increases long-term housing outcomes, as is being presented in the Family Homelessness Strategy.

The Strategy is organized around four pillars, which reflect the primary areas of focus within the family homelessness sector. The Strategy ties these efforts together to

describe and consider City-led or funded services supporting families experiencing homelessness. There are many other efforts within the Ottawa community that support homelessness prevention and housing support for families that may not be represented within this report.

Each pillar includes an overview of existing activities and highlights key initiatives currently underway to strengthen the City's response to family homelessness.

3.1 Pillar One: Homelessness Prevention

A core objective of the system is to support families in maintaining safe and stable housing and, when needed, to help them explore alternatives that best meet their needs before a loss of housing occurs.

The approach recognizes that preventing homelessness is less disruptive, more dignified, and often more cost-effective than responding only after a crisis has already occurred. Prioritizing prevention supports the well-being of children and caregivers, helps families preserve connections to community, work, school, and services, and minimizes the stress and trauma that can accompany housing loss. Prevention also helps protect private market affordable housing options, especially in situations where families may be at risk of leaving units they can sustain long-term. Given Ottawa's high housing costs, regaining stable housing after displacement can be difficult.

As part of this pillar of the Family Homelessness Strategy, the City and community partners deliver several services and financial supports aimed at homelessness prevention which are outlined below. The continuation of these services will be a key aspect of this strategy, and the City will prioritize options for enhancing the homelessness prevention pillar whenever possible, as opportunities and resources become available. Homelessness prevention and diversion is the most cost effective and sustainable solution to reducing homelessness in Ottawa.

Emergency Assistance (Housing-Related Benefits)

The City through Employment and Social Services provides emergency assistance to people who meet eligibility criteria. These supports may include up to 48 days of assistance, as well as other benefits such as rental and utility arrears to prevent evictions. Dedicated caseworkers work with households to address the barriers that lead to the accrual of arrears.

In 2025, this program supported 3,146 households (singles and families), through the issuance of funding towards utility and rental arrears, to prevent evictions and avoid homelessness for households in Ottawa.

Bridge Funding

The Bridge Funding program was initially developed in August 2022, for Ontario Works (OW) clients at imminent risk of homelessness, such as those facing eviction due to arrears. It provides short-term, low-barrier housing benefits to help clients remain housed while they work toward long-term housing stability.

Eligible clients receive a benefit that covers the gap between their OW shelter entitlement and their actual rent, up to a maximum of \$1,175 per month for families (dependent on number of bedrooms required). The program is limited to six months and is available only to clients not already receiving other housing subsidies. During their time receiving Bridge Funding, clients must collaborate with their caseworkers on personalized housing stability plans. These plans may include returning to work, moving to shared accommodations, or receiving support from family or friends.

Since the start of the program to the end of 2025, this program has supported 179 families, representing 583 individuals.

Housing Loss Prevention Services

Housing loss prevention refers to services that help in-situ households avoid imminent eviction or displacement. In 2025, the City of Ottawa provided \$2.04M in funding to service agencies that supported combined 1,854 households (singles and families) with tenant rights education and funding of tenant legal defense supports including paralegals.

3.2. Pillar Two: Housing-Focused Family Transitional Housing System (FTHS)

While homelessness prevention, whenever appropriate, is the ideal outcome, emergency accommodations will continue to play a critical role in the homelessness response system, ensuring that families have access to immediate safety, stability, and essential supports during times of crisis.

The primary focus of these services is to support families in returning to safe, appropriate housing as quickly as possible. Transitional housing and offsite services are not intended to be long-term solutions; rather, they should function as temporary interventions designed to support clients in finding housing as quickly as possible. This housing-focused approach reflects the best interests of clients, especially children, by minimizing the harmful impacts associated with homelessness and improving long-term outcomes for the family's stability, wellbeing, and long-term success.

Existing efforts within this pillar can be divided into two categories:

- Enhancing the housing-focused service delivery model for the FTTHS, and
- The physical infrastructure that supports the housing-focused service delivery model.

While these two components are distinct, there are synergies and interdependencies between the two. For example, the continued addition of new, permanent transitional housing sites, including the recent acquisition of 377 O'Connor, will facilitate the implementation of the housing-focused transitional housing service delivery model.

Housing-Focused Service Delivery Model

The FTTHS currently delivers individualized supports to households experiencing homelessness, however, there is continued exploration about how it can enhance the housing-focused service delivery model.

A housing-focused system is one where the primary goal is to help families find safe, appropriate housing, while providing temporary accommodations as needed. In practice, this means transitional housing and offsite services prioritize diversion, short stays, housing planning, and connecting people quickly to appropriate housing options rather than simply providing a temporary bed.

Below are five opportunities that will be explored by staff and partners to further embed a housing-focus into FTTHS. Some of this work is already underway, while other components will require further exploration and definition. This work will consider and coordinate with related community-led service pathway work.

Formalizing and more clearly communicating the system's housing-focus: This creates a shared understanding and consistent application of the priority across services. This Strategy includes the adoption of a mandate, diversion criteria and requirement for

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families to participate in a housing-focused program. These would actualize the priority on housing and set the direction for additional refinement of operational policies and procedures to incorporate a housing-focus.

Streamlining assessment and intake to further support diversion and earlier identification of housing needs: The City intends to streamline all intake functions, and have staff with housing specific training and experience (i.e. shelter caseworkers) complete all initial assessments for placement. This will facilitate exploring appropriate diversion strategies, such as repatriation or landlord and tenant supports including addressing rental arrears. Through the design and development of this process, consideration will be given to how this approach would link to place-based services with which families experience a housing crisis are often engaged.

Shifting to housing-focused case management: Under this model, all case managers integrate housing supports into their role. Historically, this function has been done by specialized staff and more recently, due to rising demand, case managers were balancing very high caseloads of up to 55 families which led to difficulties ensuring that families were receiving adequate housing-focused support. There have been recent efforts to better match staffing levels to demand, to reduce caseloads so staff can focus on providing these housing supports. Enhanced support systems and training opportunities for new and existing staff will also be reviewed.

Integrating services to better address barriers to long-term housing: Multiple services are interacting with families experiencing homelessness, all working to address intertwined, and often overlapping challenges that increase barriers to housing.

This includes supports such as financial assistance, employment supports and childcare subsidies and access. This work will aim to clarify and maximize roles and responsibilities between service agents to ensure clients are receiving comprehensive and efficient support.

Strengthening referrals to further support stable, long-term housing tenancies: To enhance wrap-around supports, opportunities to strengthen partnerships within and across systems will be explored, including with Gender Based Violence (GBV), health, education and newcomer settlement services. There will also be a review of referral processes to ensure families consistently receive warm transfers to services.

Physical Infrastructure that supports the Housing-Focused Service Delivery Model

This Strategy will support a reduction in overall system demand, by reducing inflow and increasing outflow from the FTTHS. To address the remaining demand, the City is consistently seeking opportunities to use permanent transitional housing sites in place of offsite services in hotels and motels.

Transitional housing facilities have onsite social services supports and programming, meaning regular access to case management staff as well as community agencies and other programming described below, leading to better housing outcomes through improved access to housing-focused supports. In addition to the benefits to client service and outcomes, these sites will also lead to significant operational cost savings compared to the use of hotel/motel spaces.

The initiatives outlined below, represent over 300 units of permanent transitional housing capacity for families added to the FTTHS in the past three years. The scale of this capacity is roughly equivalent to the level of demand that was experienced pre-pandemic with 318 families served nightly in 2018.

1 Corkstown Road: In November 2023, Council approved [the lease of 1 Corkstown Road as Transitional Housing for Families](#). The long-term lease allowed the City to relocate its existing family transitional housing site, and increase the capacity to 128 units. Support is more structured, with frequent contact with case workers. The site is equipped with programming space and multiple office spaces to support direct client interactions. Shared kitchens and expanded laundry facilities are currently being added to the site. Onsite staff are available 24/7 and multiple partner agencies offer direct programming onsite, such as weekday respite services for children, youth programming, health & dental clinics, employment assistance, GBV counselling and support, and Ontario Works.

Other services available include supports to promote independent living through life skills programming such as budgeting, cooking, and maintaining a safe & clean space. These supports ultimately lead to smoother and more successful transitions into permanent housing.

377 O'Connor Street: A second City [acquisition of Transitional Housing for Families, at 377 O'Connor](#) was recently approved by Council on March 11, 2026. The site offers 128 units, each with private bathrooms and fully equipped kitchenettes. Similar to 1

Corkstown road, this site will provide families with direct access to on-site supports as well cooking and laundry facilities. With the amenity and office space available, it will also facilitate the offering of programming similar to 1 Corkstown Road. The site is located downtown in a central location that is well-served by public transit and community services. The City will operate the site, and it is anticipated to start serving families as early as Q3 2026.

YMCA Transitional Housing: The YMCA, with City support, is currently converting unused office space for flexible transitional housing space that can be used to address ongoing pressures in the homelessness system. This will provide 55 units of transitional housing, also with access to shared kitchens and 24/7 staff and supports onsite. The YMCA has historically been a part of the FTTHS and would be well-positioned to provide families with transitional housing services again.

Request for Offers for Hotel and Motel Services: Given the level of demand currently experienced in the FTTHS, there will still be use of motels and hotels as overflow. However, in 2026, the City will also be undertaking a process to consolidate its use of motel and hotel rooms to a smaller number of sites, as well as negotiate cost efficiencies.

3.3 Pillar Three: Increased Housing Options for Families

Increasing housing options for families is the third area of focus of the Family Homelessness Strategy. Increasing access to a number and range of support levels in housing across the system will shorten FTTHS stays as well as increase housing retention, ultimately leading to the best long-term outcomes for families.

The City and community partners currently provide support to access multiple housing options for families, subject to availability and funding, and their continued availability will be fundamental to the success of the Strategy. The City and community partners also pursue time-limited and pilot initiatives, and opportunities that become available to meet outstanding needs and complement current programs. In 2025, 277 families, representing 936 individuals, moved from homelessness to long-term housing. Of these families, 67 per cent moved into social housing, or with the assistance of a housing benefit.

The City considers a continuum of housing options from transitional housing to affordable rents to suit a range of households needs and circumstances. Through the

Strategy development process, the opportunity to explore the creation of additional, complementary housing options was identified. This could range from “light touch” housing benefits to supportive housing for families. Staff and partners will continue to review the need, concept and opportunities to complement the housing options available to families, though the realization of new programs is not feasible within current resources.

Families First Program

Family First is a City-funded program run by the Pinecrest Queensway Community Health Centre (PQCHC). It was established in 2011 to support all families exiting the FTTHS into permanent housing. These supports are available for 1 year to help the household transition smoothly and stabilize in their new home. Services include housing planning and logistics, and connections to resources such as furniture, food, employment, health, and social activities. The program is provided in the preferred language of the family and in their home/community settings. In 2025, the program supported 1,017 families.

Housing Benefits

Housing benefits are a monthly subsidy provided to low-income households to assist with housing costs. Unlike other forms of housing assistance (such as RGI assistance), the housing benefit is tied to the household and not to a physical housing unit, allowing the benefit to move with the household. Housing benefits are one of the primary ways that families exit homelessness. In 2025, 79 families moved from homelessness into housing with a portable housing benefit representing 29% of families experiencing homelessness who moved into long-term housing.

Large Family Housing Benefit

The Large Family Housing Benefit pilot was introduced in August 2023 as a specialized housing benefit, implemented to address the particularly long stays for large families and as a cost saving measure compared to supporting the family in emergency accommodations. This benefit is available to households with 7+ members. While the COHB and Municipal Housing Benefits only offer rents covering up to 3-bedroom units, the Large Family Benefit provides additional support to allow the family to afford the rents of a 4 bedroom or larger unit needed to meet their household composition. The program has housed 48 families, representing 341 people. As of March 1, 2026, there

40 families units in the FTTHS with more than 7 members, including 5 households with more than 10 members.

Rent Geared to Income (RGI) Housing

Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) assistance is a provincially legislated housing subsidy. The rent for an RGI unit is typically set at thirty percent (30%) of a household's monthly net income determined using income tax information or a fixed amount if they are in receipt of Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

In addition to the chronological list, households can be assigned either a provincial priority for an RGI unit, or Local Priority Access Status (LPAS). One of Ottawa's LPAS is for households experiencing homelessness. In 2025, 72 families with a homelessness priority were housed in RGI units.

In April 2026, a 2026 Update to Local Priorities Report will be brought forward for Committee approval. Amongst other recommendations, the report recommends the continuation of the homelessness priority with a refined definition. This is in keeping with the mandate of this Strategy to leverage all available assets to support families experiencing homelessness to transition to housing.

New Affordable Housing Development

As discussed previously in this Strategy, new affordable housing developments provide units at average market rent or below market rent. In 2025, 31 units were completed, and there are currently 990 affordable units in varying stages of development. In 2026, 370 units of affordable housing are anticipated to be complete. Note, these figures represent all unit sizes, not just two or more-bedroom units needed for families. They also do not include supportive housing units.

Master Leasing for Young Parent Families

Operation Come Home (OCH) engages youth at-risk of, or currently, experiencing homelessness. The goal is to prevent youth experiencing homelessness from becoming homeless as adults. As part of this mission, OCH operates HousingWorks Ottawa, a social enterprise that is actively increasing the supply of affordable housing for youth in Ottawa through "head leasing." Under this model, HousingWorks signs commercial leases with landlords and then provides the units to youth through occupancy

agreements that guarantee ongoing wrap-around supports, for the full time the participant is engaged in the program.

Since September 2025, 42 youth-led families, representing 89 individuals, were also housed through this program. To support families, Operation Come Home staff are connecting them to family-supporting organizations and resources and helping mitigate short-term challenges due to ongoing experiences with poverty.

As of March 1, 2026, there were 23 youth led families being supported in the FTTHS.

IRCC Relocation with Supports Option for Clients

This is an innovative initiative led by IRCC and with coordination supports from FTHOS unit staff. It offers families an opportunity to relocate from temporary placements in Ottawa to St. John's, Newfoundland where employment and housing opportunities would be made available to them. Families staying in the FTTHS were invited to an information session where they learned about the relocation process. As a result, fifteen households successfully made the move to St. John's since September 2025. All those families have already moved into housing, and 100 per cent of families have at least one family member employed.

3.4 Pillar Four: Enhanced Systems Coordination

The final pillar in the Family Homelessness Strategy is enhanced systems coordination. Consistent feedback from staff, other FTTHS providers, the family homelessness sector and clients indicate that improved system coordination is a priority, and there is a strong desire for more sector-wide collaboration. In alignment with the proposed mandate, the system has a responsibility to clients to work together and coordinate services in a way that best serves the clients and ensures they can quickly access consistent, personalized supports.

Systems Coordination

The Housing and Homelessness Leadership Table (HHLT) is a multi-sectoral advisory group with a mission "to plan, design, and oversee the ongoing implementation of an integrated housing and homelessness system and related sectors to deliver affordable, suitable, and adequate housing choices and reductions in homelessness." The City and the HHLT co-designed the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan 2026-2035, and through its ongoing implementation and monitoring, provides a framework for the work

of the Family Homelessness Strategy. Per the HHLT's key responsibilities, the group will also continue work on systems-based approaches, which would further support the work of this Strategy.

Family System Sub-Committee

A formalized Family System Sub-Committee will be added to the HHLT structure to bring a subject matter expert lens as well as guide the ongoing work associated with the Family Homelessness Strategy.

The development of a family system working group was a key recommendation from several past initiatives related to family homelessness, including the Family Homelessness Lab and Rapid resolution Table. In 2025, the City brought together an interim group to consult first on the 10-Year Plan, and then on the development of this Strategy. The group is made up of subject matter experts from many areas of the family sector, including transitional housing and offsite services, community health and resource centres, gender-based violence services, legal services, housing-loss prevention agencies, Indigenous agencies, newcomer-serving agencies, public health experts, and more. Going forward, staff are working to formalize this working group's membership and terms of reference to support their ongoing work on system coordination and improvement.

Data Strategy

Recently, an enhanced data approach has been developed to support understanding and decision-making in the family system. Community and Social Service's Social Policy, Research and Analytics (SPRA) team developed an approach using data available in the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) that provides stronger insight into trends and changes within the family system, allowing staff to better understand patterns of inflow and outflow from the family system. This data strategy has been crucial to the development of this Strategy, and to the City's commitment to making evidence-informed decisions. By better understanding patterns of inflow, outflow and client demographics in the family system, staff can better understand current pressures and trends. This includes understanding if the mounting pressures are a result primarily of increased inflow or decreased outflow, and if the strategies within this report are having the intended effect.

Additionally, the City has released many publicly available dashboards in recent years, in order to provide transparent, accessible data to the public. These include the [shelter system use and trends dashboard](#), the [housing supports dashboard](#), the [point-in-time dashboard](#), and the [housing needs assessment dashboard](#).

Gender Based Violence (GBV) Support Coordination

Gender Based Violence (GBV) is one of the leading causes of family homelessness. Services and shelters supporting people fleeing intimate-partner violence fall within provincial jurisdiction and are not funded or operated by the City of Ottawa. However, many families who present to the FTTHS are fleeing violence and require appropriate support and referrals. Furthermore, when the shelters supporting families fleeing violence are full, the FTTHS acts as a secondary resource to ensure these families have a safe place to stay.

In such situations, the City of Ottawa endeavors to provide all available resources, including rapid referrals to GBV specific services, and trauma and violence-informed care, to individuals fleeing an abusive situation. 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 for which the individual is entitled.

Where applicable, this Strategy will align with the work of the forthcoming 3-year Gender-Based Violence and Violence Against Women (GBV-VAW) action plan being developed as part of Ottawa's Community Safety and Well-being Plan.

Further, in 2026, several Intimate Partner Violence/Domestic Violence emergency and second stage shelters will be added to the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) which will support coordination and data strategy efforts.

Communications Alignment

Per the proposed mandate and the Strategy's commitment to sector coordination, efforts will continue to ensure that all people who interact with the City and partner agencies receive consistent, clear information about the services that are provided through the FTTHS, and the housing-focused outcomes the sector is striving towards.

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4.0 NEXT STEPS

The City will work with subject matter experts to implement the Family Homelessness Strategy, as well as the proposed policy changes. Partners that were engaged in the development of this Strategy and will continue to be engaged in its implementation include representatives from the FTHS, GBV sector, Community Health and Resource Centres, Indigenous serving agencies, newcomer-serving agencies, Affordable Housing providers, and Ottawa Public Health.